



The Federation of Children's Book Groups Newsletter

Spring 2012

A Monster Calls Wins the Red House Children's Book Award 2012

A Monster Calls, written by Patrick Ness and illustrated by Jim Kay is the overall winner of the 2012 Red House Children's Book Award. The award was presented at a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre on the 18th February, in front of 900 children and adults who had travelled from all over the country to join in the fun.



Overall winner of the 2012 Red House Children's Book Award, Patrick Ness.

The book, based on an original idea by author Siobhan Dowd, who died of breast cancer in 2007 before having the opportunity to write the book herself, is about a boy whose mother is suffering a terminal illness... Ness paid tribute to Dowd in his acceptance speech, talking not only about her talent for story telling but also about the Siobhan Dowd trust which supports disadvantaged young readers by providing books and support, to help spread the joy of reading. *A Monster Calls* is illustrated

by Jim Kay, who was also present to receive the award.

A Monster Calls was the winner of the Older readers category.

Scruffy Bear and the Six White Mice, written and illustrated by Chris Wormell, won the Younger Children's category, whilst the Younger Readers category was won by *The Brilliant World of Tom Gates*, written and illustrated by Liz Pichon.

There was a real buzz as everyone gathered at the Southbank centre, with young and old alike keen for a glimpse of some of their favourite authors and the opportunity to get their books signed. There was a great turn out from past winners as well as from the nominated authors. The way that the foyer was set up for lunch looked spectacular, with the bright red, blue and white star shaped balloons providing a real party atmosphere. Lunch with the authors is one of the traditions of the Book Award, and offers everyone

the chance to relax and enjoy good food and conversation, a great reward for children who've worked hard reading and reviewing books over the year.

Before we all tucked in to our lunch we were introduced to each of the authors as they were presented with portfolios of work produced by children around the country. Eva Ibbotson was represented by her son, who said that she would have been delighted, and later told us of how she had continued writing with the same enthusiasm right up until her death. David Melling, we discovered was unfortunately having surgery on his knee, and so unable to make it, but sent an illustration of Hugless Douglas in plaster in his place. During a very lively lunch we tried very hard to answer some quiz questions, which were a great way to get us all talking.

After we'd eaten we slowly filtered through to the Queen Elizabeth Hall, where we were greeted by the noise of several hundred party blowers, produced by all the members of the public joining us for the ceremony itself. James Campbell, the children's comedian, did an excellent job of entertaining us, leading us in our cheers, and putting our questions to each of the nominated authors. There were some very interesting questions, and some highly interesting answers, as we learned their favourite words, what else they think children ought to be able to vote for, and how they celebrate when they see their books on display in shop. Each category award was presented by a previous winner or nominee, along with children from book groups around the country, and Chris from West Wales CBG was 'happy [he] got the chance to read out the overall winner.'

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Guardian Children's Book Site

Project 'Alienated'

FCBG Conference

The overwhelming ethos of the day was of a celebration of reading, particularly young readers, without whom the award would not happen. Michael Morpurgo reminded us, in his keynote speech that the event was a celebration, rather than a competition and that it is certainly not about the winning. To be nominated is something very special in itself, as it means that children are reading, and enjoying, your books. All the past winners who made a contribution talked about how the award encouraged reading, and that it was a wonderful thing to be involved in, with Mick Inkpen, whose book *Rollo and Ruff and the Little Fluffy Bird* was nominated in the younger children's category, described receiving the nomination as being like getting "a great big encouraging hug."

Big thanks go to Julia Miller and members of the organising committee for such a successful event, as well as to our hosts at the Southbank Centre and to Red House for their continued support.

If you would like to learn more about the Siobhan Dowd Trust please visit <http://www.siobhandowdtrust.com/>



Announcing a Partnership with the Guardian Children's Book Site

We are delighted to announce a new partnership between the Federation of Children's Book Groups and the Guardian Children's Book Web Site:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/childrens-books-site>

Take advantage of free books, author interviews, reviews and other opportunities available from the Guardian.

