



Marvellous Medicine: how to get through the Coronavirus epidemic with children's books

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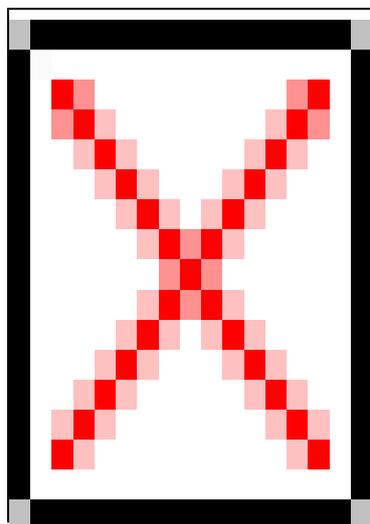
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The children's authors providing a tonic

It's more than six weeks now since schools closed and teachers and parents were handed the challenge of home-schooling all (or nearly all) under 18s in the UK. It's enough to drive us all to drink.

Fortunately, help is at hand, supplied by children's publishers, authors and children's book charities who have created a cornucopia of activity packs, work sheets, free books and the chance to hear authors reading their books. Here's a round-up of some of what's going on. If we've missed you out, let us know on Twitter (@BooksforKeeps) or [Facebook](#) [2].

Free books

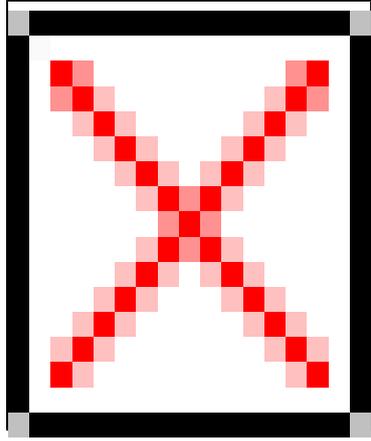


Andersen Press has released a free ebook, created by Sally Nicholls and illustrator Viviane Schwarz. [Staying Home](#) [3] is available to everyone to download. The book follows a family of energetic racoons through a day in lockdown, and explaining to the youngest members of the family how they're doing their part to save lives just by staying at home.

Hats off to **Nosy Crow** and Axel Scheffler for creating [a digital book about the coronavirus](#) [4] for primary school age children the measures taken to control it. Written by staff within the company, the book also had input from Professor Graham Medley of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, as well as advice from two head teachers and a child psychologist. **Nosy Crow** want to make sure that this book is accessible to every child and family and so the book is offered totally free of charge to anyone who wants to read it. However, they have suggested, at the back of the book, that families might make a donation to help our health service if they find the book useful:

www.nhscharitiestogether.co.uk

[5].



Hope is needed as never before so three cheers too for Katherine Rundell and the children's authors and artists who contributed to her anthology [The Book of Hopes](#) [6]. This free-to-read collection contains over 100 entries, all intended to turn its young audience into 'possibilityists' - a phrase Rundell defines as being open to the world's infinite opportunities for transformation. Poetry is perfect for delivering short, sharp moments of joy, insight or laughter, and many contributors have chosen to write poems: Catherine Johnson has a playful tribute to an Axolotl; David Almond a tender, funny father-son adventure; David Solomons an ode to a washing machine keen to lift off into space (one small step for domestic appliance?). Geraldine McCaughrean's contribution *Sunflower* is typically brilliant, and there are stories too by Kevin Crossley-Holland, Sally Nicholls, Hilary McKay and Jessica Townsend, and a positive insertion of non-fiction from Isabel Thomas, *The Hungriest Caterpillar*. The collection could inspire creative endeavours in children too.

The Book of Hopes is now live to read in full for free on the [National Literacy Trust site](#) [6].

Activities, writing challenges and fun things to do

The **British Library's Discovering Children's Books** is a free online resource for children, teachers and book-lovers of all ages. There's a gallery of activities to spark children's creativity and inspire their own stories, poems, illustrations and more and the site also includes films showing illustrators at work in their studios, including Axel Scheffler's masterclass on how to draw a Gruffalo. Plus you'll find interviews with authors and illustrators such as Quentin Blake, Julia Donaldson, Michael Rosen, Lauren Child, Andy Stanton, Zanib Mian, Joseph Coelho, Jacqueline Wilson, Viviane Schwarz and SF Said, who reveal their creative processes, memories of childhood reading and tips for budding writers and artists.

The National Shelf Service is a new daily YouTube broadcast featuring book recommendations from professional librarians. Launched by CILIP and the Youth Libraries Group and supported by Nielsen Book, OverDrive, RB Digital, Bolinda and Libraries Connected, the videos help children and families discover new, diverse reading experiences. The [broadcasts run Monday to Friday at 11.00am each day](#) [7] with selected titles available to borrow as e-books from most local libraries via their websites.

Authorfy works with year-round to make reading and writing interactive, accessible, engaging and fun and is hosting [free creative writing challenges](#) [8] created by favourite children's authors including Children's Laureate Cressida Cowell. The challenges aim to inspire children, introduce them to new books and demonstrate new storytelling techniques. Good news - the challenges are only 10 minutes each, with a new challenge every day for three months from authors.

The annual [Henrietta Branford Writing Competition](#) [9] encourages young people to get writing and the deadline for this year's competition has been extended to 31st May. Young people under the age of 19 are challenged to finish a story started by **2019 Branford Boase Award** winner Muhammad Khan.

LoveReading4Kids [10] is one of the centres recommended by the Department of Education and their Kids Zone is packed with activity downloads, videos, polls and competitions with content regularly updated. Their blog offers regularly updated reading recommendations.

