

# Book Reviews



## Forged in the Fire

(Walker Books, 291 pages)  
By Anne Turnbull (Age 12 +)

Forget the book group! If you're looking for a good read try teen fiction. Set in London 1665 - 1666 with first the plague and then the Great Fire to deal with, there's never a dull moment in this gripping story.

Susanna and William are young Quakers, forced apart by economic necessity, persecution and plague. Just as Susanna is expecting Will to return from London to their native Shropshire, his letters stop. Has he succumbed to the plague or is he, once again, in Newgate Prison, arrested for his non-conformist religious beliefs? Desperate for news, Susanna sets off for London.

Susanna and William take turns to narrate this simple and touching love story which is seamlessly woven into the historical landscape of 17th century London - the food they eat, the light they read by, and the graphic description of the city, its streets, shops and 'steeple houses' all soon to be consumed in the Great Fire.

With its dramatic storyline, economic use of language and forensically researched detail, *Forged in the Fire* is difficult to put down.

Elizabeth McFarlane

## The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane

(Walker Books, 198 pages)

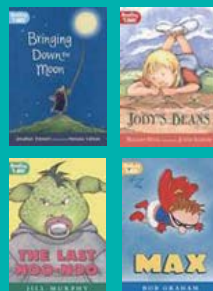
By Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline (Age 7 +)



This is an extraordinary book with a unique style and language which takes some getting used to. The adventure is told rather stiffly in a Victorian manner cleverly befitting the character of Edward himself, an uptight, arrogant blue china rabbit. On a steamship voyage to London, Edward falls overboard and is swept away on an amazing journey of discovery.

Not to every child's taste, this story is perhaps destined to appeal, in particular, to clever and sensitive little girls. It is beautifully produced, with 10 full-colour art plates, and cries out to be wrapped up and given as a gift.

Elizabeth McFarlane



## Reading Time: Bringing Down the Moon by Jonathan Emmett with illustrations by Vanessa Cabban; Jody's Beans by Malachy Doyle illustrated by Judith Allibone; Max by Bob Graham; and The Last Noo-Noo by Jill Murphy

(Walker Books, £4.99 each) (Age 3yrs+)

A series of books perfect for that time when your older child can read to the younger one. My four-year-old loved the stories and the pictures, especially *The Last Noo-Noo*, and her older sister, aged seven, found them just the right length and not too babyish to enjoy as much as her younger sister.

All the titles are colourful and cheerful, and they pack in useful lessons for life - *Jody's*

*Beans*, for example, follows life through the seasons and brings the warmth of a grandparenting relationship and the anxiety over the arrival of a new baby into a story that's only 30 pages long. *Bringing Down the Moon*, meanwhile, is a perfect bedtime story that brings that all-important sense of something bigger than ourselves into a gentle and moving little tale.

Joanna Moorhead



## Watching

(Walker Books, 160 pages)

By Judy Allen  
(Age 12+)

Judy Allen's *Watching* was originally written as a series of animal stories and later combined into a novel. The linking thread concerns five teenagers of different nationalities who have won a competition to shoot footage for a new documentary with an internationally renowned wildlife filmmaker.

Each short story represents the tale of one child, as they recount their memories of the moment that first inspired their passion for wild animals. Each member of the party was selected on the strength of different personal qualities and the interaction between the youngsters is insightful.

The book is liable to appeal not only to children who love stories about animals but also to those who love stories about people.

The pace is measured and the writer achieves a true sense of drama without resorting to cheap tricks. *Watching* would be suitable for a wide range of ages from the beginning of KS2 upwards.

Fiona O'Cleirigh



## Shakespeare's Secret

(Walker Books, 260 pages)

By Elise Broach (Age 9+)

More of a coming-of-age morality play than the Enid Blyton-style kids' historical thriller that I hoped it would be, *Shakespeare's Secret* is an engaging story based upon *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Reclusive Hero, a sixth-grader, and her elder sister Beatrice have moved with their bard-obsessed academic parents from one American university town to another. While beautiful Beatrice makes friends and pulls the boys with ease, Hero never seems to fit in.

Their latest move unfolds an historical intrigue involving royal gems and the disputed identity of Shakespeare himself. This serves as a catalyst that allows Hero to find her place in the world and, naturally, attract the local heartthrob.

The book is 'well researched' - that is, comes close to skirting the line of middle-brow drear - but the light and direct style and social relevance should enable late KS2 and young teens to find it interesting all the same.

Fiona O'Cleirigh