All our book groups will be able to join as groups and identify themselves as Federation groups using the FedTed logo which will be there on the Guardian web site for you to use. And if any of the children want to join as individual members they will also be able to use our logo if they want.

Click on "How to get involved" to see more.

The Federation will also benefit as an organisation; there will be a page about us on the web site and a link back to our groups and events as well as a reciprocal link on our web site back to the Guardian.

And to get a taster go online and read about Patrick Ness winning the Red House Children's Book Award or click on Julia Eccleshare's article on setting up a reading group: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/childrens-books-site/2012/feb/20/book-doctor-reading-group> and scroll down to read about the Federation! And when books go out to Guardian Children's Book Club members they will include our own RHCBA Pick of the Year, bookmarks and leaflets.

Want to get teenagers talking about books? For our Teen Readers we will have the chance to be the first to take part in the Guardian's new Ultimate Teen Book Club, a reading group which encourages teenagers to talk about books with one another and with the authors, via the Guardian Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/guardianteenbooks>.

There will be loads of great interactive stuff on the Teen site, including the brand new Book Bundle, a feature which will allow site members to attach comments, pictures, music, film clips and other random stuff to the book itself online!

The books will be chosen every six weeks by a poll on the site, and then the Guardian will run features and set up some theme-based questions on Facebook to get everyone thinking.

So go online and ask for a free copy of the first book: *Bullet Boys* by Ally Kennen - or use a library or proof copy if you can get hold of one and be the first to share your thoughts on the book with Ally herself.

A great initiative to encourage teen readers to share their thoughts and views with other teens and authors...one that we should and can all support.

www.fcbg.org.uk

An interview with Phil Earle

Saving Daisy, the second book from author Phil Earle, is an incredibly powerful and moving novel, written for young adults, about a young teenager trying to come to terms with her feelings of guilt about the death of her parents. When we first meet Daisy she is still living with her father, and has recently learned something that has changed her view of life and their relationship. Through the first part of the novel we see Daisy trying to cope with this change, as well as pressures from other people and school, until it all comes to a dramatic head. We asked Phil a few questions about the book, and his writing.

Hi, would you mind starting by telling us a little about you and what got you started writing?

I feel like my life now revolves around children's books, for as well as writing YA novels for Puffin, I'm also Sales Director for Simon and Schuster Children's Books.

It wasn't always this way though, I had little interest in reading as a kid as there was always football to be played.

What changed for me was working in a book shop and being given responsibility for the kids section, as no-one else wanted it. My boss gave me *Skellig* to read, then *Holes*, and that was it, I had a new passion that led me here...

Both *Being Billy* and *Saving Daisy* draw on your experiences, and working with children in care and people who perhaps don't often get a voice. How important do you feel it is that stories like theirs get told?

It's important to me that these children's stories are heard, but not just because they are so often ignored in society. I'm not interested in telling 'worthy' stories, I want to entertain like any other writer out there.

What's important to me in writing about Billy and Daisy, is that their truth is 'heard'. Yes that may be shocking and gritty, but it's real, they're living this existence that we'd rather ignore.

Most 'normal' people would collapse under the pressure of what happened to these kids, but the ones I met never did. They had a resilience and a bravery I wanted to celebrate honestly.

***Saving Daisy* has some very dark and emotionally difficult themes. Did that make it hard to write?**

Daisy took me about a year to write, 8 months longer than the first draft of Billy, but I think that was down to circumstance rather than to the themes of the story. What was interesting to me was that about halfway through, I realised I wasn't writing about this fictional girl, but about me. I suffered from depression and anxiety like Daisy did, and telling her story allowed me to talk about the journey I took to make myself well, and to thank the people who put my head back together. Men don't often talk about depression, it's seen as a sign of weakness. That bothers me, as I'm

not ashamed of my mental health problems. My depression led me to write and I wouldn't be here without it.

