



# Books of the Year 2015

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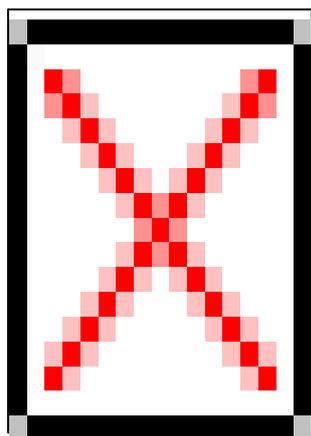
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**Books of the Year** chosen by **Books for Keeps** contributors

This year, our hard working reviewers have read and considered over 350 books for your information and delectation. The children's book market is in a rude state of health with a huge variety of books for children of all ages and all tastes being produced by an ever growing number of publishers: indeed, as the big publishing houses merge to form mega-companies, a wave of new, smaller companies have appeared and are producing exciting and unusual books. Look out for **Firefly Press**, **Two Hoots**, **Old Barn Books**, **Alma Junior** and **Tiny Owl** amongst others.

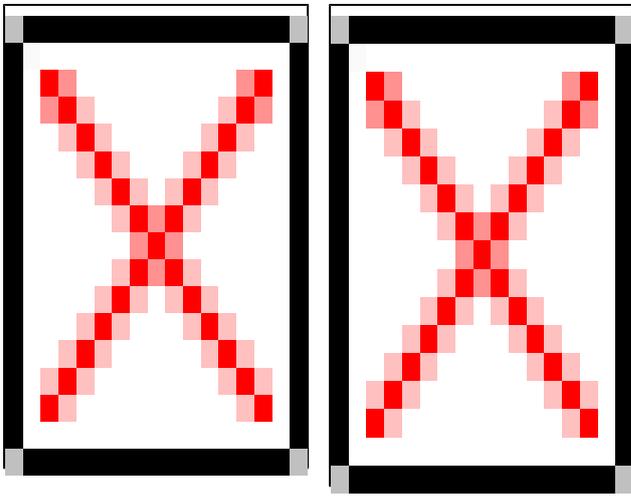
But which new books were the best of 2015? We asked some of our regular writers for their nominations.

**Ferelith Hordon**, Editor, **Books for Keeps**



How can one choose just one book of the year? Can I slip a couple more in ? [2][Jessica's Ghost](#) [2]by Andrew Norriss, or [Fire Colour One](#) [3] by Jenny Valentine? A picture book ? perhaps [Lily and Bear](#) [4] by Lisa Stubbs? But, arriving just in time is [Railhead](#) [5] by Philip Reeve. This is the book I was waiting for ? breathtakingly imaginative (singing trains!), beautifully written and breathlessly exciting. I travelled through space with its hero Zen and would like to travel more. This is Philip Reeve at his best; taking the conventional and making it out of this world.

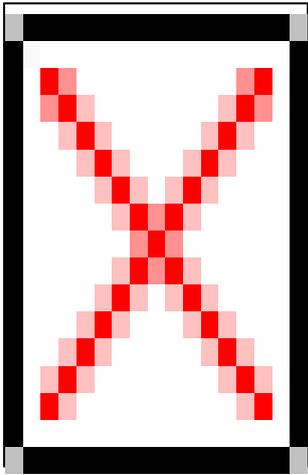
**Nicholas Tucker**, honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at **Sussex University**



[Girl on a Plane](#) [6] is a gripping as well as compassionate description of a plane hijacking in 1970. Its author, Miriam Moss, actually experienced the real thing when she was fifteen. Her story now draws deeply of memories of that time and is quite unforgettable. So too is William Sutcliffe's [Concentr8](#) [7]. Its target is the current over-promotion of drugs designed to cure alleged hyper activity in children. Each chapter of an exciting story set in a drug-dependent near-future starts with chilling evidence of what is actually happening now. Unmissable.

**Amanda Mitchison**, author ([Croq](#) [8] is out now) and journalist

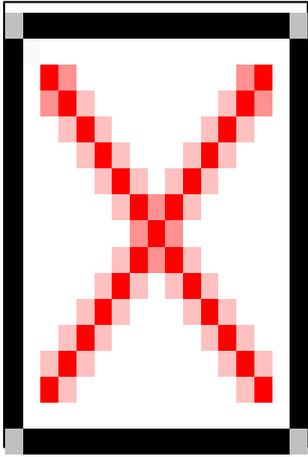
Look out for the **Hedgehugs** series by Steve Wilson and Lucy Tapper. The original Hedgehugs solved the mystery of why all our drawers are full of odd socks (the answer has something to do with hedgehogs and with hugging ?). Now with **Horace and Hattiepillar** they have overcome the ?tricky second album? problem.