BookTrust have risen to the challenge too launching **BookTrust HomeTime** [11]. Children and parents will find free online books and videos, games to play, competitions, book-themed quizzes, or and how to draw films and tips created by favourite illustrators. <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/have-some-fun/> [11]

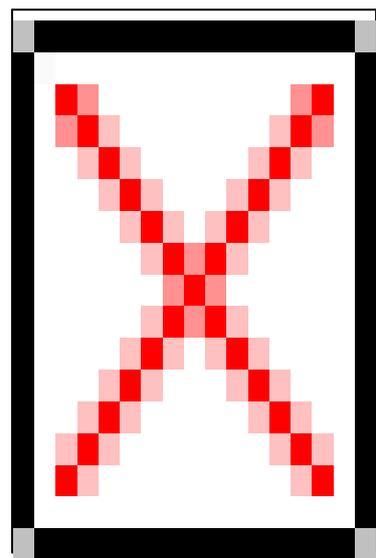
The Phoenix [12] comic has launched Q Club, a free 'quarantine club' which features comics, tutorials, videos and boardgames. Drawing and writing guides as well as videos by contributors such as Jamie Smart, Neill Cameron and the Etherington Brothers aim to show and inspire children how to create their own comics and characters.

Over at the **Harry Potter Wizarding World** website, you'll find **Harry Potter At Home**, designed to help children, parents, carers and teachers 'add a touch of Harry Potter magic to our new daily lives?'. It features special activity kits, magical craft videos (teach your friends how to draw a Niffler!) fun articles, quizzes, puzzles and more.

Authors going above and beyond ?

Frank Cottrell-Boyce is running writing workshops followed up with live Q&As and 'with the help of some actor friends - sharing his books on his Instagram account. Well worth checking in:

https://www.instagram.com/frank_cottrell_boyce/ [13]



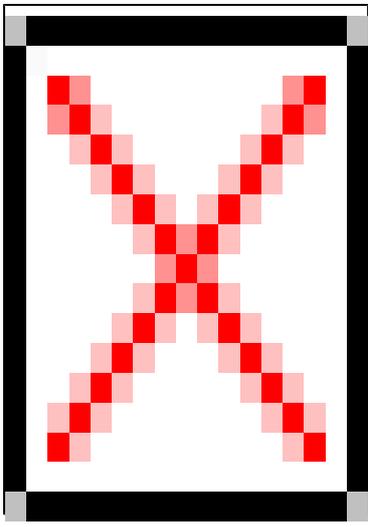
Konnie Huq is sharing content for young children on a regular basis on her YouTube channel including STEM learning and experiments, arts & crafts, as well as reading and storytelling. Educational and entertaining too.

Rob Biddulph is sharing #[DrawWithRob](#) [14] videos twice a week on social media to encourage children to draw and keep themselves entertained.

Oliver Jeffers is producing a #StayAtHomeStorytime where he will read one of his books every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and talk about how they were made. This happens at 6pm on his [Instagram](#) [15] and is then uploaded to [his website](#) [16].

Matt Brown does a live chapter read every day at 4pm on his Facebook page (Matt Brown Writer). All the chapters so far can be found here www.facebook.com/MattBrownWriter/live [17]

He's also created a [Word Monkeys podcast](#) [18] where he chats to other writers. It can be found on most podcast platform and Spotify too.



Poet **Cheryl Moskowitz** has spent the weeks of lockdown finding ways to talk directly to children about what life is like for them in this age of Covid-19, and to reflect their perspectives through poetry written for and about them. Asking children to suppose they woke up tomorrow in a coronavirus-free world she has turned their answers to the questions *Where would you go, what would you do? What new rules, if any, might you put in place for a safer, happier world?* into poems that will serve as a record of the time and create the possibility for continued conversation well after the current crisis is over. **Pop Up Projects**, the pioneering children's literary organisation, has taken on the publication of Cheryl's pamphlet, planning to turn it around in record time, and to distribute free copies to each child in Years 3 - 7 in the schools **Pop Up** serves across the UK.

Publisher and bookseller sites to check out

The **Alligator's Mouth** bookshop might be closed, but [their YouTube channel](#) [19] has a mixture of live stream and pre-recorded videos and there are downloadable worksheets on their website created as part of their special **Comics Club**. Send your comics to them and they'll share encouraging feedback and feature the best on their new website **Comics Club Gallery**.

Walker Books has created a [Youtube playlist](#) [20] of Stay Home resources such as author readings, Q&As and book trailers.

HarperCollins Children's Books has announced new initiatives to help children and families stuck at home via [Fun and Learning with HarperCollins Children's Books](#) [21], an online interactive hub where readers can find book recommendations for young readers, as well as free activities.

New STEM publisher **QuestFriendz** has launched [a range of downloadable STEM activity sheets](#) [22] based on its new series **The Adventures of Lillicorn**.

Scholastic has been hosting Julia Donaldson's weekly broadcasts, [Julia Donaldson and Friends](#) [23], and has launched [Chapter One](#) [24] with readings from authors of their own books and related resources such as discussion guides.

Happy reading, viewing, listening and creating!

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- [21] <https://www.harpercollinschildrensbooks.co.uk/fun-and-learning/>
- [22] <https://www.questfriendz.com/meet-lillicorn>
- [23] <https://bookgig.com/event/julia-donaldson-and-friends?event=2>
- [24] <https://bookfairs.scholastic.co.uk/chapter-one>