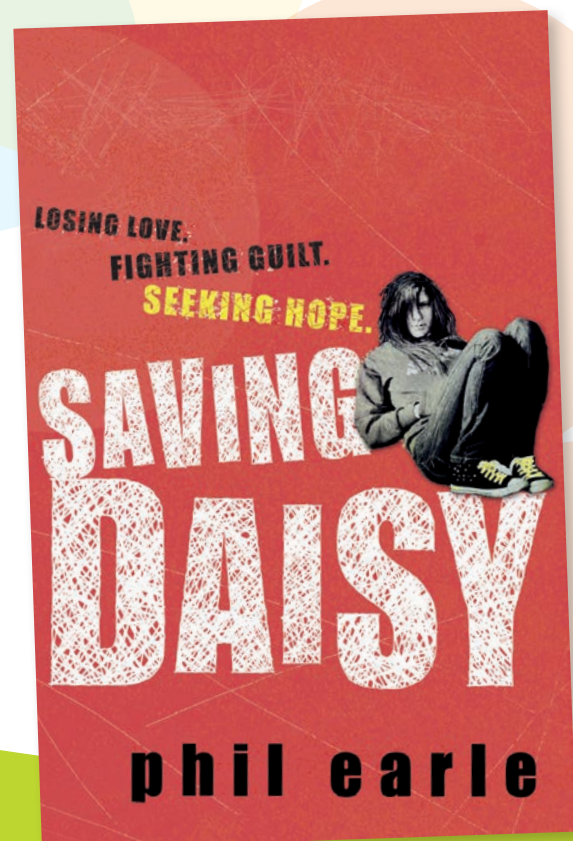
Ultimately though, *Daisy's* story is quite hopeful, do you feel that this is important?

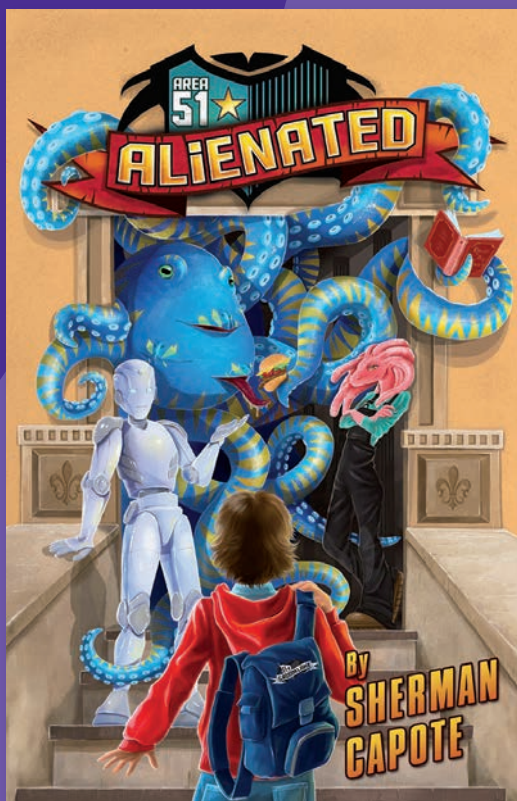
Hope is really important to me. In a way because of what I've experienced with depression, but also because of my own reading tastes. Endings shouldn't necessarily be tied up in a neat bow, but to me, hopeful endings have real heart. Heart matters, without it, it's a really empty reading experience.

Do you have any thoughts for what you might write next?

I'm writing two things. A YA novel influenced by SE Hinton's *The Outsiders* - one of my favourite books. The other idea is a book for younger readers. I'm trying to prove to myself I can do other things than gritty! Here's hoping!!

We certainly wish him all the best with that!
Saving Daisy is published by Penguin, and is out now.





Have you heard about Alienated?

Alienated is an exciting project which allows young readers to get involved in the creation of the book, working collaboratively with the authors through the Alienated website. Anyone can get involved as a beta-reader, all you have to do is visit www.alienated.com and read the first three chapters. You can then send your feedback to [sheramcapote@yahoo.com](mailto:shermancapote@yahoo.com), and have an influence on where it goes from there.

