



Light and Shade: the books on the shortlist for the 2020 Klaus Flugge Prize

Article Author:

[Derek Brazell](#) [1]

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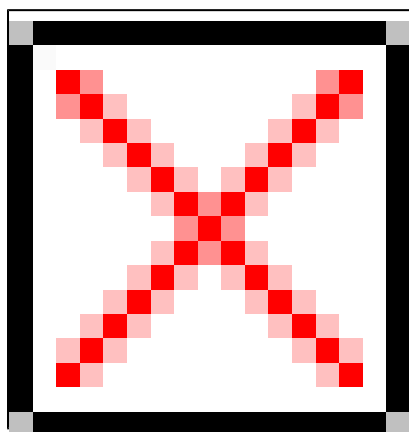
The books on the shortlist for the **Klaus Flugge Prize** appraised by **Derek Brazell**

Now in its fifth year, the **Klaus Flugge Prize** is awarded to the most promising and exciting newcomer to children's picture book illustration. **Derek Brazell** of the **Association of Illustrators** takes a close look at this year's shortlist.

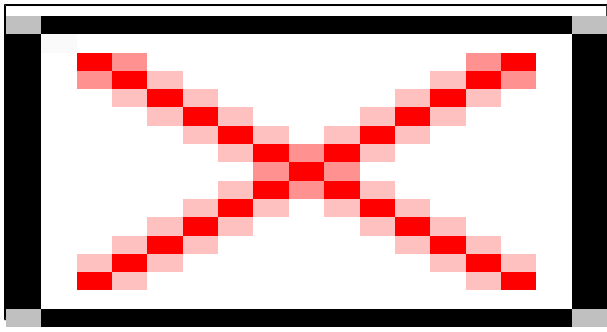
Picture books are endlessly intriguing. They bring stories old and new, delivered to the reader's mind by endlessly varied images and text working in tandem to form a special paper-bound connection: paper being the perfect medium to appreciate a picture book.

And the materials used to create the illustrations in the [2020 Klaus Flugge Prize](#) [3] shortlist demonstrate great variety on the page. Although digital tools will have been deployed there is a strong sense of actual pencils and paint moving upon paper surfaces, scissors and scalpels snipping away at (more) paper, alongside the tablet or desktop computer.

So, what does this shortlist of five hold?

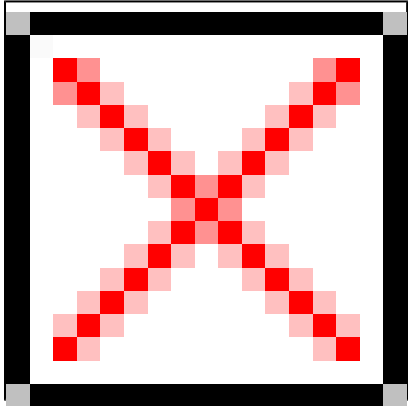


Bored on holiday with her grandparents, Maisie sees a light descend in the dark wood and encourages her sister to investigate in a story that captures the thrill of exploration. Helen Kellock employs a superb use of light and shade in her artwork for **The Star in the Forest**, with colour emphasising the intensity of light in contrast to the spooky darkness surrounding the trees as the girls search for the light.

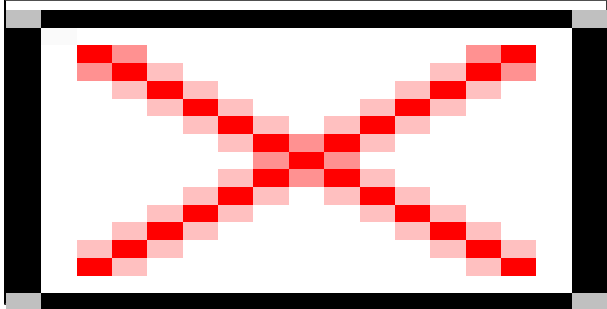


The reader is at one with the creatures looking down from the night forest on to the girls making their way through the tangled growth, with Kellock capturing some impressively vertiginous angles. As Maisie's torch sweeps around, a double page spread where a set of owls on a branch stare down wide-eyed is simultaneously surprising and really amusing.

