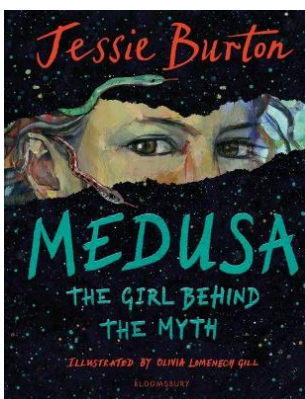


The Silent Stars Go By

Author: Sally Nicholls **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 04/11/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

November 2021 Book of the Month | Longlisted for the UKLA Book Award 2022 ages 11-14 The Silent Stars Go By is a riveting read-in-one-sitting experience driven by compelling characters who leap off the page, not least the young woman at its heart, an unmarried secretarial student who's forced to give up her baby during WWI. The novel is also underpinned by a superb sense of social history, with evocative details of post-war village life nestling within the bigger story, and - as might be expected of the author of Things a Bright Girl Can Do - it's threaded with feminist themes. It's 1919, Christmas is on the horizon and two years have passed since nineteen-year-old Margot was forced to give up her baby for her parents to raise as their own. She was only fifteen when she and Harry fell madly in love ahead of him being called up. The magic of their time together is evoked in all its tingling passion, contrasting with Margot's present-day torments. It hurts when little James calls her mother "Mummy", and she doesn't know how she can continue to keep James a secret from Harry, who's returned to the village after recuperating on the Isle of Wight. The flashbacks to Margot's time on the maternity ward are particularly poignant and, of course, the reason she has to endure this unbearable situation is due to the fact that she lives in a world in which "the girl is the one whose honour is defiled or whatever rot they spout" whereas "the boy is just being a boy". Coupled with that wider context, Margot's vicar father is a man who "forgave drunks and tramps and fallen women and the men who tried to steal the lead from the church roof. But he couldn't forgive her." Realising that "things couldn't go on like this," Margot decides to confront her fears amidst the rare glamour of a ball on New Year's Eve.

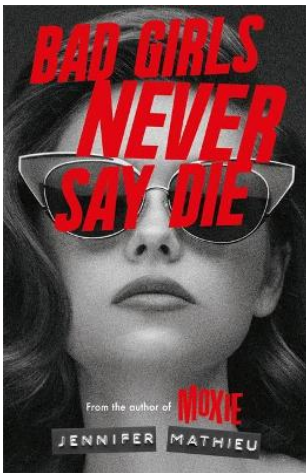


Medusa

Author: Jessie Burton **Format:** Hardback **Release Date:** 28/10/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

November 2021 Book of the Month Jessie Burton's fiery feminist retelling of the Greek myth of Medusa blazes with intrigue and beauty courtesy of author's elegant style and Olivia Lomenech Gill's fabulously evocative colour illustrations. It's an incredible feat of intellect and imagination that takes down toxic masculinity and victim-blaming culture through an ingenious reframing, reclaiming of Medusa. The gods have exiled Medusa to a remote island, with no one for company but the snakes she has for hair. That is, until impossibly beautiful Perseus arrives and transfixes her: "I know a lot about beauty. Too much in fact. But I'd never seen anything like him...I wanted to eat him up like honey cake." Desires awoken, Medusa won't reveal her name, or let him see her: "I was just going to sit on the other side of this entrance rock and pretend that boys like him washed up on desert islands all the time."

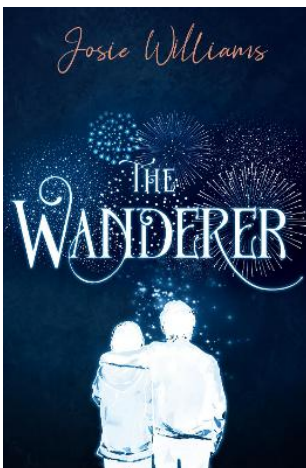
This excerpt encapsulates one of the many marvellous things about this book. The writing - cleverly, and compellingly - feels both timeless and modern. Medusa's narrative, and the dialogue, is laced with wit, and infused with tremendous detail. But betrayal swoops in the wake of desire, and all-too familiar mechanisms of patriarchy come into play with ferocity. Ultimately, though, and with a magnificent sense of sisterhood, Medusa comes to a new state of being: "Self-awareness is a great banisher of loneliness. And my sisters, the immortals, are with me." This is terrifically inspiring and empowering in the ways of timeless myths, but also in ways that are very, very real - "you will find me when you need me, when the wind hears a woman's cry and fills my sails forward. And I will whisper on the water that one must never fear the raised shield, the reflection caught in an office window, or the mirror in a bathroom."