You can then keep up to date with what's happening through the Alienated blog, where you can also learn more about Sherman Capote's classmates, space and rumours and stories of aliens on earth.

Read a little sample here:



The following is a declassified CIA transcript from the alien known as "Octo".

Species: Ventitent. **Residency:** Groom Lake, Nevada. **Situation:** Magmageddon.

Agent: Do you know the human known as Sherman Capote?

Subject: I liked Sherman Capote from the moment I saved him from certain death.

He's just this skinny, two-legged human, you know? But on his first day at Groom Lake High School—his first day—he stood up to NED. And that takes some nerve to stand up to a galactic demi-god and I respect that. I mean, I never met a Non-Earth-Deity I liked, but NED? He's a magma-drinking planet destroyer and my man Sherman stood up to him.

Also, he can count. And believe me, that's actually saying a lot at this school. Look at my tentacles; count 'em. Twenty. Not eight. Getting nicknamed 'Octo' does not make me an octopus. But Sherman, he gets it. I told him, I said, "I'm a ventitent, okay?" and Sherman's like, "Twenty tentacles, makes sense to me." We've been best buds ever since.

Agent: Why are you on Earth?

Subject: Can we make this quick? I ordered pizza. Is it here yet? [Junior Agent assesses status of pizza delivery, pizza has not been delivered yet]

I come from an all water planet, which sounds great if you're a regular at an all you can eat seafood buffet, but it's kind of a drag for Octo here because I'm allergic to water!

They day I hatched I broke in such a bad rash that my yellow stripes turned red. So my parentals, Hank and Urtha, brought me here to Earth to the heat of Nevada desert. I've had a smooth, clear complexion ever since. They live in a giant tank on the base, but it's not so bad for them. The Bureau [Bureau for Alien Affairs] sends them out on all sorts of deep sea salvage missions. Since your planet is 70% water, most of us aliens tend to touch down in the wet stuff.

Agent: Who was responsible for the alien invasion known as Magmageddon?

Subject: Contrary to about a zillion of your planet's internet conspiracy theories, life at the high school for aliens at Area 51 was pretty dull until Sherman showed up. I mean, sure, we had the rocket races every year (drag racing with spaceships), but we never faced mass invasion or planetary destruction or anything juicy like what happened that day. And if it weren't for Sherman then we probably wouldn't have faced the end of the world at the hands of magma-hungry, planet-sucking, Armani-clad pseudo-deities. And another thing; oh, hey, what's that [subject sniffs the air], that's my pizza!

Agent: Please take your seat, we're not...

Subject: Good idea.

[subject scoops up the chair with one of his tentacles and exits interrogation interview room]

[End of interview. Agent's note: subject did not share his pizza]



Looking ahead to Conference

With all the excitement of the RHCBA behind us we're now gearing up for our next big event – the **FCBG conference** which is taking place on 13th-15th April at Bradfield College near Reading. The theme for this year's conference is *Worlds Within Words*, so I think we can look forward to hearing about a wide variety of literature, both from around the world, and looking at how we build them in our imaginations. The exciting programme features a whole host of big names, including Korky Paul, Axel Scheffler, Charlie Higson and Helen Oxenbury.

One of the big draws at conference is the publisher's stands, which are always full of info on the new books coming out this year. We put a few questions to Ian Lamb about what it is that makes the FCBG conference a great place to come:

Would you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your role at Bloomsbury?

Hi there, my name is Ian Lamb and I am Head of Children's Publicity at Bloomsbury publishing. The main roles of my job are author care, getting books in to as many people's hands as possible and organising events. It's a great job as you get to do different things every day. You might start the week organising a massive school event for Mark Walden and finish it with a blog tour for Angie Sage...or even attending a conference!

How often have you been to the FCBG conference and do you have any really good memories of previous conferences?

