



# Christmas Gift Guide

By *AndreaMReece*

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[245](#) [2]

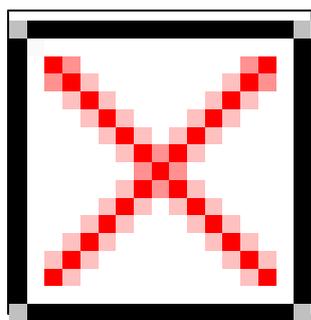
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The best books to give this year selected by **Urmi Merchant** of **Pickled Pepper Books**

Books for Giving 2020



Each Christmas **Books for Keeps** provides our readers with a curated list of the best books for Christmas. This year we are grateful to **Urmi Merchant** of [Pickled Pepper Books](#) [3], who stepped into Santa Claus's boots for us. Here are her recommendations for a very happy Christmas.

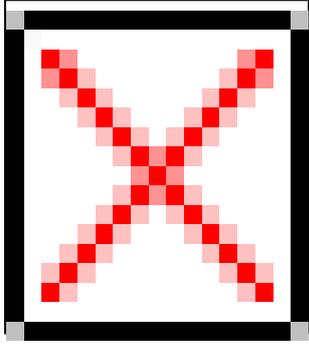
It's truly been a unique year for all of us. Some things remain constant though, Christmas of course is one of those. As I write we are about to go into a second lockdown, and you won't be able to browse in bookshops this November. I can see from my social media feeds that all those lovely independent bookshops are on hand via their webshops, email and social channels, waiting to deliver the best personalised recommendations you can expect from them.

It's been a tricky year for working out what to stock with so many great books being published and even harder to choose which to put in front of you here. We will certainly be recommending these at **Pickled Pepper Books** via our **Book Fairy** service and hopefully in person with our customers in December. There is something here for children from 0-12ish years and I'm sure that these gifts will keep giving throughout the year with the repeat sharing and reading lots of children love to do! As ever the selection from Pickled Pepper always aims to ensure children can see themselves reflected in the books they're reading.

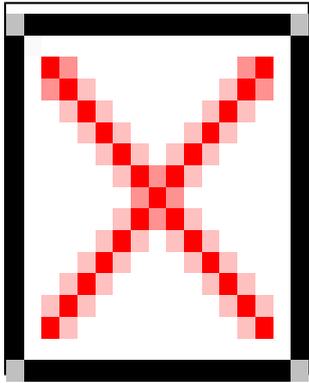
## Board Books for Babies and Toddlers (0-2)

**Baby loves Earth: An ABC of our Planet** is part of a new series of board books introducing babies to trends that matter. A is for Atmosphere, C is for Conservation, and G is for Green in this ABC book appealingly designed to teach the youngest children how to enjoy and protect our planet. Keeping with the theme of planet earth, we have a completely recyclable and plastic free baby book up next. Search the tropical jungles in **Where Are You Tiger?** Go on a journey with little one to track down the rarely sighted tiger. You may even meet some other animals along the way.

## Perfect gifts for the early years

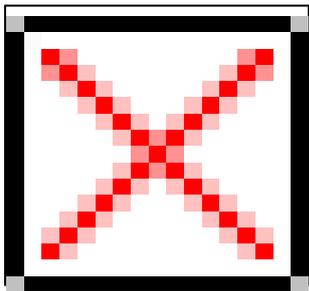


Michael Rosen and Chris Riddell have created a book to last all through your little ones early years in **Honey for You, Honey for Me, A First Book of Nursery Rhymes**. Featuring familiar and forgotten rhymes and Riddell's signature illustrations, this is sure to be a hit with the whole family! Award winning illustrator Frann Preston-Gannon also has a beautifully illustrated **Treasury of Nursery Rhymes & Poems** with 101 nursery rhymes, poems and songs to keep you all entertained well beyond Christmas. Finally discover 50 nature stories in **Slow Down**, helping carers and children to appreciate the magical transformations right in front of us. This is the perfect book for encouraging us all to go outside and explore.



## Picture books to read again and again

In the whole time we've had the shop there has always been an abundance of picture books for every occasion. This year is no exception - the only problem is choosing which ones to gift.

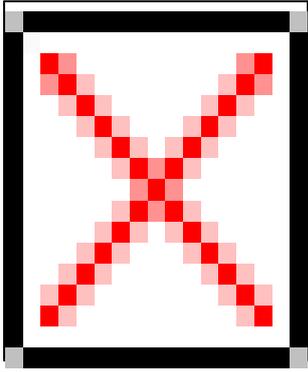


**Rain Before Rainbows** with Smriti Prasad-Hall's lyrical text and David Litchfield's joyous illustration is particularly pertinent this year, and full of hope. Lockdown YouTube sensation Rob Biddulph gives us **Dog Gone**, which will definitely put smiles on faces with Rob's warm-hearted humour. The much-anticipated **Julian at the Wedding** is here too and we are just in love with Jessica Love's illustration and storytelling. One of my favourite picture books of the year is **A Story About Afiya**, a James Berry poem, newly illustrated by Anna Cunha. Afiya is a girl with a white dress that records the memories of her childhood. From roses in bloom to pigeons in flight, this is not only a celebration of childhood but of the late Caribbean poet James Berry.