Bad Girls Never Say Die

Author: Jennifer Mathieu **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/10/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

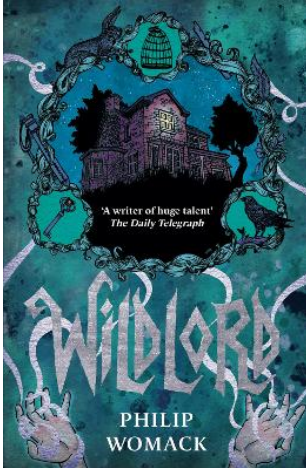
October 2021 Book of the Month In this riveting story of murder, secrets, and tragedy, Jennifer Mathieu reimagines S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* from a female perspective. *Bad Girls Never Say Die* has all the drama and heartache of that teen classic, but with a feminist take just right for our times.



The Wanderer

Author: Josie Williams **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/10/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

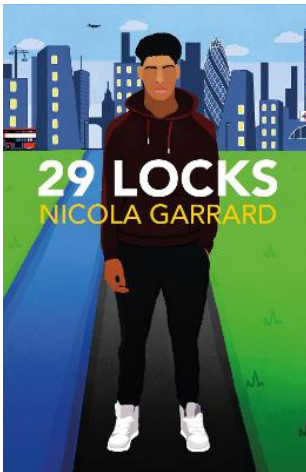
A moving, compelling and spooky YA romance. Fifteen-year-old Maggie is in foster care following the death of her mother and her grandmother's slip into dementia. When Ryder saves her life, she can't help but fall in love with him. The only problem is that he has been dead for five years... Unsentimental, passionate and immensely moving, *The Wanderer* takes a fresh look at first love and growing up.



Wildlord

Author: Philip Womack **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 07/10/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

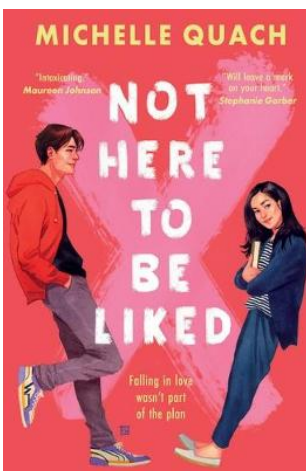
A suspenseful teen fantasy about young love, dark mystery and magic. Something is menacing Mundham Farm. Does it come from outside - or within? Who or what are the Samdhya, the supernatural people described in the old handwritten diaries Tom finds in his uncle's house? As Tom starts to uncover the truth and learn new details about his parents' death, he is confronted with a stark choice: on the one hand, infinite power; on the other, freedom. Which will he choose?



29 Locks

Author: Nicola Garrard **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 30/09/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

A coming-of-age novel set in contemporary London and Hertfordshire. Fifteen-year-old Donald Leroy Samson is the son of an absentee St Lucian father and a drug-addicted English mother. Growing up in dire poverty in Hackney, East London, his life is shaped by casual violence, gang initiation, drug-dealing and knife crime. When Donny's bored, rich, white girlfriend Zoe is offered a dubious modelling audition, the couple 'borrow' a barge and navigate the 29 locks on the canal system from Hertfordshire down into Kings Cross. When they start out on their journey, the future for both of them looks unpromising, like the fake audition, but as each lock is navigated and conquered, as the waters fall then rise again, their adventure takes on a new dimension. Life will never be the same again. A gritty, urban tale of redemption!

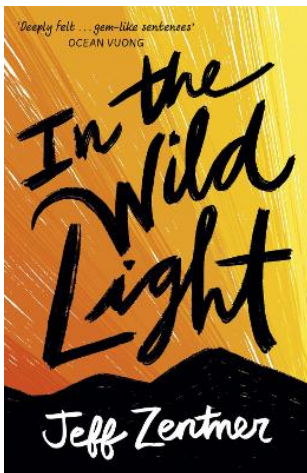


Not Here To Be Liked

Author: Michelle Quach **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 16/09/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

October 2021 Debut of the Month Refreshing, funny and packed with essential feminist themes, not to mention an authentic, engaging protagonist in Eliza Quan (a no-nonsense teenager who doesn't give two hoots about what people think of her), Michelle Quach's Not Here To Be Liked is at once deliciously entertaining and empowering. With pithy observations like "Girls get judged for their past; guys get judged for their potential", it's also a thought-provoking reminder (if one were needed) that there's some way to go before patriarchal structures are disassembled - thanks goodness, then, that Eliza is on hand to speed up the process. Oh, and the novel features a whole lot of cute kissing to boot. Eliza is set to be the new editor-in-chief of her high school

