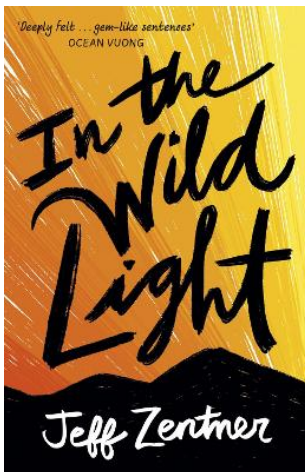


Not Here To Be Liked

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

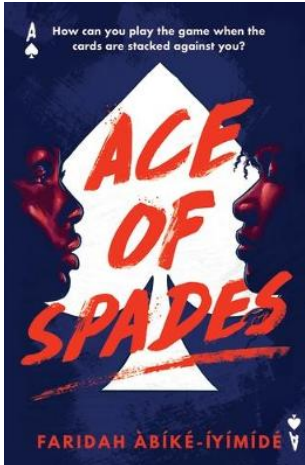
October 2021 Debut of the Month Refreshing, funny and packed with essential feminist themes, not to mention an authentic, engaging protagonist in Eliza Quan (a no-nonsense teenager who doesn't give two hoots about what people think of her), Michelle Quach's *Not Here To Be Liked* is at once deliciously 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.



Ace of Spades

Author: Faridah Abike-Iyimide **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 10/06/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

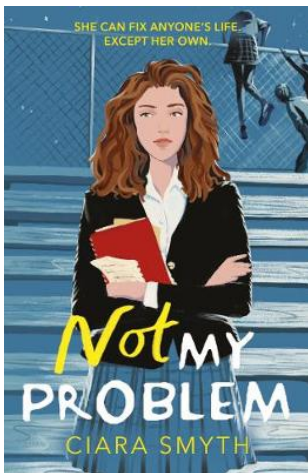
June 2021 Debut of the Month Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé's *Ace of Spades* is an explosively exceptional debut. An incisively subversive, edge-of-your-seat thriller that takes the genre to jaw-droppingly unexpected extremes as it exposes horrific, deep-rooted institutionalised racism. The action centres around an elite high school in the white part of town. It has an all-white student population, except for our two principle characters - musician and scholarship student Devon, and privileged aspiring Yale alumna Chiamaka. Devon (Von to his proud, hardworking Ma) can't wear his hair in twists or cornrows here, and Chiamaka, of Nigerian and Italian heritage, feels compelled to hide her natural hair, and has adopted a "kill or be killed" stance - to achieve the success she's set on, Chiamaka knows she'll have to be tougher than tough. Devon and Chiamaka are sent reeling when an anonymous texter, Aces, starts revealing their deepest, darkest secrets, and it doesn't take much to realise why they're being targeted - the colour of their skin. And so a cruel cat-and-mouse game unfolds - two mice trapped in a destructive nightmare and a malicious cat motivated by racism, with homophobia weaponised too. While there are shocks aplenty (of the rare, ingeniously interwoven variety), the story is compellingly complex, with finely considered character exposition, and no simplified, clear-cut dichotomies drawn between who we can trust, and who should be top of our suspect list. The mounting tension is powerfully palpable, as is the embedded racism Devon and Chiamaka are subjected to - it runs deeper and wider than they (or readers) can possibly anticipate. Turns out, no one can be trusted; that there's more than one cat in this hideous game. Oh, and there are romantic entanglements too, all of which means *Ace of Spades* delivers on all fronts - mystery, romance and tackling important issues in explosive style. What more could a reader ask for? *** Find a must-read letter from Faridah to her readers, attached to the extract.



