

FICTION FOR UPPER PRIMARY/ LOWER SECONDARY

Happy New Year! And welcome to our first Fiction for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary standing order for 2021. There are so many brilliant middle-grade titles being published these days that we have decided to break our regular Fiction standing order into two sections (Fiction for Lower to Middle Primary and Fiction for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary). There are no recommended reading levels in these notes as all the selections are suitable for 10 to 14-year-olds. I will add content warnings if they are applicable. And so to our books.

Our featured book for February is *Footprints on the Moon* by award-winning author Lorraine Marwood. This beautifully written verse novel is about Sharnie who has just started high school and is struggling to understand the changes in her older sister Cas and the fragile health of her much-loved grandmother. Set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the first landing on the Moon, there are themes of grief, war and resistance, courage and relationships.

The World Between Blinks is a new novel from bestselling author Amie Kaufman, who enjoys rock-star literary status with readers around the world. In this first book in a new series, Amie has teamed up with US author Ryan Graudin to create a fantasy adventure with some historical mysteries thrown in. It's a fast-paced, wonder-filled story about two cousins who slip into another world and have to find their way back again before they are stuck there forever.

Balloon Girls by Darrell Pitt is set in a small rural town called Yallaroo, and the story revolves around a young girl called Ally who decides to enter a competition to win a trip to the Smithsonian Museum in the USA. Her plan is to prove that the Earth is round by sending a video camera to the edge of space. But nothing goes smoothly for Ally as she puts her plan into action. There are themes of science, determination, resilience and friendship.

Unborn Exploring is a wonderful collection of adventure-themed stories written by young people and edited by children's author Rebecca Lim. There's a mix of stories and poetry and a contribution from award-winning Australian author Sally Morgan. The collection is the initiative of 100 Story Building's Early Harvest youth publishing program, where a panel of young editors aged eleven and twelve select a theme and then commission artwork, curate the stories and make all the necessary creative decisions to bring the anthology together.

And finally we have three international titles for you that are all being published locally by Australian publishers. There's an enormous (huge!) buzz around *Amari and the Night Brothers* by B.B. Alston. Amari is a thirteen-year-old girl who discovers she is an all-powerful magician. *Kirkus Reviews* says, 'The author weaves magical whimsy with honest, realistically portrayed circumstances, allowing Amari's literal #BlackGirlMagic to shine even when she doesn't believe in herself. This timely, energetic, first-person narrative moves quickly with clear descriptions, a thrilling buildup, and strong messages about profiling.'

The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S. by award-winning author David Levithan is about two brothers, Lucas and Aidan. When Aidan disappears for six days and then mysteriously reappears, everyone wants to know what happened. When Aidan tries to explain that he stepped through a portal into a different world, no-one believes him.

The Ghost of Gosswater by Lucy Strange is a thrilling Gothic novel that had me hooked from the first page. Twelve-year-old Agatha is cast out of the family home by her cruel cousin and is forced to make a new life for herself with a father she has never known. Determined to discover who she really is, Aggie is joined in her quest by the restless spirit of a young girl who will reveal dark and dangerous secrets.

Happy reading.

Belinda



FEATURED BOOK: **FOOTPRINTS ON THE MOON** FEATURED AUTHOR **LORRAINE MARWOOD**

Lorraine Marwood was born and raised in rural Victoria and has lived for most of her married life on a dairy farm with her husband and their six children.

She has published several children's novels and collections of poetry, winning the inaugural Prime Minister's Literary Award for children's fiction in 2010 for her novel *Star Jumps*. She has enjoyed three fellowships with the May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust. Her 2018 verse novel, *Leave Taking*, was the joint winner of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature and was shortlisted for the 2019 CBCA Book of the Year, Younger Readers and the Queensland Literary Awards, Children's Book Award.

For further information about Lorraine visit:
lorrainemarwood.com

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Our next Fiction for Upper Primary and Lower Secondary standing is in April and will contain selections from both March and April publishing lists.

THE DETECTIVE'S GUIDE TO OCEAN TRAVEL
NICKI GREENBERG

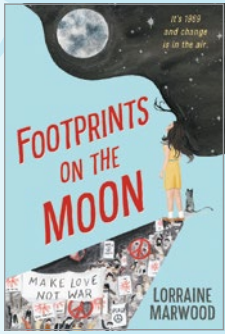
THE CUCKOO'S FLIGHT—WENDY ORR

THE EDGE OF THIRTEEN—NOVA WEETMAN

THE GOLDEN TOWER—BELINDA MURRELL

HUDA AND ME—H. HAYEK

**MY AUSTRALIAN STORY: SIX SECONDS,
THE NEWCASTLE EARTHQUAKE**
ALAN SUNDERLAND



FOOTPRINTS ON THE MOON

Author: **LORRAINE MARWOOD**
SCIS: **1990476**
ISBN: **9780702262838**
RRP: **\$16.99**

It's 1969 and life is changing fast. Sharnie Burley is starting high school and finding it tough to make new friends. As the world waits to see if humans will land on the moon, the Vietnam War rages overseas. Young men are being called up to fight, sometimes without having any choice in the matter. Sometimes without ever coming home. Sharnie's Dad thinks serving your country in a war is honourable, but when her older sister, Cas, meets a returned soldier and starts getting involved in anti-war protests, a rift in their family begins to show. Sharnie would usually turn to her grandma for support, but lately Gran's been forgetting things. Can Sharnie find her own way in this brave new world?



STUDY NOTES

- In the opening verse of the book, Sharnie is excited about the prospect of watching the moon landing. Why does she wonder if 'our world,/my world, [will] suddenly change' (pp 3)? In what ways will Sharnie 'watch history happening'?
- How is life likened to the phases of the moon?
- How does Sharnie feel about humankind 'conquering' and 'trampling on [the moon's]/milky surface' (pp 5–6)? How do the author's language choices help readers to make inferences about Sharnie's thoughts?
- How is navigating high school like the mission to the moon (p 7)?
- Lorraine Marwood incorporates complex concepts into *Footprints on the Moon*, such as communism, the Cold War, the Space Race and conscription. To contextualise the backdrop of this text, use jigsaw group-work to find out more about these issues, reporting to the class on your chosen topic.
- Just as Sharnie is asked to do homework in

Geography class, complete the homework tasks on p 17 using a world map.

- Create a character profile of Gail, Mia or Ellie using evidence from *Footprints on the Moon* to support your ideas. Why are characters like these necessary to the story?
- Re-read the poem 'Good morning America' (pp 24–27). What can we tell about Cas by what is not said in this verse?
- Why does Miss Anders play Simon & Garfunkel's 'I Am a Rock' (p 40)? How do the lyrics of this song represent themes and characters from *Footprints on the Moon*?
- In a piece of prose, explain the significance of the little red horse in *Footprints on the Moon*. Why is the verse, in which the horse is broken, entitled 'Memory is treasure, too?' (pp 58–64)?
- After Grandma dies, what does Sharnie mean when she says, 'The world feels/thick and sticky/like a spider's web' (p 112)?
- When Gail finally says her brother's name, why does she say it like a 'foreign word' (p 159)?
- How is the generation gap portrayed in

Footprints on the Moon? Is the generation gap as pronounced today as it was in the 1960s? Discuss.

- Re-read pp 201–202. Discuss how the author ties together many of the themes and ideas of her text in this passage, including concepts of invasion and conflict.
- Discuss the formatting of Neil Armstrong's famous quote on p 218.
- Sharnie wonders if Grandma's footprint will last forever, like human's footprints on the moon. Respond to this question using evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- On p 222, Sharnie comments that both Armstrong and Steve would have 'thought/of not coming back/from such missions./ But one would always be a hero,/the other quickly forgotten'. Why does she go on to ask: 'How can we look up/and touch the moon,/ when we don't know how/to look across to our neighbours/to listen and take note/of their opinions?' In what ways is this the crux of Marwood's text?



THE WORLD BETWEEN BLINKS

Author: **AMIE KAUFMAN
& RYAN GRAUDIN**
SCIS: **1990690**
ISBN: **9781460757628**
RRP: **\$16.99**

Have you ever blinked, and thought you saw something that was gone a moment later? Have you ever turned to pick up an item, only to find it wasn't where you left it? Jake and Marisol are cousins. Jake's great at leaving things behind and Marisol's so gifted at finding things, that sometimes she even wonders if things find her. Together, Jake and Marisol are about to discover *The World Between Blinks*. The place where everything we lose—from the front door keys to ancient cities—eventually appears.

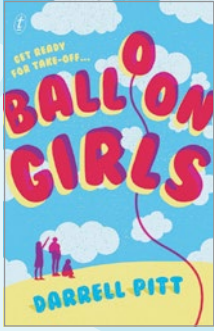
STUDY NOTES

- A key theme in the novel is the power of storytelling to sustain myths and mysteries that otherwise might have been forgotten. There are many intertextual references and travels through periods that explore famous stories, events, places and myths from all over the world, such as the Loch Ness Monster, Amelia Earhart, the fabled city of Atlantis and the Great Mogul Diamond. Examining all the different stories invites students to consider different social, cultural and historical contexts, both in the real world and in fantasy settings.
 - Share the myth of the Loch Ness Monster with the class. <https://bit.ly/38Tgxkg>
<https://bit.ly/2Hbs1Ep>.
 - Ask the class whether they believe the myth and why they think so many people have believed for years and years that the myth could be true.
 - What does the story of the Loch Ness Monster tell us about the power of stories and myths?

- Why do people like myths?
 - What is the appeal of fantasy?
- Ask students to choose a famous person, place or myth to write about.
 - What fantastical elements could they add?
 - What type of mystery could they add?
 - How would this change the shape of the story?
- Discuss the title of *The World Between Blinks*. Look at the cover of the book. Ask the class to consider what the world between blinks could mean and how might it work.
- Using a map of the world, pinpoint all the people, places and times mentioned in each chapter of the book and discuss why each one is important. Show the class pictures of some of the people and places mentioned, such as Amelia Earhart and Atlantis, and ask them to work with a partner to create a 300-word news story with pictures about why each person or place would be of interest to a child living in the 2020s.
- Read the first page of *The World Between Blinks*

out loud and look at how sound devices are used to shape or enhance meaning.

- Using this passage as a model, ask students to write about the place they go to in their imagination. Ask them to write 15 sentences and to use punctuation, assonance, rhyme, rhythm, repetition and short and long sentences to create a composition which evokes a strong emotion or reaction, e.g. beauty, love, fear, anger.
- Setting the scene of a story is very important. Good writers use sensory detail to establish the mood of a setting. Read the passage below. What senses do the authors appeal to? 'Marisol loved the air around the ocean. It smelled mostly of salt, yes, but there were so many other things happening inside it too. Sunscreen and crying seagulls and driftwood discoveries and waves washing castles back into sand. One breath held all of this.' (p 3)



BALLOON GIRLS

Author: **DARRELL PITT**
SCIS: **1990481**
ISBN: **9781922330567**
RRP: **\$16.99**

Times are tough in the small town of Yallaroo where Ally Simpson has lived her whole life. The whole area is in drought and people are going broke or moving away. So when Ally hears about a competition to win the trip of a lifetime to visit the Smithsonian Museum in the USA, she knows she's got to do everything she can to try and win.

Ally enlists her best friends Harmony and Ping to help her plan the most impressive experiment she can imagine: to send a video camera to the edge of space, and prove once and for all that the earth is round. At first, Ally is pretty sure she's got the whole competition stitched up. But then, as one disaster after another derails her plans, she begins to learn the importance of staying grounded even while she's aiming for the sky . . .

STUDY NOTES

- In the opening chapter, we are introduced to the character of Mrs Blunt. How would you describe Mrs Blunt? Use adjectives and quotes from the book to describe her personality.
- We quickly learn that Ally is an avid lover of science. Choose one of Ally's favourite scientists to research: Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Alexander Bell, Stephen Hawking, Amelia Earhart or Katherine Johnson.
- The Balloon Girls face many challenges as they launch their balloons. How does the town of Yallaroo support the Balloon Girls?
- 'You're incorrigible.' (p 56) Mrs Blunt remarks to Mr Drake after their date. What does 'incorrigible' mean?
- Research one of the monsters that is referred to in the text. Why do you think they are known as a monster? Are they really a monster or simply misunderstood?
- As the book progresses, we learn that the town of Yallaroo is haunted by the local legend, Hickey Saw. Do you believe the myth of Hickey Saw? Why or why not?
- 'They copy straight off the internet.' (p 88) The Tommetti triplets choose to compile their history report with information they have taken from the internet. What is plagiarism? How is plagiarism like stealing? Why is it important to reference all sources that you use?
- 'Harmony didn't live up to her name.' (p 3) How can the names of characters sometimes hint towards their true personalities? Consider how the character names 'Harmony', 'Mrs Blunt' and 'Mr Drake' are used to subtly characterise their personalities. To inform your ideas, you will need to consider the definition of their name and also the tone that their name creates.
- Select three characters from the book to illustrate. You will need to find evidence from the book to ensure that you have represented them accurately in your pictures.
- On page 10, the author uses imagery to create mood and tone in the story. What is imagery? Find an example of imagery on page 10 before searching other sections of the book to find additional examples.
- The Tommetti triplets are convinced that lizard people are real because they found photographs of them online. Are photographs enough to prove that something is real?
- What is the relationship between science and conspiracies? Do they share more similarities than differences?
- Create a vocabulary bank of all the scientific terms from the novel. Record definitions of each of the new words that you find.



UNBORING EXPLORING: THRILLING STORIES BY YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURERS

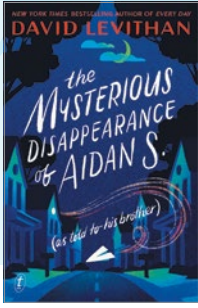
Author: **VARIOUS CONTRIBUTORS**
SCIS: **1991274**
ISBN: **9780648205326**
RRP: **\$16.99**

It all began with a Zoom meeting gone wrong. A team of Year 5/6 students, gathering online to discuss their plans to create a book, were suddenly sucked into their devices because of a sinister virus wielded by nefarious computer pirates. Can they save the stories they selected and emerge with a completed book? And how do their dogs fit into this whole thing?

After curating the collection from submissions by their peers, fourteen young editors, mentored by children's author Rebecca Lim and publishing industry professionals, created a wraparound editorial story, a Choose Your Own Adventure that runs throughout the book, a series of adventure survival tips and more!

STUDY NOTES

- Rather than a traditional Table of Contents, this book features a 'Map of Contents'. As a class, discuss how this changes the reader experience: does it change the way you feel you can read the book? Make a 'Map of Contents' for another book that you love!
- The book's Editorial story was written by young editors during the COVID-19 lockdown. Ask students to carefully read it and identify themes or plot elements that might have been inspired by real life. This is also an opportunity to have an in-depth discussion with students about their experience during lockdown, or to prompt them to write their own fantastical version of what life was like during that period.
- The humorous "101% Serious Never-fail Adventure Survival Tips" feature is hardly a complete list! Ask students to create and illustrate their own lists on that same topic.
- The "Best Lines from Our Treasure Trove of Tales" section is an exciting collection of inspiring excerpts. Have students pick their favourite and discuss why they're drawn to that one, and then have them create a story that contains that line.
- The book's Choose Your Own Adventure story has many options and many endings—and the only reason we didn't include more is because we ran out of space on the pages! Luckily, you and your students won't have that problem, so challenge your students to create a new branching storyline from the same starting point. As an ICT tie-in, students can try out the free Twine computer application, which allows you to use basic coding to create text-based video games or Choose Your Own Adventure stories. They can put their new storylines in this format and test out each other's!
- For a designer, creating a collection like this can be a challenge because the illustrations and written pieces are all so different. What design elements do you notice that help tie the book together (ie dragons, arrows, mountains)? What do you notice about the different sentences that have been highlighted with their own graphic style? How does this change the feeling you get when reading it? Ask students to add emphasis in this same way to a story that they've written.
- Ask students to choose one of their favourite illustrations from the book and then challenge them to write or tell a whole new story based on it.
- This book is full of fantastical and faraway settings. Have students identify all of the different settings in the book, and then discuss which setting they would like to visit for their own adventure—and why? Ask them to point to specific things from the text that appeal to them, and then compare and contrast the story setting with the world we actually live in.
- The editors include a full-page acknowledgment of country at the beginning of the book, and consulted with local Aboriginal experts about the appropriateness of using a personalised version instead of a more standard formal acknowledgment. Discuss and then workshop your own acknowledgment that honours your local First Nations groups in a way that connects with what's important to your class.



THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF AIDAN S.

Author: **DAVID LEVITHAN**
SCIS: **1990470**
ISBN: **9781922330918**
RRP: **\$16.99**

Aidan disappeared for six days. Six agonising days of searches and police and questions and constant vigils. Then, just as suddenly as he vanished, Aidan reappears. Where has he been? The story he tells is simply . . . impossible. But it's the story Aidan is sticking to. His brother, Lucas, wants to believe him, but being on Aidan's side would mean believing in the impossible. But how can you believe in the impossible when everything and everybody is telling you not to?

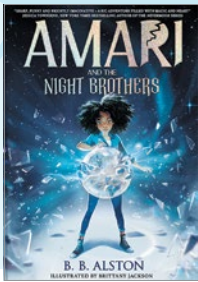
STUDY NOTES

- Imagine that someone you love has disappeared. You've spent six days searching for them, and watching people become more and more frightened at their disappearance. Suddenly, on the sixth day, they show up out of the blue. Write the conversation you have when you find them.
- 'They looked everywhere.' (p 1) The opening line of the book sets up the suspense—you immediately want to know who or what 'they' are looking for, why it's missing, where it might be. What other questions do you have from the opening line? Use this opening line to write

a short story of your own—what answers does your story provide for the reader?

