

Book Reviews



Discover London

(Franklin Watts, 64 pages)
By Jacqui Bailey
[Age 6 – 12yrs]

“Welcome to the best city in the universe!” says the cartoon character at the front of this fact-tastic book. Following the recent trend in literature about London for adults, here is the answer for children. Packed with every conceivable bit of information about London’s history, geography, royalty, museums, markets, theatres and people, this colourful hardback is accessibly designed with lots of pictures and boxes of text set against different coloured backgrounds.

It includes a map, a bus and tube guide, a list of important dates, addresses and telephone numbers and a comprehensive index. Each double page tackles a different subject, from a history of the city limits to ‘bloody London’. As well as the usual fare - such as the story of Dick Wittington- Jacqui Bailey also gives us up-to-date titbits. The Glass Gherkin, for example, (really, 30, St Mary Axe) uses enough glass to cover five football pitches.

The perfect antidote to one of those ‘hadn’t we better move out of London for the sake of the children’ moments, here is an utterly biased celebration of the city so many of us call home. Read it with your kids before jumping on the 159 bus to go and see it for real.

Elizabeth McFarlane



The Boyfriend List

(Random House, Corgi Children’s, 246 pages)
By E. Lockhart (Age 12yrs+)

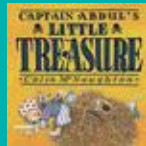
Have you ever taken an instant dislike to someone, then revised your (probably unfair) opinion, only to discover - too late - that you should have trusted your instincts all along? *The Boyfriend List* constitutes such an acquaintance. The ditzzy cover and back blurb (teen angst fodder, US-style) made my heart sink. So it came as a pleasant surprise to find the story entertaining and well-written.

Fifteen-year-old Ruby has recently lost her true love to her best friend and is having scary panic attacks. Her shrink encourages socio-sexual reminiscing; hence the Boyfriend List.

The characterisation rings painfully true although the overall tone is that of a long Cosmo article; the sort that claims boyfriends are extraneous, in between features on kissing know-how and DIY breast augmentation.

The real problem with this book concerns the age of the target audience. It bored the Year 10 girls I canvassed but the issues covered are perhaps too explicitly grown-up for younger kids. Ultimately, its suitability depends on your own attitudes. My advice; read it yourself first.

Fiona O’Cleirigh



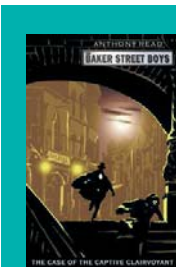
Captain Abdul’s Little Treasure

(Walker Books, picture book)
by Colin McNaughton (Age 3+)

My four-year-old, Catriona, absolutely adores this book: we read it at least twice a day, and sometimes as many as four times. And she’s not the only one: her best friend Freddie is so obsessed with it that his mother admits that she’s actually taken to hiding it occasionally, just to give herself a break from having to shout ‘kaboom’ and ‘ooh-aargh’ and ‘mutinous dog’.

It’s a hearty tale of a group of endearingly B-grade pirates who find themselves in charge of the captain’s baby for a week and discover the challenges and - yes - the joys of looking

after a pint-sized pirate in a nappy. Witty illustrations and lovely lines your little one will enjoy shouting time after time make it a triumph: but for me its finest achievement is its portrayal of Captain Abdul’s marriage to the unfortunately-named Doris, who has very sensibly decided to take a week out pirating with her girlfriends. She’s obviously a whole lot more suited to it than is her husband, whom she touchingly refers to as ‘a smelly tub of lard’, and after the babysitting arrangement goes to plan (ish), she decides to make role-reversal the future. A tale for our times, you might say.



The Case of the Captive Clairvoyant

(Walker Books, 160 pages)

The Baker Street Boys series

by Anthony Read (Age 8yrs+)

The eponymous ‘Boys’ are the Baker Street Irregulars of Sherlock Holmes novels, but it isn’t necessary to have read Conan Doyle or previous books in this series in order to enjoy the *Captive Clairvoyant*. Holmes, the villain Moriarty and Inspector Lestrade make appearances but the story is entirely new. This latest episode takes place while the great detective is away with Watson, dealing with “some trouble with a dog on Dartmoor”.

The book is aimed at fluent readers of age eight and above. Some challenging vocabulary is included but obliging adult

characters translate the more complex sentences for the benefit of the chirpily down-to-earth Cockney sparrers and, indirectly, the would-be sophisticate junior readers. It’s worth noting that, of the seven Boys, three are girls and the ‘Captive Clairvoyant’ herself is a winsome young lady.

The story is pacy throughout, with a happy ending (which does include one dead villain) and has the added bonus of teaching the reader a rather neat ‘telepathic’ party trick.

Fiona O’Cleirigh