Everything I Thought I Knew

Author: Shannon Takaoka **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 03/06/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

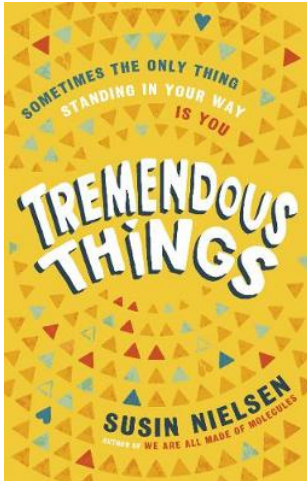
June 2021 Debut of the Month New life, love, friendship and unexpected talents and dreams blossom in the wake of a teenage girl's life-saving heart transplant. *Everything I Thought I Knew*, Shannon Takaoka's enthralling debut, provokes thought and all the feels, and comes highly recommended for fans of Nicola Yoon and Sara Barnard. Seventeen-year-old Chloe was on track to attend a top US college - until she collapses and discovers she's in urgent need of a heart transplant. Thankfully for her, she's able to get one in time and makes a good recovery, though eight months on, things feel a bit weird. First up, Chloe's developed a new desire to surf, which she does in secret from her worried parents in the company of attractive surf teacher, Kai. Then there's the strange dreams that haunt her. Propelled by her new friend, Jane (a rebel to Chloe's good girl), she begins to wonder if the source of all this weirdness might be connected to the person her new heart came from. Threaded with themes of identity (figuring out who you are, and who you might be), this is a moving and heartfelt read, with plenty of funny moments too.



Not My Problem

Author: Ciara Smyth **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 03/06/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 3

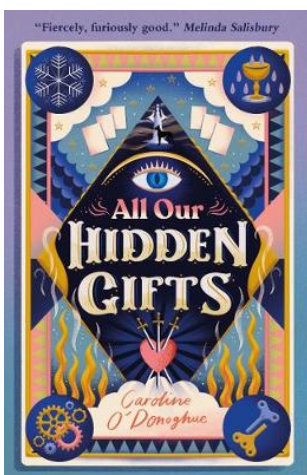
Aideen can fix anyone's problem - just not her own in this outrageously funny YA novel with a lesbian heroine at its centre. From the author of *The Falling in Love Montage*, shortlisted for An Post Irish Book Award and KPMG Children's Books Ireland Award.



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.

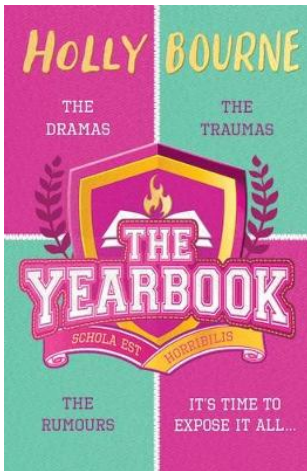


All Our Hidden Gifts

Author: Caroline O'Donoghue **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 27/05/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

June 2021 Debut of the Month Caroline O'Donoghue’s *All Our Hidden Gifts* is an accomplished debut - the first in what’s set to be an exhilarating quartet exploring friendship, love, responsibility, and the repercussions of supernatural gifts. Thrilling, funny, and tingling with the intrigue of ancient magic, tarot cards, and a troubling disappearance, it’s a multi-layered, myth-infused inclusive mystery that will have fans of edgy contemporary YA utterly enthralled. Witty, endearingly self-effacing Maeve (“if I think I’ll get a laugh for it, I’ll do it”), goes to a posh private school in Ireland. Having driven away her best friend Lily in an attempt to find popularity, she’s accepted her lot in life as an ungifted individual. All that changes, though, when she finds an old pack of tarot cards in school and becomes the centre of attention after discovering a gift for delivering uncannily accurate readings. Maeve’s fate switches yet again when she finds a mysterious card in the pack - the menacing Housekeeper - and then Lily vanishes. Reeling with mystery, drama and real-life issues, this tackles themes of intolerance, bigotry and justice with timely, thought-provoking dynamism. What’s more, it’s an

absolute page-turner.



The Yearbook

Author: Holly Bourne **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 13/05/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3