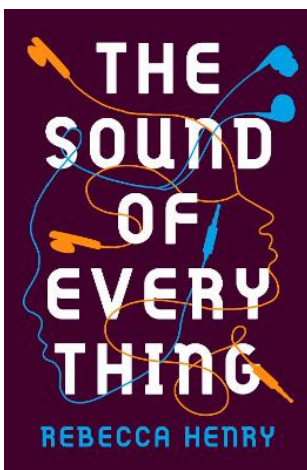
newspaper. Firstly, she's the most qualified candidate. Secondly, she's the only candidate...until former baseball player Len joins the paper for want of something better to do and winds up winning the vote. Justifiably angry that he - male, handsome, popular and utterly inexperienced - was picked over her - Eliza's venting inspires a feminist movement that exposes the gulf between those who want - and recognise the need for - gender equality, and those who think she's just annoyed about being overlooked. Alongside exploring such pertinent themes in slick style, the novel also sees Eliza face the ultimate conflict when she finds herself falling for Len. Fast and furious, *Not Here To Be Liked* flies in the face of anyone dumb enough to think that books about feminism (and feminists themselves) can't be smart and funny.



In the Wild Light

Author: Jeff Zentner **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 05/08/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

August 2021 Book of the Month Life in a small Tennessee town is not easy. Cash lost his mother to an opioid addiction and his Papaw is dying slowly from emphysema. Dodging drug dealers and watching out for his smart but troubled best friend, Delaney, is second nature to Cash. But when Delaney manages to secure both of them full scholarships to an elite school in Connecticut, Cash will have to grapple with his need to protect and love Delaney, and his fears about abandoning his old life.



The Sound of Everything

Author: Rebecca Henry **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 22/07/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

August 2021 Debut of the Month Winner of the Everything with Words' YA Competition 2019, Rebecca Henry's *The Sound of Everything* is an authentically gritty, involving coming-of-age novel that speaks to young people who struggle with feeling unseen, unheard and unloved. Shipped from foster home to foster home, frequently betrayed, and having "never had a dad that I could call Daddy", it's no wonder Kadie (aka Goldilocks) has trust issues. The only thing she's sure of in this world is music - listening to it, and creating it. It's the "only thing that keeps my head straight." To protect herself, she's set out three rules: "1. Don't count on anyone. 2. Act. Always act. 3. Be prepared to lose everything." Constantly in trouble at school, though told she has potential, Kadie bonds with a boy called Lips, aka Dayan, the name he reserves for use by special people, of which Kadie is one. Dayan records with his AMD mandem (Amalgamandem) and she's happy to be invited to hang out with them, while remaining ever-mindful of the fickleness of group dynamics: "one day you're in the group, the next you're invisible." But, just as things start to take an upturn, everything

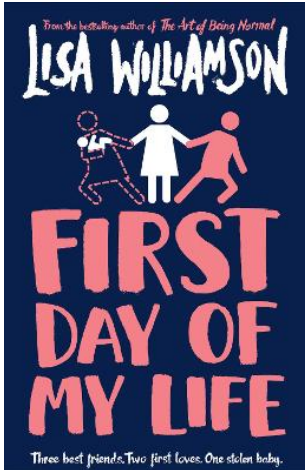
explodes in the aftermath of hideous online trolling and trouble with her foster sister. What's unique about this novel is the author's considered, long-game exposition of Kadie's complex character - it's not rushed, not forced too soon to serve the plot. And, true to life, her problems aren't easily solved either - it really is powerfully authentic all round, from Kadie's voice and interactions, to its portrayal of mental health problems, among them self-harm. At times Kadie will have you pulling your hair out at her own-worst-enemy outbursts, but mainly, though, you'll warm to her. You'll will her to find her way. Appropriately enough for a girl named Goldilocks, there is - ultimately - a glint of gold among the grit. I don't want to spoil it, so let's just say she finds what might turn out to be her "just right" and begins to learn to open up to people she can trust.



