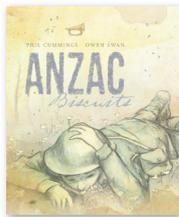


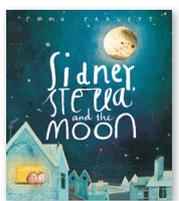
BOOK REVIEWS

by Veronicah Larkin and David Witt



ANZAC Biscuits
written by Phil Cummings,
illustrated by Owen Swan,
Scholastic Press,
h/b, RRP \$24.99

It's not easy to create a picture book about World War One for primary-school children, but this one succeeds brilliantly. In a cosy Australian farm kitchen, Rachel and her mother decide to make biscuits for Dad. In simple illustrations and spare text, they mix the flour, oats and treacle and bake them in an oven – images of ordinary domesticity. But on alternating pages we see where Dad is – on a battlefield. Referred to only as 'the soldier', he faces contrasting images of howling winds, exploding shells and falling snow. He is cold, miserable and alone. However, the book makes it clear he is always in the thoughts of his loved ones half a world away, and when the Anzac biscuits arrive, the soldier knows it, too. The story doesn't offer a pat ending in which the soldier and his family are reunited – because in that war so many weren't. Instead, it ends on a note of hope, in which the tokens of love are more enduring than the horrors of war. Highly recommended for ages 5 to 9 years. *DW*



Sidney, Stella and the Moon written and illustrated by Emma Yarlett,
Lothian, p/b,
RRP \$14.99

Sidney and Stella are twins who do everything together – everything except share. One night the children squabble over Sidney's bouncy ball and, in the midst of the argument, the ball is thrown out the window. The ball bounces high until it hits the moon, breaking it into a million pieces. Sidney and Stella soon realise

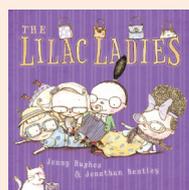
everyone will miss the moon, and devise a plan to replace it with a large round cheese they find in the fridge. After their usual squabbling, the twins realise if they work together they can catapult the cheese into the sky, which they do to great effect. Now there is a new moon and the twins are friends at last. First-time author Emma Yarlett has conjured up a deliciously unconventional tale of mischief and mayhem; of problems created and solved by ingenious means; and of promises of new and improved sibling relationships. Those who love contemporary fairytales will be over the moon about this alluring new book. Highly recommended for ages 3 to 7 years. *VZ*



The Windy Farm
written by Doug MacLeod, illustrated by Craig Smith,
Working Title Press,
h/b, RRP \$24.95

Given the extremes of weather Australia has experienced recently, this is a timely book. But rather than being about heat, fire or flood, it's about the relatively more benign and certainly more comic extremes of wind. It tells the story of a family living on the windiest farm on Windy Hill, where it is so windy the pigs and the daughter nearly blow away. When half the house is gone with the wind, Mum decides to use the wind to their advantage and turns the property into a wind farm. With their new special windmills the family makes so much power that they sell the electricity and become rich – and even the pigs have their own wind-proof house. This book is a comic romp in which author and illustrator seem to be having a lot of fun. Craig Smith's illustrations, especially, are masterpieces of controlled chaos. However, amid all the fun is a strong message about clean energy and the importance of a positive spirit. Recommended for ages 5 to 8 years. *DW*

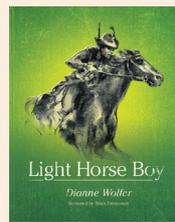
VERONICAH'S PICK OF THE MONTH



Ida, Maisie, Rose and Nelly are older ladies enjoying life to the fullest. Each week the friends play bowls, go swimming, share cherry sodas, take dance lessons and enjoy high tea together. When anyone gets into a muddle it is always clever Nelly who solves the problem. One week Nelly is unwell and Ida, Maisie and Rose sadly go about the week's activities without Nelly's gentle guiding hand. Then Nelly passes away peacefully, surrounded by her three dearest friends. Ida, Maisie and Rose gradually begin to bowl, swim, eat and dance again without Nelly's presence – and soon they find themselves smiling and laughing again. Hughes' debut picture book sensitively explores the themes of love, loss and acceptance with a charming tenderness. Hughes and Bentley have created four comically joyful characters, brought skilfully to life by the spirited watercolour-and-pencil illustrations. While this book might make you laugh and cry, there will be lots more laughter than tears. Highly recommended for ages 3.5 to 6 years.

