



INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE GRADE STANDING ORDER

Welcome to our first International Middle Grade standing order for 2019. I always enjoy reading the selections for these standing orders. It's a wonderful age group to be writing for and there are so many brilliant titles to choose from. All of the titles are suitable for readers 10 to 14. I will let you know if there are any content warnings for younger readers.

Our featured book in this selection is ***The Middler*** by Kirsty Applebaum. I've just discovered that it was a *Times* Book of the Week and in 2016 the manuscript won the United Agents Prize for Most Promising Writing for Young People, so it's off to an auspicious start. It's a gripping story, set in a dystopian world, and has themes of friendship and betrayal. *The Times* says, 'Enter Maggie, 11, a middler, wedged between Jed, the eldest, and Trig, the youngest . . . I thought I'd almost reached my fill of dystopian novels, but Kirsty Applebaum has rebooted the genre. The plot pulls you along and I liked Maggie more and more as she grew in courage. There is a touch of Harper Lee's Scout about her.' Highly recommended.

Shouting at the Rain is the new novel from *New York Times* best-selling author Lynda Mullaly Hunt. This is also a novel about friendship—the pain we feel when a good friend outgrows us and the joy of discovering a new friendship. *Kirkus Reviews* says, 'A richly embroidered cast of characters, a thoughtful exploration of how real friends treat one another, and the true meaning of family all combine to make this a thoroughly satisfying coming-of-age tale . . . Hunt has crafted another gentle, moving tale of love and loss: the value of the one and the importance of getting over the other.'

She Wolf by Dan Smith is set in Northumbria in 866. This is a fantastic adventure featuring a young Viking girl called Ylva bent on revenge when her mother is murdered. Vikings, wolves, snow, vengeance, a kick-the-door-down heroine—what more can a young reader ask for?

Asha and the Spirit Bird by Jasbinder Bilan is set in India and is a beautiful, uplifting magical-realist tale that combines themes of friendship, family and spiritual strength. A young girl called Asha and her best friend Jeevan must trek across the Himalayas to find Asha's father and save her home. The story was the winner of the 2017 *Times/Chicken House* Children's Fiction Competition.

Girl 38: Finding a Friend by Eva Jozefkiewicz is a wonderfully entertaining mix of history, comic book and adventure. Twelve-year-old Kat likes to write her own superhero comic, starring Girl 38, the sort of girl Kat wishes she could be. When Kat's elderly and rather frightening neighbour has an accident, Kat goes to the rescue and a special friendship forms. The story is based on a real-life friendship.

Cloud Boy is a touching story (you may need a handkerchief) about what it means to lose your best friend. Harry Christmas and Angie Moon have been best friends since birth, but when Harry becomes terminally ill, Angie has to find a way through the grief. The novel is written in diary form and beautifully captures the thoughts and feelings of young children dealing with the unknown.

And finally in this selection we have ***When We were Warriors*** by Emma Carroll. I loved this collection of stories about children in World War II showing their bravery and resourcefulness. (Some of the characters have appeared in previous books by Emma Carroll.) I feel like the word 'glorious' is the best adjective for the book—it has a lovely classic British feel to it. It's full of adventure and is also an eye-opener for today's young readers about the hardships children had to endure during times of war.

Happy reading

Belinda



FEATURED BOOK **THE MIDDLE**

FEATURED AUTHOR **KIRSTY APPLEBAUM**

So many things come together in that big mind-soup that is the beginnings of a book. The ingredients for *The Middler* include Kirsty Applebaum's 1970s semi-rural childhood; terrible reports of child soldiers on the news; a trip to Berlin; the white feathers handed out during World War I to shame young men into enlisting; and the songs she learnt in the Brownies.

The idea of being brought up in an isolated place, unaware of the world beyond, has always been fascinating to Kirsty—and she believes it's a universal experience to a certain extent. As we grow up we all discover there's a much wider world beyond our immediate community, with cultures and ideas quite different from our own. Kirsty wanted to reproduce this experience in *The Middler*, and couple it with a page-turning plot.

Kirsty was born in Essex and grew up in Hampshire. She has had a wide variety of jobs including bookselling, railway re-signalling, picking stones off conveyor belts, putting lids on perfume bottles and teaching Pilates. She now lives with her husband on top of a hill in Winchester.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

BEVERLEY, RIGHT HERE
KATE DICAMILLO

LALANI OF THE DISTANT SEA
ERIN ENTRADA KELLY

THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY
SHARON GOSLING

THE UNEXPECTED FIND
TOBY IBBOTSON

...and more to come! Our next International Middle Grade standing order is in October and we are still reading and selecting titles for you. The final list of selections will be posted on our website in September.

THE MIDDLER

KIRSTY APPLEBAUM

Eleven-year-old Maggie lives in Fennis Wick, enclosed and protected from the outside world by a boundary, beyond which the Quiet War rages and the dirty, dangerous wanderers roam. Her brother Jed is an eldest, revered and special. A hero. Her younger brother is Trig—everyone loves Trig.

But Maggie's just a middler; invisible and left behind. Then, one hot September day, she meets Una, a hungry wanderer girl in need of help, and everything Maggie has ever known gets turned on its head.

SCIS: 1913015 | ISBN: 9781788003452 | RRP: \$14.99



STUDY NOTES

- Split the classroom and class in two, with one side smaller than the other. One group sits on the floor in the smaller area; they are going to imagine they are Una—the wanderer. The second group sits in chairs on the other side of the room—they are Maggie. Have a class discussion about how it might feel to be on either side of the boundary. Consider questions such as:
 - How has your view of the classroom and your classmates changed?
 - Why would it be difficult for you to make friends with someone from the other side?
 - How might you feel about people on the other side?
- Why do we sometimes need boundaries in society? Are there any unnecessary boundaries you can think of? What are the dangers of boundaries (both real and imagined)?
- Why does the writer choose to write from Maggie's point of view? What is the effect of this?
- The author uses lots of adjectives to describe the characters. The wanderers are described as 'dirty, dangerous, deceitful'. Can you find examples of how Una contrasts this description? What adjectives would you use to describe the wanderers?
- As a class, discuss what is meant by self-doubt. Why does Maggie feel this way? Consider the effect that being a middle child has had on her. Come up with a list of things that cause self-doubt. Then, come up with five pieces of advice to offer anyone suffering from this feeling. Turn this into an advice column for a newspaper.
- Why does Una feel she has been betrayed by Maggie?
- What lies have been told throughout the book?

Which is the biggest lie and why?

- Individually, write a speech for an assembly titled 'The Truth'. In it, emphasise the dangers of spreading false information, how fast lies can spread and the impact they have.
- When the Mayor accuses Una of starting the fire, Maggie stands up for her. Why is loyalty such an important quality in a friend? How does Maggie try to redeem herself in this scene?
- At the end of the story, Maggie and Una are best friends and go up to the Hawthorn to play together. Write a description of a perfect day with your best friend. As a twist, consider how you might make your description edgy or unusual, considering the author's style in *The Middler*. Could you perhaps incorporate a strange or threatening setting and/or event?

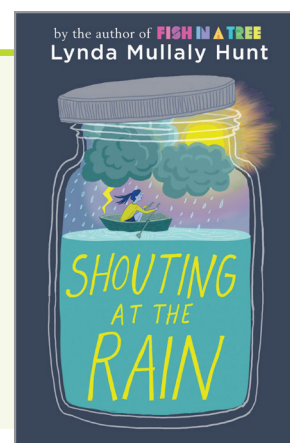
SHOUTING AT THE RAIN

LYNDA MULLALY HUNT

Delsie loves tracking the weather—lately, though, it seems the squalls are in her own life. She's always lived with her kind-hearted grammy, but now wishes she could have a 'regular family'. There are other changes in the air, too—the most painful being a friend who's outgrown her. Luckily, she has Ronan, a new friend who is caring and courageous but also troubled by the losses he's endured.

As Ronan and Delsie traipse around Cape Cod on their adventures, they both learn that, together, they can weather any storm.

SCIS: 1912632 | ISBN: 9780399175152 | RRP: \$27.99



STUDY NOTES

- As the novel opens, Delsie narrates the story, and she makes it clear that she doesn't like surprises and is an orphan. Explain the difference between causation and correlation. As a class, discuss if those two ideas are correlated or caused by one another. Why or why not?
- The author's use of foreshadowing allows readers to watch out for Brandy's new friend, Tressa. After she is introduced at the beach, Delsie says, 'The little voice warns me' (p 34). What might the voice say? Have you ever heard a little voice and did you listen to it? Find other examples of foreshadowing in the novel.
- Throughout the novel, characters' thoughts, opinions, or descriptions are written with figures of speech. Why do you think the author does this? Make a list of some of the similes and metaphors, and then come up with a list of your own. For example: 'Sometimes Olive makes me feel like a category 5 storm'. (p 76)
- Delsie is desperate to hear stories or see pictures of her mother. How does she feel when she is reminded of her mother?
- Delsie has a fascination with and a vast knowledge of weather patterns and especially loves tracking big storms. What does this tell us about her?
- When asked about his mother, Ronan says she is dead, but Delsie later learns Ronan's mother didn't die. Explain why you think Ronan lied. Hold a discussion about bending the truth and lying. Is it ever necessary? In what circumstances?
- Esme, Delsie's neighbour, is known for serving tea from her 'Strong Shoulder' jars. What is the significance of the jars in Delsie's story?
- Throughout the novel, Delsie is dealing with rejection—by her mother and by one of her closest friends. How does she deal with it? Does it evolve as she matures throughout the book?
- Explain Grammy's response to Delsie: 'Strength comes in all kinds of forms, you know. I think your momma's strength came in leaving—not in staying.' (p 171)
- Here is a list of some anagrams that are in the

book, with the answers. Try to find more.

- Olive Tinselly: I love silently
- Brandy Fiester: betrays friend
- Katrinka Schofield: It's a hard knock life
- Ask students to research Cape Cod and write a short report to provide deeper insight into *Shouting at the Rain*.
- Tressa's treatment of Delsie comes across as a way to put herself (and Brandy) above her and her grandmother. Hold a group discussion about the way to treat people—friends, peers, classmates, adults and younger kids. Consider involving the school chaplain or guidance officer to facilitate the discussion so that your students understand the gravity of the issue.
- When Delsie is struggling at the beginning of the novel, what kind of support group or organisation might she have benefited from? In small groups, brainstorm social support groups for kids like Delsie. Have each group present their findings to the class.

GIRL 38: FINDING A FRIEND

EWA JOZEFKOWICZ

Katya loves working on her super-heroine comic Girl 38. At school, her best friend Gem is a gang leader and a force to be reckoned with. But at home, Katya feels lonely when her only company is an indifferent au pair. Even her neighbour, an elderly lady called Ania, is reclusive. But when, one day, Katya sees her neighbour fall, she rushes to help and finds a mysterious partly finished portrait inside Ania's house . . .

As Ania reveals her childhood story to Katya, at school Gem embarks on a bullying spree. Will Ania's incredible story of friendship and endurance show Katya the way, and will she unravel the mystery of the unfinished portrait?

SCIS: 1910461 | ISBN: 9781786698971 | RRP: \$19.99



STUDY NOTES

- 'A red spot appeared high up on Gem's cheek.' (p 3) The writer uses Gem's physical response to tell the reader something about her emotional response. Discuss the phrase 'show, don't tell' in regard to storytelling. What does this mean? Why do you think this is an important technique?
- Miss Seymour says that 'history is best learned from the people who lived through it' (p 96). Conduct an interview with an elderly friend or relative, inviting them to share their memories of childhood with you. How does your interviewee respond to being interviewed? What have you learnt about the person you interviewed and about yourself and your own life?
- There are many examples in the book where fear prevents someone from doing the right thing. Choose one example and answer the following:
 - o What is the person afraid of?
 - o What is their fear preventing them from doing?
 - o What impact do their actions (or inactions) have on someone else?
 - o Write a short paragraph imagining how you might feel in their position. How might you try to overcome your fear in order to do the right thing?
- Do you think bravery is something that you're born with or something that you learn? How does her friendship with Ania give Kat more courage? What makes you feel brave?
- Kat imagines herself as a bully (p 54). Is she right to do so? What other choices could she have made? Rewrite the end of a scene

imagining that Kat has chosen to ignore or resist one of Gem's orders.

- 'He did what he could to be good and kind in the circumstances that he was in. The world around us was filled with darkness, but within him there was more light than dark. That is all that matters. That's all that you can ask of any human being' (p 53). Do you think that this is true? To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- Write about an act of kindness that someone has done you that has had a significant impact on your life.
- How do you think the author navigated writing themes of trauma, war and racism? How does fiction allow us to explore difficult topics with empathy and compassion?

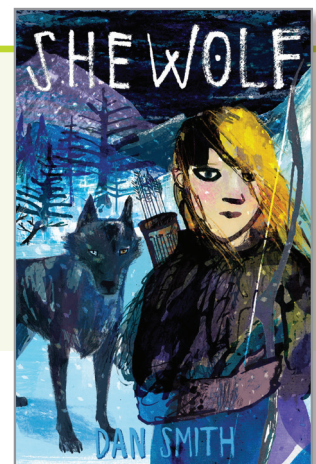
SHE WOLF

DAN SMITH

Northumbria, 866 AD. Washed ashore on a frozen English beach, 13-year-old Ylva's survived. She will not cry. She's meant to be strong. She's a Viking.

But when her mother dies at the hand of a three-fingered man, and the wolves of the forest circle closer, Ylva will need more than the memory of her mother's stories to stay alive.

CONTENT: some violence | SCIS: 1905546 | ISBN: 9781910655931 | RRP: \$16.99



STUDY NOTES

- *She Wolf* introduces readers to groups which populated England in 866: Vikings, Saxons and Danes. As a class, discuss what you already know of these groups, especially Vikings. Are there tropes associated with Vikings? What would you imagine when you think of a Viking? Does this match up with Dan Smith's 'Did You Know?' note at the end of the book?
- Draw a Viking based on Dan's description. When did Vikings live? What sort of armour did they wear and what weapons did they use? What language did they speak? Which gods did they worship? Make a class display out of your work.
- The story is told from third person perspective, but always following Ylva. Using your knowledge of Ylva and her characterisation, write a diary entry from her perspective, from any point in the novel, or before or after the novel. How much do you think Ylva would choose to share in her diary?
- Ylva places a lot of importance in the stories of the Norse gods and Norse mythology—the novel touches on stories of Thor, Odin and Ragnarok. Working in small groups, research different Norse myths and answer the following questions:
 - o Where did the myth come from?
 - o Is there a moral or lesson to it?
 - o How would it have been interpreted in the Viking Age?
 - o Is there a hero or a villain?
 - o Does the story feature in popular culture at all?
 - o Are there different variations—has it evolved over time? If yes, why do you think this is?
- As a group, share your findings with the rest of the class.
- Why do you think Ylva continues to see Geri even after he dies?
- Ylva believes in honour and vengeance, but

Cathryn is more sceptical. Ylva insists the gods would expect her to carry out revenge. Why do you think Ylva is so insistent? Do you think avenging her mother's death is the right thing to do? Why or why not? Is claiming 'that's the way things work' a good enough reason to kill? Do you think this can ever be justified?

- The author has split the novel into several parts. What do you think the effect of this is? Do you think the parts are named correctly?
- The symbolism of wolves plays a big part in the book. Is the overall depiction of wolves positive or negative in the novel, or is it not that simple? Why do you think there is such a focus on wolves? Why are they so important?

ASHA & THE SPIRIT BIRD

JASBINDER BILAN

Asha lives on the family farm with her mother in rural India. Her father is away working in the city and when the money he sends stops suddenly, a wicked debt collector arrives. Guided by a majestic bird, Asha and her best friend Jeevan embark on a journey across the Himalayas, to find her father and save her home . . .

SCIS: 1903299 | ISBN: 9781911490197 | RRP: \$16.99



STUDY NOTES

- Asha is guided by the spirit of her Nanijee in the form of a lamagaia. What do you think the form she has taken suggests about Nanijee's spirit? How does this link up to the stories Asha tells us about Nanijee?
- As a class, create a quiz with the title: 'What is your spirit animal?' First, write a minimum of five questions designed to bring out a person's true character. Next, have four separate groups decide on a spirit animal, and devise an answer to each question reflecting that animal's personality. Collate the questions, answers and results. Now, it's time to take the quiz! What does your spirit animal say about you?
- Asha and Jeevan must map out their perilous route to Zandapur. Imagine your own dangerous journey and draw a map of how to reach your destination. Include:
 - a starting point
 - two geographical obstacles
 - two perils (eg tigers and wolves)
 - a mode of transportation
 - two places of rest and respite
 - a destination.
- The author has chosen an epigraph that underlines the role of faith in the novel. How does the author tackle the question of faith—what do you think she is trying to say?
- How are issues of wealth and poverty represented in the book? Do you think this is a central theme? How important is money to Asha—and to Meena?

WHEN WE WERE WARRIORS

EMMA CARROLL

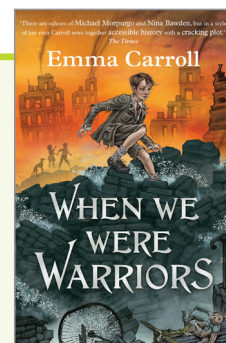
A body washed up on the beach . . .

Evacuation to an old house with forbidden rooms and dark secrets . . .

An animal rescue service . . .

Set in World War Two, Emma Carroll explores the resilience, resourcefulness and inventiveness of children when their lives fall to pieces.

SCIS: 1912815 | ISBN: 9780571350407 | RRP: \$14.99



STUDY NOTES

The Night Visitors

- Research evacuees during World War II. Why were children sent away from their families and where were they sent? In groups, discuss what you think it would be like if you had been one of the evacuated children.
- After reading chapters 2 and 3, ask students to draw a picture of Frost Hollow Hall. Then ask them to write a paragraph from the perspective of another character who arrives at Frost Hollow Hall. Do they see it the same way as Stan or do they interpret it differently?

Olive's Army

- After reading the first few chapters, as a class discuss who is narrating the story. Why do you think the author chose to narrate it from their perspective and how would the story be different if it was from someone else's perspective?
- Read chapter 10. Ask why this chapter is so significant in the story. In groups, act out the scene. Discuss how to convey the drama in the scene and the importance of the moment for the community in the story.

Operation Greyhound

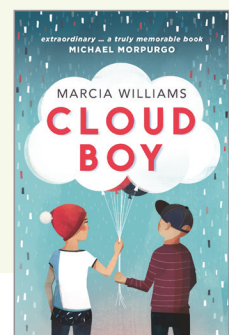
- Before reading, look into the Blitz in Plymouth and how people sheltered from the bombs. How were people organised? What preparation did people do to protect their homes from bombs? What were the different jobs to do with the bombing? Who were the conscientious objectors? What happened to their pets?
- Do you think Mr Jackson was right when he banned animals from the air-raid shelter? Why?
- Why did Velvet's mum (Mrs Jones) change her mind about having a puppy?

CLOUD BOY

MARCIA WILLIAMS

Harry and Angie are best friends and almost-twins. Ever since they were born two days apart they've been partners in cloud-spotting, sweet-eating and treehouse-building. But when Harry is taken to hospital, he needs Angie more than ever. Because when things fall apart, only a best friend can stitch them back together.

CONTENT: illness, grief | SCIS: 1912754 | ISBN: 9781406381214 | RRP: \$16.99



STUDY NOTES

- Cloud Boy* is an epistolary novel written as a series of documents—in this case a journal from Angie's perspective. How might it be different if it was from Harry's perspective or written in third person?
- Angie and Harry share Artcloud. Why is it special to them? What do they like to do there? Do you have a special place that you share with a friend or sibling?
- Grandma Gertie and her parents were imprisoned in Changi during World War II. Discuss Gertie's experience in Changi prison.
- Why does reading the letters make her upset, even though it has been over 60 years since she was in Changi?
- 'Now I see why people keep a diary and it's not to report on the day, it's to give your true heart and feelings a place to explode.' (p 49) What does Angie mean by this? Keep your own private diary for a week and use it to write how you are feeling every day.
- Why does Grandma Gertie suggest Angie make a quilt? Make a class paper quilt. Each student draws or writes something special on a paper square and the pieces are taped together.
- Examine the 23rd July diary entry. Why do you think it is designed this way? Why is the next diary entry not for another two days?
- How does Angie react to the news that Harry might not get better? How does she comfort Harry as his sickness gets worse?