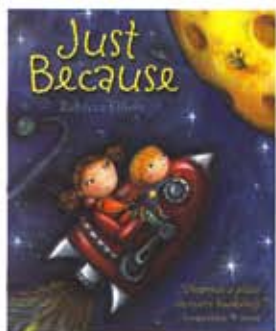


Rising Stars

Just Because

Written and illustrated by Rebecca Elliott



This thoughtful picture book is one to meander through together. Readers are introduced to the main characters on an end paper which represents sunshine and fun on a sandy beach. The little boy is leaning on a spade, pointing towards his regally-looking sister lolling on a sandcastle. Focusing on their faces, her expression is open-eyed wonder, not completely relaxed but comfortable. His stance is proud, eyes closed but oozing pleased satisfaction with his achievement. The offbeat humour

is refreshing whilst the illustrative style captures the spirit and freedom of childhood - grounded in reality yet wildly imaginative.

A special, close harmony between the two radiates from the title page where both are wearing cowboy gear, and both are portrayed riding their different steeds.

Mottled and marbled backgrounds, created by using layers of watercolour, add texture to every following page. A child's experience is at the heart of the story and the sensitive placing of images allows the reader to pause and explore both the words and pictures carefully. Her brother, gleeful to begin with, is now wide-eyed and thoughtful whilst Clemmie's body language expresses a poignant sadness - hands relaxed in her lap. The conversational text uses simple language and combines perfectly with the illustrations to clarify the unusual outfit on the beach. The gentle rhythm and repetition is reflected in the pictures and turning every page creates a unique atmosphere.



Rebecca Elliott sees and reads colours to great effect. Lively greens re-inforce the fun and laughter Clemmie instigates whilst the introduction of red emphasises her feelings of anger. Relaxing in the garden with their pet is given a fairly muted palette but close-ups and long-shots convey the excitement and drama of their imaginative games.

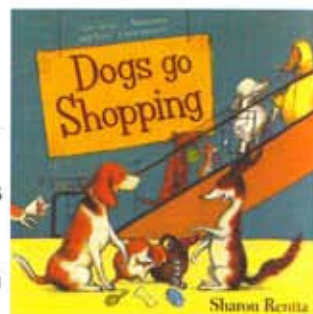
Transforming Clemmie's chair into a surreal rocket to take them both on an adventure to the moon moves the story along and accentuates a madcap sense of scale and perspective in a fantasy world. Her enormous, curly hair is a charming feature to highlight - both sensitive and telling and lovingly executed.

Paler, more translucent colours are used increasingly as night time approaches, alongside a calming and pleasing text about facing up to fears. Sympathetically set in, and around, Clemmie's bed, her disability is there but not there. This warm, colour-saturated, loving story is a treasure for all readers.

Published by Lion Children's Books £5.99 ISBN: 978-0745962351

Dogs Go Shopping

Written and illustrated by Sharon Rentta



The comic strength in this book lies in Sharon Rentta's ability to interpret species of exuberant dogs in a humorous and engaging way. She gained first class honours in the Children's Book Illustration MA course at Cambridge where she developed ideas about animal characters.

The title page sets the tone. Three sleek, stylish creatures are off on a shopping spree in their zippy car. Lively drawing portrays speed and elegance - heads up and ears back! A clean, fresh palette presents a procession of dogs ranging in hues from creamy white, through yellow and orange ochre shades, to tan and rusty browns. The flat, background tones draw the readers' eyes to the diverse characters in turn. Each has its own particular feature - lively, proud, inquisitive, defiant, anxious - indicated by clever drawing and positioning of simple button eyes. The shops look inviting for someone with a birthday gift to buy so they all troop in.

Visual jokes and little asides support the simple text, inviting the reader to search and identify possible doggy treats. Highlighting Max, our hero, is a series of funny images showing possible gifts. These help to move the story along when Mummy says "No" to each unsuitable suggestion.

Every child will identify with the boredom emanating from the visit to the Pharmacy. Irritability, discomfort, dejection are feelings clearly displayed by the dogs just hanging around, but a speedy up-and-down the modern escalator cheers them enormously. Finding the little comments and details hidden in this double spread gives young readers a wonderful sense of discovery.



Combining full page illustrations with another series of framed scenes adds pace to the more serious search for a present. Max has to be good but he can have fun! And the activities show this, demonstrating both warmth and humour in the toy department.

Turning the page prompts a sharp intake of breath when the atmosphere changes abruptly. Discarded toys, empty space, Max alone. One word says it all. A dramatic search ensues where the interplay of limited text and explosive illustration effectively convey panic.

The gentle reunion - cream and yellow predominate, alongside flashes of other primary colours - is illuminated by a complete feeling of safety. Velvety mother and son, with their dotty eyes and cheeky blob noses, simply melt with love and affection. Onlookers are relieved and stand by briefly relaxed.

Tranquility doesn't last long. Everyone races along after the car - where we all began - with the hitchhiker on top with his purchases stacked high. Speeding from one page to the next, we come to rest with a joyful picnic spread under a tree. The final, spectacular image is of Dad, enjoying a special birthday gift from his son. A most satisfying book.

Published by Alison Green Books £6.99 ISBN: 978-1407108629

Jenny Blamh