The Lilac Ladies written by Jenny Hughes and illustrated by Jonathan Bentley, Little Hare Books, h/b, RRP \$24.95

DAVID'S PICK OF THE MONTH



It is August 1914, and two country boys seeking adventure and excitement enlist to fight in World War One. Charlie and Jim are accomplished horsemen, so they join the 4th Light Horse Regiment, and Jim, who is only 17, takes his cherished horse, Breaker, with him. The boys are shipped off to Gallipoli, where they soon find themselves in the midst of the carnage at the Battle of Lone Pine – and dreams of adventure and excitement immediately vanish. *Light Horse Boy* is a work of fiction, but is based on historical records and primary-source documents – although some liberties have been taken to enable Jim to join the Medical Corps and LH (light horse) Field Ambulance. It is written mostly as correspondence between Jim and his sister, and features letters, photographs, newspaper clippings and charcoal sketches. The first-person point of view gives the narrative immediacy and captures the gung-ho spirit of young Australians of the time, but it also doesn't shy away from the horrors of war – for men and horses alike. This is a powerful and moving book, highly recommended for ages 9 to 14 years.

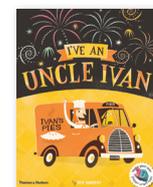
Light Horse Boy written by Dianne Wolfer, illustrated by Brian Simmonds, Fremantle Press, h/b, RRP \$26.99



Max & George
written by Cori Brooke and illustrated by Sue deGennaro,
Penguin Viking,
h/b, RRP \$24.99

Max looks at his reflection in windows and sees a boy looking back. Max calls him George and they become best friends. Max notices George dresses like him, shares his moods, laughs at his jokes and copies his actions. Shy and anxious Max finds great comfort in steadfast and loyal George, and when Max starts school he even finds George reflected in the window of his new classroom. When the children go outside to play Max prefers to talk to George – until young Sam introduces himself and the two boys become fast friends. Now that he has a real friend, Max notices George no longer appears in windows, and in time Max stops looking for him. An imaginary friend forsaken when a real friend is found is a commonly used theme in picture books, and Brooke and deGennaro have explored the subject matter with great sensitivity. Brooke's careful text ensures Max is never painted as a victim of loneliness or anxiety, while Sue deGennaro's off-beat and quirky illustrations cleverly mirror Max's unconventional approach to life. Highly recommended for ages 3 to 6 years. *VZ*

win the school science competition, so he asks the genius rodent to help him build a manned – or in this case, hamstered – rocket. Stinky is reluctant at first, but eventually agrees in order to overcome his fear of heights – which is just as well, because an act of sabotage sends him to great heights indeed. Stinky is a delightfully eccentric central character, but all the characters have their own quirks. The text is age-appropriate and, given the fact that the rocket is made out of baked-bean cans, *My Hamster Is An Astronaut* features remarkably few fart jokes. Recommended for ages 6 to 9 years. *DW*



I've An Uncle Ivan
written and illustrated by Ben Sanders,
Thames & Hudson,
h/b, RRP \$24.95

Ivan drives a pie van, and is joined on the road by members of his extended family. We meet Kate on a rollerskate, Cooper on a scooter, Morse on a horse and Gus on a bus, to name just a few of Ivan's kinfolk. These larger-than-life characters are determined to get where they are going and there are visual hints a-plenty to suggest where that might be. The whole family congregates at a cafe where Ivan has set up his pie stand. Once pies are devoured, they process up the hill, where it is revealed they are a circus family heading to the evening's performance. Sanders has created a simple rhyming story that moves the action along with speed and purpose, but what sets this book apart are the delectable illustrations, 1950s retro-style drawings that are utterly gorgeous. Sanders' illustrative style serves the text well and elevates this book to another dimension entirely. Recommended for ages 18 months to 5 years. *VZ*



Stinky and Jinks: My Hamster Is An Astronaut written by David Lowe,
illustrated by Mark Chambers, Lothian
Children's Books, p/b, RRP \$12.99

This is the second book in a series of beginner chapter novels about a nine-year-old boy, Benjamin Jinks, and his brilliant but curmudgeonly hamster, Jasper Stinkybottom, or Stinky. Stinky's other significant feature is that he can talk, so he is Ben's best friend and partner in adventure. In this novel, Ben wants to

MORE REVIEWS

Go to www.webchild.com.au for our reviews of the latest movies, DVDs, music, books and computer games.