June 2021 Book of the Month Honest, authentic and (ultimately) uplifting, Holly Bourne's *The Yearbook* will strike a powerful chord with young women on the brink of leaving secondary school. Realistically raw in its portrayal of toxic relationships (from poisonous school peers to abusive partners), with an underdog protagonist readers will wholeheartedly root for, and a sweet, slow-burning romance that will melt the most cynical of hearts, this is classic contemporary YA. Budding journalist Paige lives a lonely, isolated life - "the undeniable truth was that I was invisible as well as unlovable. Nobody could see me see me at all, let alone look at me and see the potential to store their heart there. People don't fall in love with wallpaper. Or silence." At the same time, her parents' marriage shows the jeopardies of falling in love with the wrong person. She and her mum walk on eggshells around her erratic, coercively controlling dad who flips from jolly joker to enraged monster over the tiniest thing. At least Paige has the school newspaper to keep her occupied - until it's hijacked by malicious narcissists from the official Leavers' Committee who want to create a yearbook. As Paige's family life disintegrates, she realises that the infiltrators steering the yearbook are re-writing history. The same goes for Paige's dad and his ilk - people who think "they're the hero of their own story, but, actually, in the pursuit of being so important, they're often the villain of everyone else's". Thankfully, though, hope comes in the form of her independent-minded aunt Polly ("she seemed to genuinely care for me") and soul-lifting Elijah, who supports Paige's quest to find her voice and speak the truth after they meet through a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.



Black Brother, Black Brother

Author: Jewell Parker Rhodes **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 13/05/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3

At once hard-hitting and heart-stirring, *Black Brother, Black Brother* confirms Jewell Parker Rhodes as an exceptional writer whose work resonates with authenticity, empathy, and powerful truths about race and equality. One of the few black boys at his prestigious school, 7th grader Donte has a hard time of it, to say the least. "I wish I were invisible...Sometimes I feel like I'm swimming in whiteness. Most of the students at Middlefield Prep don't look like me. They don't like me either." He's singled out by teachers, and subjected to racist bullying by his classmates: "You dress thug". "Your dreads are dreadful." "Why can't you be like your brother?" "Can your brother find you in the dark?" The brother in question is Trey, who presents as white and, as a result, occupies a very different place in the world. As Donte is arrested - for

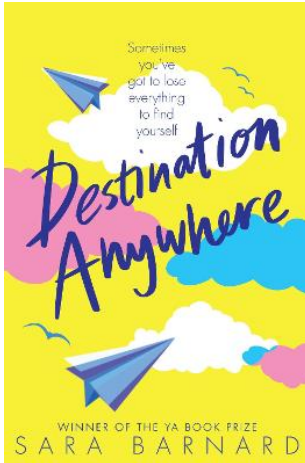
nothing - he experiences (yet again) that “Black is not invisible”. So, he resolves to get his own back on the student who got him in trouble, and the best way to do that is to beat the boy at his own game - fencing. Donte’s first-person narrative is pitch-perfect and incredibly powerful, and the brothers’ family life is beautifully portrayed too. Their dad is a computer architect whose family were “poor seafarers from Norway”. Their mom is a social justice lawyer whose family is “descended from captured Africans.” But despite the love and support of his brother and parents, Donte’s loneliness is powerfully palpable, especially when he’s suspended. This makes his determination to track down and learn from an African American Olympian fencer all the more moving, all the more inspiring. What an incredible tale of triumph and fortitude this is. Mention must also be made of the author’s afterword, in which she lays bare historic and cultural prejudices against darker skin, the falsehood of black/white categories, and her fascinating reasons for featuring fencing.



Goodbye, Perfect

Author: Sara Barnard **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 15/04/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 4

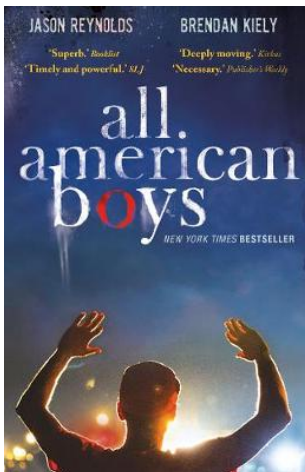
Fresh-voiced and thought-provoking contemporary YA exploring friendship, trust, messing up and trying to do the right thing in the aftermath of a teen girl going on the run with a teacher. Fabulously forthright Eden has always been the kind of student teachers “call ‘spirited’ when they’re trying to be nice and ‘disruptive’ when they’re not”. The last thing anyone expected was for her level-headed, flute-playing, star student bestie Bonnie to run off with the school music teacher, but that’s exactly what happens, right before they’re due to sit their GCSES, and Eden is the only one who knows where Bonnie is. She knows this is wrong, that Bonnie should come home, but she’s promised not to tell, and she can’t betray her friend. Bonnie was the one who made Eden feel at home in a new school when she was placed with a new foster family. Until Bonnie, Eden hadn’t had a proper friend. And exploring friendship - how it feels, what it means, the joys, the obligations, the codes of loyalty - is at the heart of this involving novel. No one believes Eden when she says Bonnie hasn’t been in touch, but how long can she keep lying? And what price will be paid for her loyalty, when she knows Bonnie is making a massive mistake? Alongside Eden’s struggle, understanding why Bonnie left is also thoughtfully explored - the pressures she put on herself to perform at school, the weight of expectation, the fears and doubts that made her more susceptible to grooming, the desire to feel understood. This novel tackles serious issues head-on, and with tremendous empathy, never shirking from the complexities of both Eden and Bonnie’s predicaments. Eden’s adoptive parents are a delight, as is her relationship with super-sweet boyfriend, Connor. They’re true friends, and the very model of a healthy relationship: loving, supportive and respectful of each other. Sara Barnard has done it again.