There are so many great books with a festive feel this year. We're highlighting the following: in **A Thing Called Snow** by Yuval Zommer, join Fox and Hare on an arctic journey in their first winter to find out what snow is. Emma Yarlett

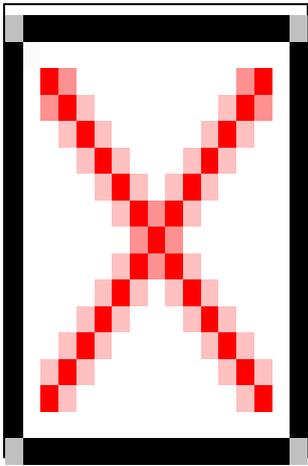
gives us **Santa Post**, sure to be a hit with lots of letters and parcels to open! And to top it all off there's a new Dogger book by Shirley Hughes, **Dogger's Christmas**, perfect for Dogger mega-fans.

### Fairytales, new and retold



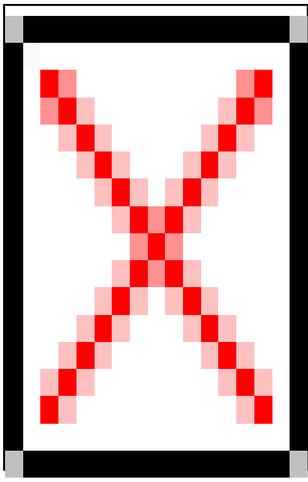
Fans of Maggie O'Farrell's writing will be delighted she has penned a children's modern fairytale, **Where Snow Angels Go**. Illustrated by Daniela Jaglenka Terrazzini, it's perfect for sharing with children from 5 and up. Keeping with this theme, a new series, **A Fairy Tale Revolution** has published four feminist, egalitarian and environmental retellings: look out for **Hansel and Greta** by Jeanette Winterson, **Blueblood** by Malorie Blackman, **Cinderella Liberator** by Rebecca Solnit, and **Duckling** by Kamila Shamsie, all with illustrations by Laura Barrett. Finally, **Starbird** is an original fable written and illustrated by hugely talented Sharon King-Chai about love, freedom and the wisdom of children.

### Fun fiction for younger readers



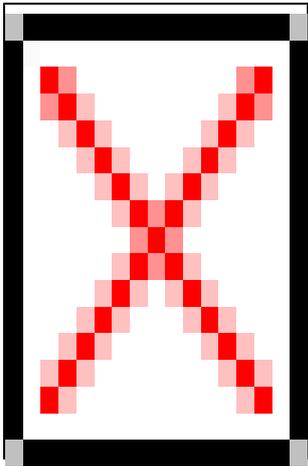
For those children who are just emerging as readers, you are guaranteed moments where you will find them somewhere cosy curled up with a book over the festive period. Feed them the most appealing fiction and they'll be well on their way to becoming avid readers. This year we love Clara Vulliamy's new series **Marshmallow Pie, The Cat Superstar**; Alex T.Smith's **Claude at the Palace** and Karl Newson's **The Hat Full of Secrets**.

For those children who are reading independently there are some fantastic new books. The hilarious Simon Farnaby from **Horrible Histories** and **BBC Ghosts** has written his first children's book, **The Wizard in My Shed**. Merdyn the Wild is from the Dark Ages, he's the world's greatest Warlock, and has been banished to the 21st century for bad behaviour, and he's about to create a whole load of trouble for Rose, aged 12. This book is full of historical gags, we loved it!



Jen Cambell and Alice Lickens? respectively write and illustrate the appealing **Agents of the Wild** series. This is fun-packed younger fiction with conservation themes. Last but not least, Sally Nichols has written **A Christmas in Time** - a follow up to *A Chase in Time*. This time Ruby and Alex find themselves in a Victorian Christmas. Can they help Edith and return to the present day?

### Gifts for older children



The books listed here are perfect for children aged 8-12 years. Of course, children are individuals so you can always go a bit younger or a bit older. The publishing this year has been led by the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and a growing desire for us to talk to children about what is happening around them. **The Book of Hopes** is the genius of Katherine Rundell in the middle of this pandemic. She contacted author and illustrator friends during lockdown to contribute to this wonderful anthology. These stories show that imagination can be a shelter, provide hope, make us laugh, smile and help us to see some light - much needed! With 133 contributions children will revisit this book time and time again. **Timelines from Black History** is stacked with facts and a visually vibrant, accessible hive of information on the people and the issues that have shaped Black history. It's an essential book for every child's shelf. And to finish our very last recommendation is **Kay's Anatomy : A Complete (and Completely Disgusting) Guide to the Human Body** - Adam Kay manages teach our kids biology without them even knowing!

Happy gift giving!

Urmi Merchant set up specialist children's bookshop **Pickled Pepper Books** in 2012. It is situated in Crouch End, north London.

Click [here for details of her Christmas book list](#) [4].

Page Number:

4

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