I've been working in publishing for 12 years now and have been attending the conferences since then. It's like a little club when all the publishers get together and we always have a laugh. I remember attending one conference with Paul Jennings. He was the author that initially got me into reading when I was young. He was a very cool man and did a great event at the conference. I also enjoyed Mark Walden and Andy Briggs' heroes versus villains event. Andy put up a good fight but I think Mark won with the villains!

What's the attraction of coming to conference, for a publisher?

Talking directly to people who have a passion for children's books. It's a brilliant opportunity to get feedback on what we are publishing as well as trends that FCBG members have seen from their group's choices. It's also a good place to make new contacts for author events. Basically, we really want people to come and talk to us so we can tell them about new books, exciting projects and ways we can work together to get young people reading.

Is there anything that you're especially looking forward to sharing with us all this year?

It's a strong year for Bloomsbury. Celia Rees has published her first contemporary novel for us, we have a YA biography of Steve Jobs coming out, and in June we have a debut novel that will change the way you look at witches completely. We'll also be celebrating 15 years since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

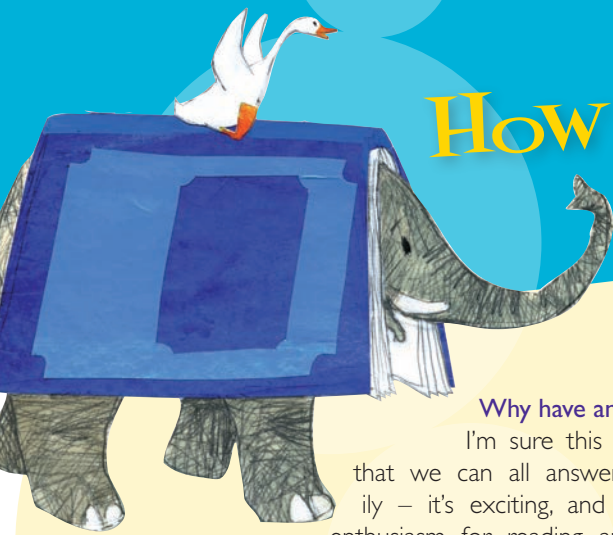
And finally, what do you think we should all be reading at the moment?

Ooh, difficult question for a publicist. I'm tempted to say you should just be reading Bloomsbury books but might get beaten up by my fellow children's publicists! I'm a huge fan of Chris Priestley and his Frankenstein inspired *Mister Creecher* has been one of my fave reads; it's an historical mash-up and a creepily brilliant read.

Sounds good to me! And can it really be that long since the first Harry Potter?

Thanks to Ian, for answering our questions.





How to organise an author visit

Why have an author visit?

I'm sure this is a question that we can all answer pretty easily – it's exciting, and helps create enthusiasm for reading and writing. It allows both children and adults the chance to meet a favourite author in person, and ask them those burning questions. It's also great publicity, for your group, for the schools that host them, and it can add that little bit of extra excitement to a school book week.

Who should you invite?

- Ask for recommendations, from people you know, libraries, schools. Get in touch with other book groups and find out who they've enjoyed having.
- Consider the age group – if you are holding it in school would it be better for secondary or primary.
- Do you want someone who's going to offer workshops and activity sessions, and are they happy talking to a big audience?
- Remember that costs and fees vary, and you can expect to pay more for a bigger name.
- Think about their availability. Big names can be booked a year or two in advance, and even less well known authors can be fully booked around busy times like World Book Day, so it's best to plan well in advance.

Prepare for the authors visit

Make contact with them, through an agency if necessary, but make sure you confirm everything with them – they should know the date, the time, the group size and age etc.

Send them a letter that confirms all of this in writing, and make sure that they know how to contact you and the person who will be looking after them on the day, particularly if they will need to be collected from the station.

You should make sure you know which books they'll want to be talking about – often they are out on tour to promote their latest book, and that's what they will want to focus on.

Remember that the more preparation time you have the more excitement you can build:

- Make sure everyone knows that it's coming up – colleagues, children, parents.
- Find out about display and promotional material
- