



Books for Giving Christmas 2015

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[Andrea Reece](#) [1]

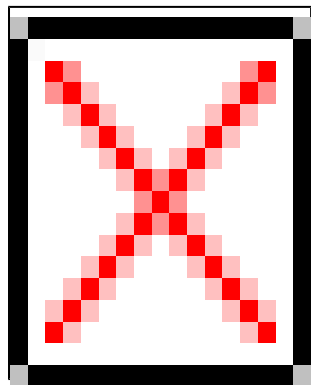
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Byline:

Andrea Reece plays Santa

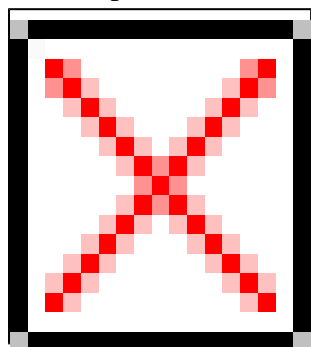
From so called Super Thursday onwards each year, the publishing industry goes into overdrive, and thousands of books are published with an eye on that place under the tree or in the stocking. But which books will they be truly thankful to receive, and which will still be favourites come spring? **Andrea Reece** plays Santa.

Picture books for Christmas



There are two picture books this year that capture the essence of Christmas: **Refuge** by Anne Booth and Sam Usher retells the story of the Nativity, subtly presenting the Holy Family as refugees relying on the kindness of strangers for food and shelter. The text is gentle and reassuring for the youngest reader, and the illustrations, black and grey wash lit up by bold splashes of yellow, show the family as real people in a difficult and frightening situation. £5 from every sale will go to the charity [War Child](#) [3]. Less overtly Christian but conveying the same Christmas message of love, generosity and hope for the future is **The Christmas Eve Tree** by Delia Huddy and Emily Sutton. A battered little fir tree is picked out of the rubbish by a young homeless boy and ends up the centre of a warm and very special Christmas celebration. Emily Sutton's illustrations have the air of folk art, and there's a timeless feel to this book which ends on a splendid joyful image of new life.

Another picture book to warm the heart is [Petr Horacek](#) [4]'s **Blue Penguin**. The little penguin is regarded with

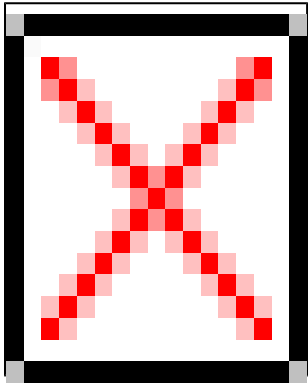


suspicion by the others because of his blue colour until he manages to win first one, then many more friends through his singing. Horacek's textured, colour-rich artwork creates dramatically beautiful Antarctic scenes while the little penguin is a charmer.

Socks for Santa by Adam and Charlotte Guillain is a typically lively and funny story which reverses tradition by

sending young George out with a present for Father Christmas. Lee Wildish's illustrations are as exuberant as ever and there's lots to ho ho ho at! There are twists, surprises and lots of laughs too in Chris Judge's latest story of his now not-so-lonely Beast. **The Snow Beast** stars not one but two Beasts, and features some wonderful comic-strip-style chases and clever gags. Witty and inventive, this will brighten up long, dark evenings.

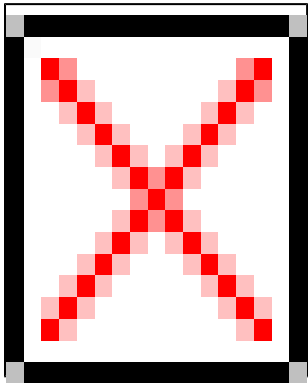
Traditional stories



Look out for two new versions of **The Nutcracker**, very different but equally beautiful to look at. Jane Ray's version moves through the cheery colours of a traditional Christmas celebration to the delicious pale pinks and greens of Clara's dream world, depicted in scenes full of sweets and candy, peopled by dancers from across the world. Niroot Puttapipat's **The Nutcracker** is full of drama, vivid scenes created out of striking silhouettes against richly coloured backgrounds and with a wonderful pop-up to finish. Buy both! Jackie Morriss's version of **The Wild Swans** is a gem, her telling inspired equally by the natural landscape and the magic of the story, and her illustrations as beautiful as ever.

Festive favourites

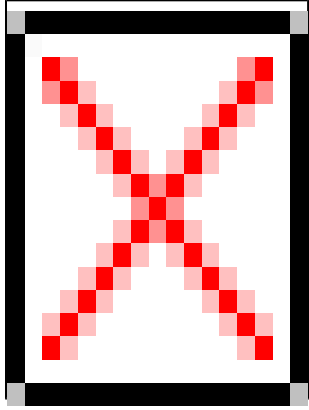
Christmas is a time for old friends, and there are beautiful new editions of classics in bookshops. To celebrate the



80th anniversary of Edward Ardizzone's **Little Tim**, Frances Lincoln are reissuing the books as sturdy hardbacks, including **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain** at the original size and with the hand-lettered type of the first edition. The stories can't be beaten for excitement and adventure, and Ardizzone's illustrations are still as fresh as the salty sea air Tim enjoys.

Michael Bond's stories of **Olga da Polga**, the going-places guinea pig, are now available as a handsome hardback with illustrations by Catherine Rayner. Rayner gives Olga a scruffy, pick-upable vitality and equally tactile are her friends, Noel the cat, Graham the tortoise and 'spectacularly so' Fangio the hedgehog, a spiky ball of splattered paint. Ruth Brown meanwhile has taken Anna Sewell's classic **Black Beauty** and turned it into a picture book. Her painterly style is just right for the story and this will be enjoyed equally by those new to the original and those who already love **Black Beauty**'s story. Taking on the task of illustrating all seven **Harry Potter** books must have been daunting, but there's no sign of trepidation in Jim Kay's illustrations for the new colour edition. They put the strangeness 'the magic even' back into stories now so familiar to young readers, and he finds darkness as well as humour. Scenes, settings and dramatis personae are represented in an extraordinary variety of compositions and techniques: there are full page portraits of the main characters in the style of the old masters while the landscapes and buildings have as much personality. No wonder JK Rowling is so pleased.

Thank heaven for little Gauls

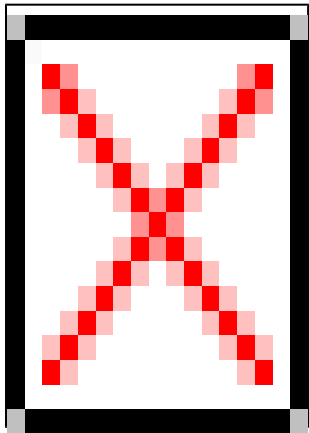


Asterix made a welcome return three years ago in a new story by a new author/illustrator team, working under the watchful eye of original co-creator Albert Uderzo. Their second Asterix story, just out, **Asterix and the Missing Scroll**, sees them really getting into their stride. The story of Caesar's attempt to edit that one annoying village out of his famous histories is funny and clever, full of the ingenious wordplay, slapstick comedy and social comment that makes the books so special. There's a new character with a striking resemblance to Julian Assange, called Confoundtheirpolitix (check out the second verse of the national anthem to fully appreciate the joke!).

Story collections

There's a welcome new edition of Mary Hoffman's collection **Queen Guinevere and other Stories from the Court of King Arthur**, bewitching retellings of the stories of the mothers, wives and daughters of the knights of the round table, full of magic and excitement; and of Robert Leeson's **The Arabian Nights**, an equally spell-binding piece of storytelling. Christina Balit's glowing illustrations add even more to the appeal of each.

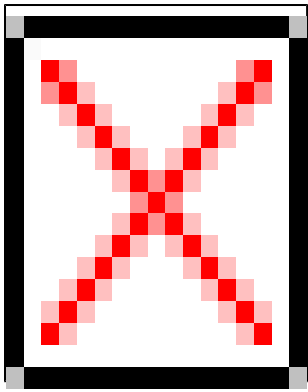
As part of his tenure as Laureate na nÓg, Eoin Colfer has compiled an anthology of original stories and poems by



Ireland's top children's authors, each inspired by a place. [Once Upon a Place](#) [5] is a terrific collection with a delightfully varied range of stories and, while Ireland provides all the settings, the appeal is universal. Black and white illustrations by the peerless PJ Lynch make this even more special.

Outstanding non-fiction and information books

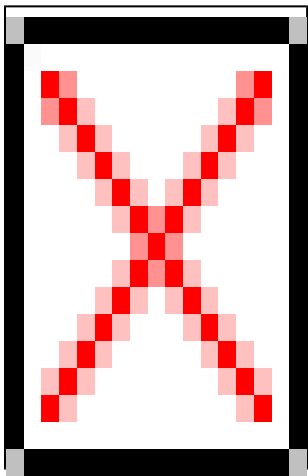
The past few years have seen a renaissance in non-fiction: Google might provide information, but it can't match these books for beauty or for the skill with which information is presented. In **Counting Lions** Stephen Walton renders photographs of wild animals into charcoal, creating astonishing full page drawings that put readers eye to eye with the subjects: tigers, penguins and Ethiopian wolves amongst others. Short, inspiring pieces of text accompany each illustration and there are notes and suggestions for further reading at the end. [Kristjana Williams](#) [6] takes a completely different approach in **The Wonder Garden**, another lavish exploration of



the natural world. Step through the golden gates on the cover to enter five of Earth's richest natural habitats; the plants, flowers, animals, birds and fish that live in each of these distinctive habitats are shown in detailed and brilliantly coloured double spreads, guaranteed to inspire readers of all ages. Katie Scott, illustrator of last year's bestseller **Animalium**, is creator of **The Story of Life: Evolution**, which illustrates on concertina-like pages the first chapters of evolution starting with the single cell-organisms and ending with Homo Habilis. Scott's elegant illustrations demand to be studied in detail and there's information on the creatures on the reverse.

Another unusual book that combines natural history with myth in a picture book format is **Hare** by Zoe Greaves and Leslie Sadleir. The daily life of this most secretive of our wild animals is described in beautiful colour spreads and followed by pages of myths and stories about hares. This is a book to be savoured by children and adults.

For anyone who yearns for a life in the theatre **National Theatre All About Theatre** is a must have. This large and comprehensive book explains exactly what it takes to put on a show, from script through to opening night, explaining the roles of the many different people involved. It's a fascinating read full of real back-stage information. For those dreaming of the stars above our heads, then the **Usborne Official Astronaut's Handbook** will make them seem



that bit closer. This is the essential book for would-be astronauts, telling you everything you need to know about how to become an astronaut, and what it's like to live and work in space. There's an introduction by the UK's very own astronaut Tim Peake.

Festive fiction

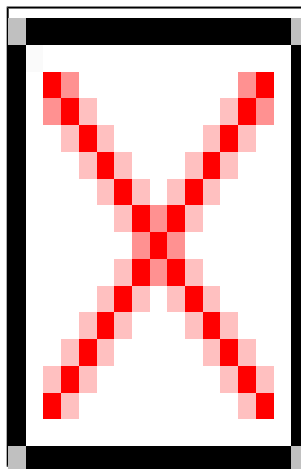
A combination of first-class writing and beautiful illustrations make these works of fiction into superb Christmas gifts. **The Wolf Wilder** is a fairy-tale adventure of the wildest kind, but inspired by real-life Russian history, and full of exciting scenes and ideas; it's a perfect winter read for young rebels aged ten and up. [Heart song \[7\]](#) by Kevin Crossley-Holland and Jane Ray is set in Venice's Ospedale della Pietà and imagines the life of one of its young orphans, learning to make music with composer Antonio Vivaldi: author and illustrator are in perfect harmony, and this atmospheric, ultimately uplifting story will stay with readers. Michael Morpurgo is on typically heart-warming form in his little story **Clare and her Captain**, the story of a girl's friendship with an old man and his horse. Catherine Rayner's delicate illustrations bring to life all the characters, human and animal.



McIntyre. The story of a race across the ice in a pug-powered sled, it's as wacky as their previous collaborations but surprisingly poignant too, and a proper adventure.

Stocking fillers

I hope there's space to squeeze some paperbacks into their stockings and for giggles on Christmas morning try Squishy McFluff's new adventure **Secret Santa**, which brings the invisible kitten face to face with Father Christmas, or Cas Lester's bad-fairy story **Wonky Winter Wonderland**. **Gabriel-Ernest and Other Tales** by Saki with new illustrations



by Quentin Blake is altogether darker, indeed often macabre, but a collection that should inspire a passion for short stories, as should Eva Ibbotson's **The Christmas Star**, three typically brilliant stories that will light up Christmas.

Happy shopping!

Click [here for a list of all titles mentioned](#) [8]

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