

Picture books

King Baby by Kate Beaton

(Walker Books)

A hilarious book about the demands of small babies that will resonate especially with parents who know who's the real boss in their home.

Nothing! By Yasmeen Ismail

(Bloomsbury)

A perfect example of how picturebooks really work: when Lila's mum asks her what she's doing, she says 'Nothing!' but the reader is treated to the secret world of Lila's imagination in her fluid, lively watercolours. Another beautiful book from an Irish author-illustrator

Owl Bat Bat Owl by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick

(Walker Books)

Wicklow-based author-illustrator; this is her first wordless picturebook. When the bat family arrives and the owl family has to share a branch, there's suspicion, but with the innocence of small children – even own-children and bat-children – barriers are broken down.

5-8 years

Bliain na nAmhrán - Book and CD

Liricí agus ceol: Tadhg Mac Dhonnagáin, maisithe ag Christina O'Donovan, Brian Fitzgerald, Tarsila Krüse agus Jennifer Farley

(Futa Fata)

A very special Irish-language picturebook of new songs as Gaeilge to match each of the four seasons, each season illustrated by a different artist. The book is a hardback with dust jacket and a CD of the songs – we are always asked for Irish books with CDs for parents who aren't fluent but want to share the language with their children; this is a perfect Christmas gift. Published December.

Historopedia by John and Fatti Burke

(Gill Books)

The follow-up to the very popular Irelandopedia, from father-daughter team John (author) and Fatti (illustrator) Burke. An illustrated history of Ireland – clean, modern design. Another great gift book.

Rabbit and Bear – Rabbit's Bad Habits

Julian Gough, illustrated by Jim Field

(Hodder Children's Books)

This is a snort-out-loud funny kind of read – genuinely warm dialogue between Bear and Rabbit makes for a wonderful story of an unlikely friendship. And there's poo, for the kids (big and small) who get a giggle from that sort of thing.

9-11 years

Miraculous Miranda by Siobhán Parkinson

(Hachette Children's)

Eoin Colfer's blurb on this one says 'I loved Miranda, and so will you' – very simple and so true. Miranda is a child with a Big Imagination who always wins Word of the Day at school. When her sister Gemma is taken into hospital, Miranda escapes into her own fantasy land, Magnanimous. With giraffe police, ham sandwich trees and a Crystal-Clear Glass Hospital for Getting-Better Children, Magnanimous grows and grows. As her sister gets worse, things Miranda writes seem to

trigger small miracles she has been asking for: her gran stops smoking, horrible Darren Hoey is nice to her ...Can Miranda write a miracle for her sister? This is such a thoughtful book with a very real, very frustrated little sister.

The Making of Mollie by Anna Carey
(O'Brien Press)

Mollie Carberry's life seems pretty dull until she discovers her older sister Phyllis is a suffragette! When she and her friend Nora get involved they must face the question of how far a girl should go for her beliefs. Wonderful to see a book like this for young readers – smart, feminist, exciting.

The Ministry of Strange, Unusual and Impossible Things by Paul Gamble
(Little Island)

Thoroughly bonkers novel from a debut Belfast writer, The Ministry of SUITs tells the story of a secret Ministry hidden away in the Ulster Museum. All manner of strange, unusual and impossible things can be found there including ancient monsters, wild animals, pirates, unicorns and aliens; this is where 12-year-old Jack and his frenemy Trudy work. Peppered with hilarious 'facts', this author successfully makes footnotes funny for a young audience – no mean feat.

12-14 years

The Bombs that Brought Us Together by Brian Conaghan
(Bloomsbury)

Fourteen-year-old Charlie Law and his new refugee friend Pavel Duda represent strict, rule-bound Little Town and neighbouring Old Country. In a war torn country, desperation drives Charlie to do things he would never have done before for the sake of his family. A dangerous regime draws him in and pushes him to the limit – how far will he go, and how can he protect both his family and his new friend? Warm, funny dialogue and a believable dystopian world make this an excellent read.

Nothing Tastes as Good by Claire Hennessy
(Hot Key Books)

This is a book I'd have loved as a teenager – it really taps into that awful self-consciousness of being a teenage girl, particularly one with body confidence issues or indeed deeper problems. Annabel has died of anorexia, and the only way for her ghost to get a message to her family is to help living teenager Julia – help her to lose weight, Annabel thinks, but perhaps there's more to it than that...

YA (YOUNG ADULT)

Needlework by Deirdre Sullivan
(Little Island)

A departure from Deirdre Sullivan's Primrose Leary trilogy, this book is powerful, moving, lyrically written. This is the story of a girl whose father has been violent and abusive to her and her mother. Ces is keeping it together – just – building an emotional wall around herself and dreaming of being a tattoo artist.

A Lonely Note by Kevin Stevens
(Little Island)

This novel was released as an adult edition first and a YA novel a year later – it's a real crossover novel. Tariq takes refuge in jazz music from the violence on the streets and conflict at home, forming a new friendship with the volatile but intriguing record-store owner, Jamal. A story of a young man caught between two worlds – traditional Islam and modern America.