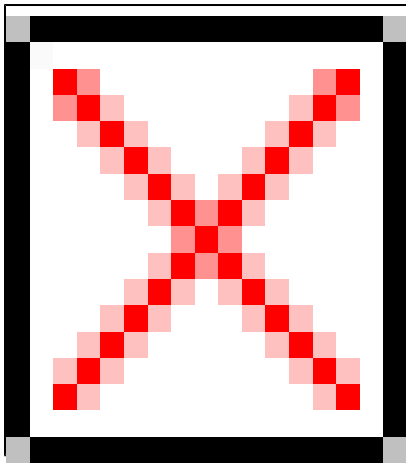
Washes of paint and speedily expressed pencil marks which leave some pictorial elements apparently incomplete (in a not-required kind of way), mean the reader dwells on the illustrations, seeking out further narrative.



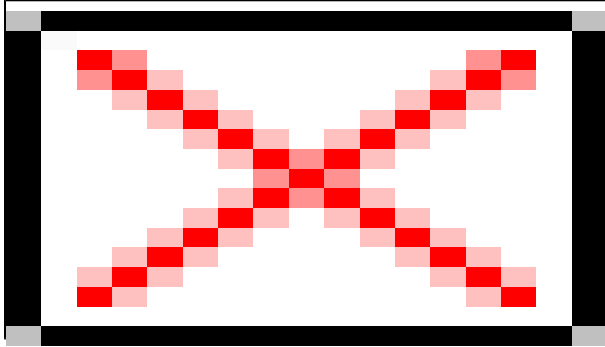
The sisters arrive back home with no threat from the dark forest, but the same can't be said for the roosting chickens in [One Fox: A Counting Thriller Book](#) [4] by Kate Read. As the pages turn it counts upwards to a tense finale, pitting the hungry titular character against a flock of plump hens in their coop as night falls.



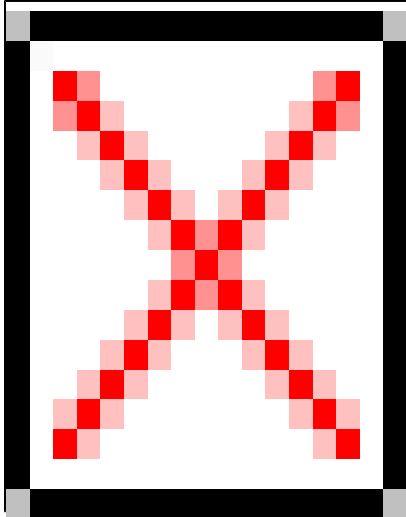
The crisp lines of the cut collages formed from painterly and mono-type textures keep the eye dancing over the artwork from texture to texture. With the beautifully composed and well-paced images finishing with a satisfyingly turn-the-tables end spread that should ensure children aren't left distraught at the hens' fate.



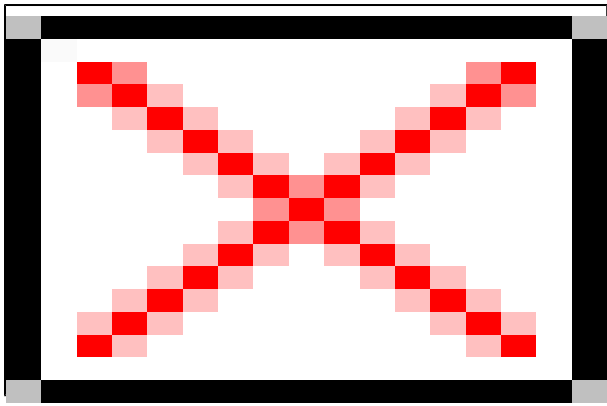
An almost meditative book, [When Sadness Comes to Call](#) [5] by Eva Eland is more likely to be deployed by parents or carers concerned over a child's emotional state seeking a way to explore hard to express feelings. I loved the way the story starts immediately, incorporated into the title page, and then flows through the book quite serenely.



The gentle pace is reflected and sustained by the simplicity for the illustrations, with little background required ? a sofa, a tree ? to contextualise the story of a young child being guided by the story to come to terms with a visit from Sadness. Using tones of single colour, the character of Sadness is conveyed by Eland as a not-quite-there presence, contrasting with the solid, crayon style line of the other elements of each image.