After the Rain

Author: Natalia Gomes **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 08/07/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

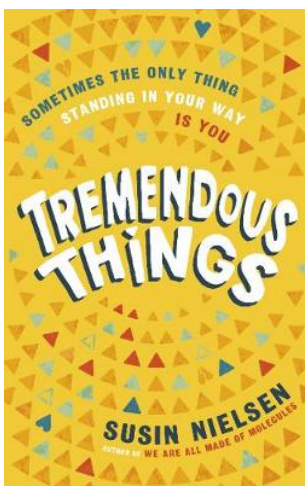
Natalia Gomes's dual-narrative story of survival, survivor's guilt, friendship and rebuilding one's life and identity is a potent, authentic feat of YA fiction. US-born Alice is a dedicated bookworm who believes "there's nothing like the smell of a library", and considers running to be a form of "voluntary torture." In contrast, Jack lives to run - it's freeing, exhilarating, a means of "creating your own music." Unsurprisingly then, despite attending the same school, Alice and Jack's paths have barely crossed, until their chance encounter on Leicester Square at the precise moment a bomb explodes. A bomb that kills 22 people, and leaves them forever changed. Their initial floods of thought and feelings are powerfully evoked in all their heart-stopping intensity, especially as Jack runs through all the imminent athletic adventures he had planned and realises, "My legs are gone. There's nothing from my thighs. It's all gone." As his "thoughts are heavy and they hurt. My memories hurt. My past hurts", Alice is gripped by anger and also feels driven to find Jack, while he dreams of her, "the girl with the yellow polka dot umbrella." The ebbs and flows of their struggles and friendship are stirringly evoked. As Jack begins to feel hope when he's fitted with prostheses ("I'm finally starting to feel like the old Jack. Maybe it's time to start putting my old life back together again"), Alice struggles with PTSD, with survivor's guilt, and with debilitating panic attacks. Then they switch roles again, with Jack slipping into depression as Alice finds solace in a therapy group. He realises he was being overly optimistic about his road to recovery - it's a marathon, not a sprint, which hits him hard given that's he's already set himself on taking up his London marathon place. But Alice is there for Jack, every step of the way, and he for her, and therein lies the heart of this novel - the power of friendship to heal and keep a person going when all feels lost.



First Day of My Life

Author: Lisa Williamson **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 01/07/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

Voiced by three unforgettable characters – Frankie, Jojo, and Ram, Frankie’s ex boyfriend - whose lives are inextricably bound by unexpected, life-changing circumstances, this impactful novel sparkles with heart, hope and a riveting storyline. Jojo and Frankie have been best friends since forever. Both promising actresses, their lives are on the brink of new horizons, so when Jojo doesn’t turn up to collect her GCSE results, Frankie is frantic with worry. Then, when she eventually hears from Jojo, and also hears a baby crying in the background, Frankie puts two and two together to get six. Could Jojo be responsible for the stolen baby that’s being reported on the local news? Fearing the worst, Frankie does what she must for her dear friend. She tracks her down and discovers an unimaginable truth that truly tests their relationship. Radiant with uplifting portrayals of friendship, and demonstrating that it’s possible to find a way through even the most seemingly impossible situations, this poignant page-turner packs a whole lot of punch in the author’s inimitably empathetic style. Of particular note is the way the novel shows that adults don’t always have the right answer, that life can be confusing no matter what your age, which demonstrates Williamson’s singular respect for her YA readers - she never talks down, and always writes in a spirit of openness.



Tremendous Things

Author: Susin Nielsen **Format:** Hardback **Release Date:** 03/06/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

June 2021 Book of the Month Susin Neilson has such talent for creating pitch-perfect characters and immersive story-worlds that ring with real-life authenticity. Much like her excellent My Messed Up Life, Tremendous Things packs in plenty of humour and heart as it tells a page-turning story underpinned by big emotional themes, in this case finding confidence through battling the effects of bullying. At eleven, Wilbur (Wil) resolved to grow taller, cry less, have his writing published, make friends, fall in love, “learn to be my best self”, and learn to be “confident and brave”. Three years later, while he’s yet to become brave, Wil has grown, he’s still writing poetry and he’s made some friends, among them his best friend, 85-year-old Sal. Going to “Aquacise for Seniors is definitely one of the highlights of my week,” he happily admits. With his two mums, Mum and Mup (collectively known as The Mumps) struggling to make ends meet, it’s a bit of a challenge for pay for his French exchange trip, but boy is it worth working extra hours at Foot Long Subs to help fund it. Wil’s exchange partner, Charlie, turns out to be a confident, clever girl who appreciates Wil for who he is, and so his gay friends pledge to give him a confidence-boosting makeover before he goes to Paris. But then, as Wil feels a flicker of self-love, the merde hits the fan (to paraphrase a chapter title) and he’s showered

with a succession of unsettling events. Reader, I balled, I beamed, and was bowled over by every step of Wilbur's life-affirming journey, with the wonders of Charlotte's Web woven through it.