Jonathan Stroud writes compelling adventure stories which children can skitter through, but which also contain deeper, more complex resonances. His [Lockwood & Co](#) [9] series, set in a fantastical Britain beset with murderous ghosts, is endlessly inventive, sophisticated, adroitly written and funny. Book three, [The Hollow Boy](#) [10], where Lucy tries to engage with the ghosts rather than simply exterminate them, is the very best of the bunch. And there is still so much back story to unfold ?

**Tony Bradman**, author, Chair of the **Siobhan Dowd Trust** and Vice Chair of the **Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society**

For me this year's most impressive book was [My Name's Not Friday](#) [11], a wonderful YA novel by Jon Walter, the

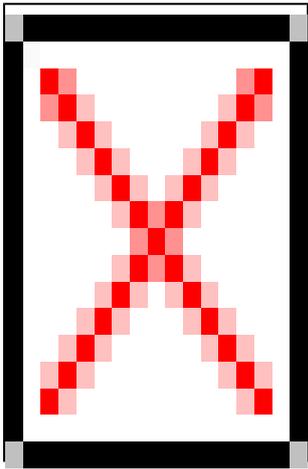


story of a young black boy who is tricked into slavery in Civil War America. It's epic in scope, with a gripping plot that's full of twists and turns and dramatic surprises, but all built on a rock-solid foundation of deep historical research and superb writing. The characters are great too, not least young Samuel himself, and it's packed with insight into the roots of racism, the problems of religion, and human life in general. Not to be missed!

**Joy Court** is a consultant on reading and libraries, Chair of the CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenway Medals, and reviews editor of the School Librarian.

2015 has been *such* a good year this is an impossible task, but my first pick has to be Daniel Hahn's [Oxford Companion to Children's Literature](#) [12] ? rarely a day goes by without spending a few minutes browsing this fascinating, invaluable treasure. For the grandchildren [Please Mr Panda](#) [13] by Steve Antony has been the number one hit and just plain *please* is no longer enough in our households! **A Great Big Cuddle** (Rosen and Riddell) is proving a great big giggle too. Novels I have loved: [The Bolts](#) [14] (Clary and Roberts), **Jessica's Ghost** (Norriss), **Fire Colour One** (Valentine), [One](#) [15] ([Crossan](#) [16]) **Unbecoming** (Downham) and [Wolf Wilder](#) [17] (Rundell) but I could go on ...

**Philip Womack**, author (**The King's Shadow** is out now), and reviewer



In an alternate Victorian England, the daughter of a discredited scientist discovers his secret: a tree fed by lies which has the power to change reality. Set on a remote Channel Island, [Frances Hardinge's](#) [18] [The Lie Tree](#) [19] is my book of the year by the longest of chinks, featuring feminism, revenge, superbly drawn characters, and a plot that is grippingly, swooningly involving, and constructed with the kind of stylish, arresting, inventive language that Hardinge has made her own. Superb.

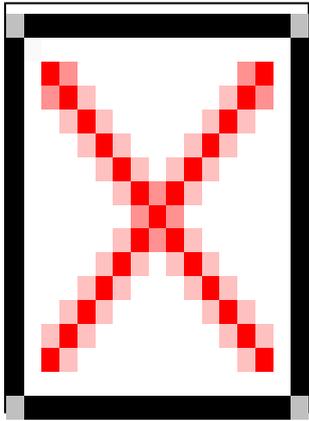
**Pam Dix**, Chair of **Ibby UK**

It was a delight to discover Barroux's very bold and colourful [Where's the Elephant?](#) [20], in total contrast to the charcoal drawings of the graphic [Line of Fire](#) [21].

Barroux wanted to write about the deforestation of the Amazon after he had visited and seen this at first hand, and found his inspiration in **Where's Wally?** The result is a joy to look at, with powerful use of colour, including on the magnificent endpapers. There is the excitement of finding hidden animals on each page in the rapidly shrinking forest and growing cityscape, and a satisfying twist at the end.

It is a great book to share and discuss with all ages and has been my most 'bought' book this year.