- Aunt Brandi is the first person to believe Aidan's story, and remains consistent in this throughout the book. What makes her believe him? How might Brandi's experience affirming her gender as a teenager give her insights into Aidan's experience that others around him lack?
- Who is the narrator of *The Mysterious Disappearance of Aidan S.*? Are they telling the story as it happens or from the future? What specific words or phrases can you find in the book to justify your answer?

- Other worlds are sometimes used in stories to act as a metaphor for something else, or to say something about our ordinary world. If this is true, what do you think the writer of this story is trying to say with Aveinieue? Do you think it's a real place?
- How does Aidan's experience in Aveinieue change the way others see him? See if you can find examples of how he is perceived before and after his disappearance by his parents, Brandi, Lucas, Glenn, other kids at school. How do you think this shapes the way he sees himself?



AMARI AND THE NIGHT BROTHERS

Author: **B. B. ALSTON**
Illustrator: **BRITTANY JACKSON**
SCIS: **1990696**
ISBN: **9781760505882**
RRP: **\$17.99**

Amari Peters, a 13-year-old girl from a US housing project, discovers her missing brother Quinton was more than he seemed . . . So when she finds a ticking briefcase containing a nomination for a summer tryout at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs, she's certain the secretive organisation holds the key to locating Quinton—if only she can wrap her head around the idea of magicians, fairies, aliens and other supernatural creatures all being real.

STUDY NOTES

- The author makes it clear in the novel that the issue of race is a central theme. As a Black girl, how is Amari treated by those she encounters at school?
- Amari and her fellow students at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs are tested in several ways during their tryouts. How does she

develop courage and demonstrate her bravery in this novel?

- In what ways does Amari mature in the novel?
- The fact that Amari lives in a housing project where people are treated like second-class citizens is another theme. How much does class influence one's standing in the contemporary world?

- Throughout the novel, Amari's need for friendship and support is emphasised. Which characters prove to be her real supporters?
- Invite students to create their own illustrated portrait of Amari and then compare how each of the students have depicted her.
- Draw a picture of one of the Hybrids described in this novel.



THE GHOST OF GOSSWATER

Author: **LUCY STRANGE**
SCIS: **1987979**
ISBN: **9781911077848**
RRP: **\$16.99**

The Lake District, 1899. The Earl is dead and cruel Cousin Clarence has inherited everything. Twelve-year-old Lady Agatha Asquith is cast out of Gosswater Hall to live in a tiny, tumbledown cottage with a stranger who claims to be her father. Aggie is determined to discover her real identity, but she is not alone on her quest for the truth. On the last day of the year, when the clock strikes midnight, a mysterious girl of light creeps through the crack in time; she will not rest until the dark, terrible secrets of the past have been revealed . . .

STUDY NOTES

- Lucy Strange uses language to great effect throughout *The Ghost of Gosswater*. Read the extract on p 33 about Cousin Clarence. It is a fantastic example of consonance: when similar-sounding consonants are used in close proximity within the text. What do you think the effect of this is? As a reader, how does the repetition of these sounds make you feel about Cousin Clarence? What do you infer about his character?
- Look at Sexton Black's speech on page 68 and observe the use of sibilance: repeated 's' or 'sh' sounds are found nearby in the text. Why do you think Lucy Strange used this linguistic

device here? Do you think it's effective? What is the implication of Sexton Black 'spitting' and 'hissing' as he speaks? What image does this conjure in your mind?

- Using these linguistic devices write a paragraph describing either Cousin Clarence or Sexton Black, using either consonance or sibilance respectively.
- 'When there's snow comin', the air smells like cold metal, and wet, too – but not clarty-wet, like rain – clean, bright-wet. White.' (p 131) In the sentence above, Bryn vividly describes snow using an array of senses and descriptors. As a class, try and come up with some phrases you think are effective in describing the following

types of weather: sun, fog, rain and wind. Be sure to use all five senses. Once you've done that, write a short poem or descriptive passage on the weather of your choice.

- What effect does the setting of the secluded Gosswater Lake have on the story? Do you think the story would have had the same feel if it were set someplace else? What do you think it is about the setting that creates the atmosphere it has?
- Did you feel you were able to relate to Aggie, even though the circumstances she finds herself in are so unique? If so, why? Did your feelings towards her change between the beginning and the end of the novel?