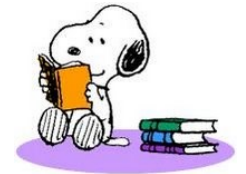




# RGS: Bonkers About Books!

March 2022



As I type this, I am reflecting upon what has been a wonderfully bookish morning in Junior School: during lesson 2, the whole school enjoyed a paired reading session, with buddies sharing books with each other and classmates curling up together with books in their rooms. There was a wonderful buzz around the place which was increased when Year 5 and 6 got to experience a live, in-person, author event for the first time in 2 1/2 years! I was absolutely thrilled to be able to introduce them to Elle McNicoll (and have to admit that I was positively giddy about the whole thing myself!). Elle's talk was interesting and insightful as she spoke to the children about her books and her neurodivergence—she was inspirational.

It's no secret that I am an enormous lover of books, but to see so many children enjoying books today has been my absolute pleasure to see.  
Happy reading everyone!

## Like A Charm - Elle McNicoll

Ramya has known she was different from a very young age and refusing to do as she was told by a stranger at her parents' New Year's Eve party in their London home shows us that in the opening of the book. Only her grandfather seemed to understand what she was doing. Unfortunately, that evening divided her family and Ramya hasn't seen her grandfather since. Now, seven years later, she and her parents have moved up to Edinburgh where the rest of her mum's family live. But when Ramya hears that her grandfather has died, everything changes. Ramya goes to his funeral alone where she meets a stranger who tells her she has been left something in his will. Against her better judgement, she goes to the bookshop where he tells her to meet him and he gives her a book that only she can read and write in. It's this book, the enchanted form of the Greyfriars Bobby statue and Ramya's sense of needing to be herself that leads her to discover that there is a whole world of magical creatures hiding in Edinburgh, and she is about to become acquainted with them. But can she heed the warning to 'beware the sirens'?



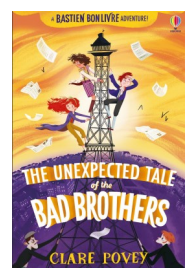
I love Elle's writing and her fierce determination to put neurodivergent people firmly at the centre of her books. All Ramya wants to do is live her life as herself and not be defined by her dyspraxia - she is a true hero in this book and her strength of character is an utter joy to read. She has unique skills that allow her to see what most of us cannot and her approach should be a lesson to us all. She is a role-model for us all.

I have a soft spot for books set in Edinburgh, having spent lots of my childhood holidays there visiting my grandparents so I was excited before I even opened the book, but discovering Greyfriars Bobby has a role to play in the story made my day - it's one of my favourite spots in the city and somewhere I have to go whenever I go back. I spent much of the book being able to visualise where Ramya was which added an extra element to the book for me and next time I'm there, I shall be curiously hunting for the door the leads to the real Grassmarket!

A unique story that combines individuality with magic and adventure, **Like A Charm** was an unputdownable book and I'm not certain I'll be able to wait until next spring to find out what happens next!

## COVER REVEAL!

I know how many of you have enjoyed *The Unexpected Tale of Bastien Bonlivre* and have been desperate to know about book 2, so I am delighted to be able to reveal the cover of *The Unexpected Tale of the Bad Brothers* here ... and you'll only have to wait until the 7th July to read it! If you haven't met Bastien yet, there's a copy in the Penrith Library.



## The Secret of the Treasure Keepers - AM Howell

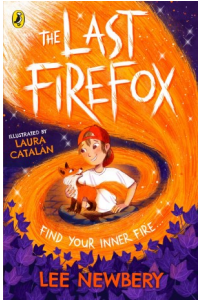
Set in 1947, whilst Ruth's mother, Harriet Goodspeed, is being interviewed for her ideal job at the British Museum, Ruth picks up the phone to Mary Sterne, a woman who is desperate to know what she should do about the treasure she has found on her farm. Emerging from the meeting, it is clear that Ruth's mum hasn't got the job and Mr Knight's grumpy tone means that Ruth doesn't get the chance to pass the message on to him. Instead, the pair make their way to Rook Farm south of Ely themselves, hoping that Harriet's archaeological skills will be able to help Mary and also impress Mr Knight enough to give Harriet a job. Sure enough, the treasure turns out to be impressive and potentially valuable, however, Ruth quickly feels that there is something not quite right. Why is Mary's son, Joe, so unwilling to let Harriet take the treasure back to London to be examined? With secrets waiting to be uncovered, can Ruth get to the bottom of everything in time to help her mum and help save the farm?