Destination Anywhere

Author: Sara Barnard **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 15/04/2021
Year Groups: Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4

Exploring a 17-year-old's life-affirming reclamation of her life from ruthless bullies, this raw, true-to-life novel confirms Sara Barnard's talent as a writer of immense heart. After years of horrific bullying, Peyton's life was supposed to have been better at college. It was supposed to herald a fresh start away from school bullies. And - for a while, at least - life did seem to get better. Peyton found a friendship group for the first time in her life, but it's not easy staying true to yourself when you fear you'll lose those hard-found friends. Then a whopping wake-up call comes when her so-called buddies turn out to be anything but that. So, she takes flight to Canada, with only her beloved sketchbook for company. The novel's smart structure slips from Peyton's present-day Vancouver adventure back to earlier episodes that caused her to flee her old life - the ostracisation, the humiliations, the escalating bullying, her slippage into a reckless social life - and then a mortifying let-down that provides Peyton with a pivotal 'enough is enough' prompt. The author brilliantly (i.e. painfully) captures the agonies of friendlessness and the excruciating awkwardness of tentative attempts to make mates - so many scenes will have readers squirming in their seats. Then there's the poignant portrayal of how needlessly cruel people can be, heart-cheeringly countered by Peyton's newfound camaraderie in Canada. All of which makes for a thought-provoking, empathy-inducing experience. It'll make you cry too - in a good way.



All American Boys

Author: Jason Reynolds, Brendan Kiely **Format:** Paperback **Release Date:** 04/03/2021 **Year Groups:** Key Stage 4

March 2021 Book of the Month Co-written by Brendan Kiely and the always-exceptional Jason Reynolds, All American Boys is an immensely powerful, timely novel about police brutality against young Black men. Shining a stark light on white privilege and the racism implicit in not speaking out, it's a punch-packing wake-up call for us all to stand up and plant ourselves on the right side of history. Wrong place, wrong time, wrong colour. It all goes wrong for Black sixteen-year-old Rashad when a cop jumps to the unfounded conclusion that he's shoplifted a bag of chips. Rashad's arrest is brutal and the cop, Paul, leaves him with internal bleeding and broken bones. There were witnesses though, among them Quinn, a rising basketball star from Rashad's school who also happens to know Paul. In fact, Paul has been like a father to Quinn since his dad died on service in Afghanistan, which puts him in a tricky situation - speaking out against Paul would sever his friendship and support ties. But Quinn's decision to keep quiet unravels when footage of the incident is picked up by the media, with everyone in town taking a side. As a powerful "Rashad is absent" school campaign gains momentum along with plans for a big protest march, Quinn realises that

not speaking up is a form of racism, that as an “All-American” white boy he can walk away from anything. “Well, I was sick of it,” he decides. “I was sick of being a dick”. Aware that his dad had inspired Paul to become a cop to “make a difference in the world”, Quinn resolves to be like his dad too, but not in the sense of being loyal to his country and family, which is how people always frame his father’s heroism. Quinn means in the sense of standing up for what he believes in; being “someone who believed a better world was possible - someone who stood up for it.” Packed with plenty of moments that will make you melt and tear up (such as Rashad’s relationship with the hospital shop volunteer, and the bonds between him and his buddies and big brother), this is a smart, incisive, rousing read for our times.