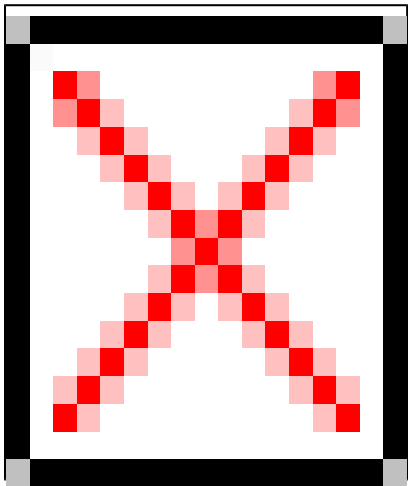


The non-fiction shortlisted title is **On the Origin of Species** by Sabina Radeva, which retells Darwin's famous text originally published in 1859. Radeva's scientific background led her to the subject and there's much to cover here; an adult may be required to explain parts of the information on evolution. Quotes from Darwin's text in its original style of language are placed throughout the book, and these will be an intriguing challenge for the younger reader to interpret.

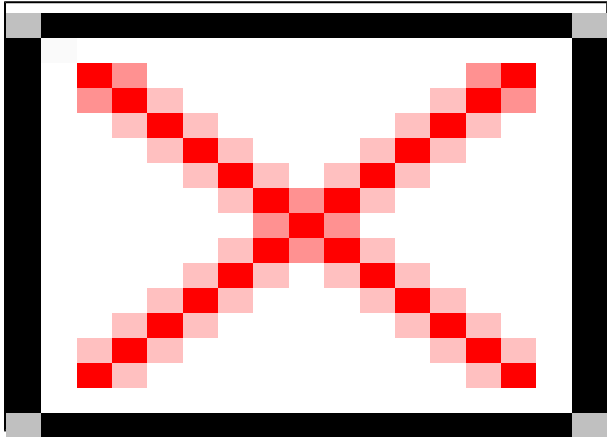


The text reveals the changes on Earth over millions of years, from tiny organisms living their lives, to the fight for survival and development of creatures adapting to their habitats. Text and image are not always clearly connected across the spreads ? the ?why? of certain situations is not clear ? although the varieties within certain species are well indicated, sections where the illustration comes more into its own. Radeva is not striving for total accuracy in her depictions of many of the animals, and there is a naïve painting approach to some of the illustrations, which give them a charm that the flat, graphic style heavily employed in much current non-fiction lacks.

Although it offers a lesser explored angle on the natural world, I feel this would be a book to read alongside someone who has some understanding of the subject area who can possibly answer some of the questions that could be thrown up.



Many kids will be familiar with the urgent query, **Where is Your Sister?**, the title of Puck Koper?s book, and a shopping trip is the perfect time to set a search for a potentially ?lost? child. The young narrator knows her sister is fine, just distracted by all the happenings in the department store they are visiting, but nevertheless the action careers ahead as mum dashes around the store spreading amusing mayhem as displays collapse and other shoppers get tangled up in the search for the seemingly missing child.



Other characters are threaded throughout the busy story who may become more noticeable on re-readings, and the

limited palette of black, red and blue flattens the images, adding to the challenge of spotting the characters in each busy scene. The spontaneous line Koper uses adds to the fluidity of the illustrations, with blocks of colour bringing an almost print-like feel to the artwork.

Much of the story's shopping-based humour is more likely to be caught by the adult reader than the young child, with much of it focused on the female shoppers' reactions to clothes that are impossible for their body shape.

The **Klaus Flugge Prize** shortlist reflects the broadening out of subject matter in UK children's publishing, making room for stories embracing the mental health of children as well as continuing to focus on traditional linear narratives. This reflects a broad shift in the publishing world which is understandably being heavily encouraged by outside influences to include wider perspectives. It's worth noting that within these shortlisted titles there are missed opportunities to include more diversity across the characters, even when many people are depicted (not that tokenism is being encouraged).

In a busy publishing market place a first picture book has a substantial amount of competition for media and public attention, and not every illustrated book reaches the required creative heights to achieve notable sales. It's hard enough for the stand out titles to gain recognition. Which is where a competition such as the **Klaus Flugge Prize** brings a positive service to those publishing their very first picture book. Being selected for the long and short lists is a personal milestone which will bolster the confidence of all those author illustrators whether they are awarded the top prize or not. And for those creators and their publishers it is a fantastic award to hang effective marketing for the book on.

Having an individual voice, a consistency of characters and a strong, potentially meaningful and illuminating story is what the publishing world continually seeks. In this shortlist they found much of what they look for.

Derek Brazell is a writer, illustrator, and **AOI Project Manager** and has been involved in the illustration world for many years.

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