Set firstly in London, I enjoyed being able to imagine where Ruth and her mum were at the beginning of the book. The attention to detail in accuracy of the setting for the time period drew me in and mentions in the introduction of the National Health Service (or a new health service that won't cost a penny), a new self-service shop where you pay for everything together at the end, not to mention Baedeker raids (I had to look this up!), shops opening on buses after the bombings and electricity being used sparingly, means that readers quickly learn that 1947 Britain was still feeling the after-effects of the war (something I suspect many children will not realise). Then you have the comparison of Rook Farm where Ruth thinks life will be easier and food more plentiful. Surrounded by vast open fields, it quickly becomes obvious that life on the farm is far from easy: the place is heated sparingly, the family are still working the land by hand and food isn't as plentiful as Ruth thought it would be. There is a contrast in the landscape but not in the daily struggle.

Having survived the Blitz in London, Ruth is not scared of getting stuck in and it is her idea to venture to Rook Farm. Underneath it all though, she is driven by the idea of not wanting to lose her childhood home, the home where her father has created the most amazing sounding mural on her bedroom wall and, despite the fact that her parents are divorcing amicably, it's a change she can't bear to face. However, Ruth doesn't always get things right and I like that about her; it makes her real. Compare that to Joe who is definitely more reserved and clearly doesn't want to get close to Ruth; it is apparent that he has the world on his shoulders and is trying to help his mum in every way he can. I can imagine that this is something that many children went through during this period: having lived through the harrowing events of the war, both of their childhoods are essentially being robbed from them as they have to help make ends meet, understand that food is often scarce and that life is still very different.

As well as mastering the historical content in her novels, Ann-Marie is brilliant at weaving in intriguing plots and **The Secret of the Treasure Keepers** is no different: hints are dropped subtly throughout the book that something is not quite as it seems (although you're not quite certain what it is) and this draws the reader in (indeed, I couldn't put the book down, even though it was New Year's Eve!). The odd red herring is also scattered to keep you on your toes and will ensure that you are guessing until the end (I'm determined not to give anything away!). There's a slight darkness to the book that helps to add to the air of mystery and the host of characters helps to build that feeling. In short, what I'm trying to tell you in a rather long-winded way, is that I adored this book! It's a gripping read that combines intrigue, mystery and treasure whilst also expertly tackling themes of divorce, bereavement and family struggle. **The Secret of the Treasure Keepers** is a compelling post-WWII mystery that I know will go down very well with the children in my class; I just worry that they won't be able to put it down for long enough to be able to pay attention in lessons!



### The Last Firefox - Lee Newberry

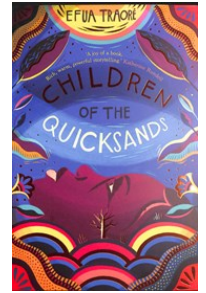
With bullies at school and changes at home (his dads are planning to adopt another child), Charlie is finding things a bit tricky, but then he has to look after a fox cub called Cadno who happens to burst into flames at times, things get a whole lot trickier! But can Charlie, with the help of his friends, save The Last Firefox?

This is a funny and adventurous story that will keep readers engaged and will quite possibly make you want your own firefox! Looking at family, friendship and finding your inner strength, this is a book that I think everybody will enjoy.

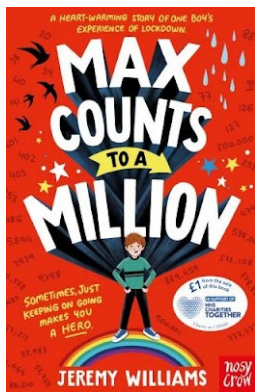
### Children of The Quicksands - Efua Traoré

Children of the Quicksands is a book based on the story of Simi, a girl living in Lagos with her mother who has been sent to her mysterious grandmother, who she knows nothing about, in an isolated forest and village called Ajao. There she unravels the secrets of her family's checkered past and why her mother has never spoken about her grandmother once. This is a thrilling book and a joy to read. I highly recommend it to adventurous readers in Year 5 and 6.

Chirag 6L



### Max Counts to a Million - Jeremy Williams



The coronavirus is looming and eight year old Max is trying his best to understand exactly what is happening. As the lockdown gets underway, he realises that things aren't as easy as he first thought, so in an attempt to annoy his mum, he decides he's going to count to a million, but when he realises exactly how big a million is and how long it's going to take him, will he make it all the way?