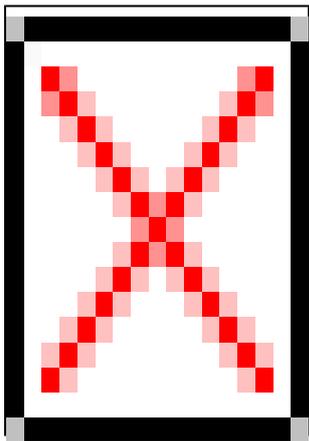
**Daniel Hahn** is an award-winning writer, editor and translator and national programme director of the **British Centre for Literary Translation**



In the year we got **The Marvels**, **Fire Colour One**, **Railhead**, **Wolf Wilder**, **One** and [A Song for Ella Grey](#) [22], I'm actually going to pick a book you probably haven't even heard of. Tomiko Inui's [The Secret of the Blue Glass](#) [23] (tr. Ginny Tapley Takemori) is the old-fashioned story of a family in a time of war; but the family in question is only 14cm tall, living happily on a shelf in an old house in Tokyo (they themselves are British) till WWII separates them. And this terrific story of courage, loyalty and love has also just become the first ever Carnegie-nominated translation!

**Imogen Russell Williams** is a journalist and editorial consultant specialising in children's literature and YA

My stand-out title of 2015 is Jacqueline Wilson's [Katy](#) [24], a retelling of Susan M Coolidge's **What Katy Did**, and a



strong contender, to me, for JW's career best. After a severe fall, Katy, the mischievous, strong-willed eldest of six siblings, must learn to cope with the consequences. Unlike Coolidge's heroine, Wilson's Katy doesn't wring saintliness from suffering, and there's no neat, fairy-tale resolution to her story – barring miracles, she will be a wheelchair-user for the rest of her life. But she is determined to fight for and find joy, despite anger, grief and depression. A coruscating heartbreaker of a book.

Booklist

[Jessica's Ghost](#) [2], Andrew Norriss, David Fickling Books, 978-1-9102-0033-9, £10.99 hbk

[Fire Colour One](#) [3], Jenny Valentine, HarperCollins Children's Books, 978-0-0075-1236-2, £6.99 pbk

[Lily and Bear](#) [4], Lisa Stubbs, Boxer Books, 978-1-9101-2605-9, £11.99

[Railhead](#) [5], Philip Reeve, Oxford, 978-0-1927-4275-9, £9.99 hbk

[Girl on a Plane](#) [6], Miriam Moss, Andersen Press, 978-1-7834-4331-4, £7.99 pbk

[Concentr8](#) [7], William Sutcliffe, Bloomsbury, 978-1-4088-6623-8, £12.99 hbk

**Horace and Hattiepillar**, Steve Wilson and Lucy Tapper, Maverick Arts, 978-1-8488-6163-3, £6.99 pbk

[Lockwood & Co The Hollow Boy](#) [10], Jonathan Stroud, Corgi Children's, 978-0-5525-7314-6, £7.99 pbk

[My Name's Not Friday](#) [11], Jon Walter, David Fickling Books, 978-1-9102-0043-8, £12.99 hbk

[The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature](#) [12], ed Daniel Hahn, Oxford, 978-0-1996-9514-0, £30.00 hbk

[Please Mr Panda](#) [13], Steve Anthony, Hodder Children's Books, 978-1-4449-1665-2, £6.99 pbk

**A Great Big Cuddle**, Michael Rosen and Chris Riddell, Walker Books, 978-1-4063-4319-9, £14.99 hbk

**One**, Sarah Crossan, Bloomsbury, 978-1-4088-6311-4, £10.99 hbk

**Unbecoming**, Jenny Downham, David Fickling Books, 978-1-9102-0064-3, £14.99 hbk

[Wolf Wilder](#) [17], Katherine Rundell, Bloomsbury, 978-1-4088-6258-2, £12.99 hbk

[Where's the Elephant?](#) [20], Barroux, Egmont, 978-1-4052-7648-1, £10.99 hbk

[The Lie Tree](#) [19], Frances Hardinge, Macmillan, 978-1-4472-6410-1, £6.99 pbk

[Katy](#) [24], Jacqueline Wilson, Puffin, 978-0-1413-5396-8, £12.99 hbk

[The Secret of the Blue Glass](#) [23], Tomiko Inui, trans Ginny Takemori, Pushkin Press, 978-1-7826-9034-4, £8.99

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[4] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/212/childrens-books/reviews/lily-and-bear>

[5] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/215/childrens-books/reviews/railhead>

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[12] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-oxford-companion-to-children's-literature>

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