From the beginning of the book, the first person, chatty style was warm and engaging, and I found myself smiling and giggling along with Max (and also desperately in need of smarties!)

Max is an endearing character whose charm and view of the pandemic made me smile and will undoubtedly help children to see recent events in a more light-hearted way (I will, from now on, see the virus as suitcase carrying zombies!). I think

it the child's-eye view of things adds an element of humour to the book and I really like that. It's what children need and I think it will help children to frame their own experiences of lockdown in a positive light.

From remote learning to an hour of exercise; panic buying to chatting to the neighbours during the Thursday evening clap, Williams has captured the details of what was a most unusual time for everyone and it's this attention to detail, put in a way that children will be able to relate to, that makes this such a great read. I'm sure there were plenty of times when my son wanted to annoy me during lockdown; however, I know we relished our daily walks (especially when I was about to throw my laptop out the window!) and, of course, being apart from family and missing events like parties was difficult for us and are things we won't forget in a hurry. Our children will be talking about this to their grandchildren ('I remember when I was your age and we couldn't go to school...') and I think this book will show them a different side to such a huge event and will remind every reader (young and old) that there was a lighter side to the pandemic.

I find myself waffling now and quite possibly going off on a tangent (I feel Max would understand!). It's safe to say that **Max Counts to a Million** is a triumph of a book, it's a moving and heart-warming story about what can happen when we can't go outside; it's about dealing with change and how communities can come together, even in the worst of times. I know that readers will love Max and I can't wait to hear what 5M think of the book as I know that this is their current daily reading lesson book.

## ONE TO LOOK OUT FOR!

(Ellie raided the book trolley in my office, which is available to Year 6 and book group, and has read an early proof-copy of this new book which is due out on the 19th May).

### Fake - Ele Fountain

This brand-new book was a recommendation from Mrs Wall and I was intrigued from the very first page.

It is a futuristic story about a society without antibiotics. Children must home-learn until they have fully developed their immune system at the age of 14. At this point, everyone is sent to boarding school and the main character, Jess has to handle people who haven't learnt any social skills due to their time in isolation.

Fully reliant on computer systems and the cyber world, Jess has to work out what is real and what is fake.

The book is particularly salient after the last two years living with covid as it highlights and illustrates just how important friendships and human interactions are. A great read for those in Year 6.

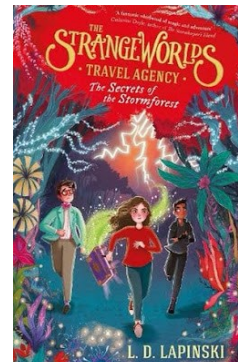
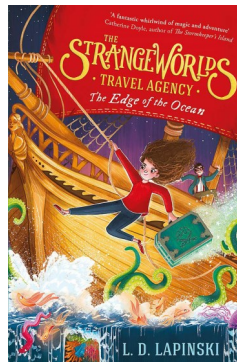
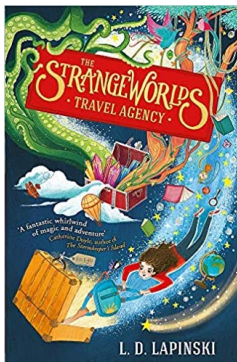
Ellie AJ 6N



## The Strangeworlds Travel Agency: The Secrets of the Stormforest - LD Lapinski

**'Words are magical, young lady.'**

This VERY short extract from the final book in **The Strangeworlds Travel Agency** series, **The Secrets of the Stormforest** is incredibly true. To read the rest of the thrilling book, you'll only have to wait until the 12th April! I promise you a rollercoaster of a journey but, other than that, I will say nothing as I don't want to spoil things as I know 5C are currently reading book 1 in their daily reading lesson. I know many of you are desperate to read book 3 and I promise it will be worth the wait!



## LD Lapinski In the North-East!

Are you a fan of The Strangeworlds Travel Agency series? (Me too!) Then you'll be excited to know that you can meet the author, LD Lapinski, on Easter Saturday (16th April) as she'll be signing books in 2 local Waterstones that day!

From 11.00am-1.00pm, she'll be at Waterstones Durham

From 4.00pm, she'll be in Waterstone Newcastle (& you may just see me there!)

Bring your books along to be signed or pop along and buy a copy! She'll be thrilled to see you all!



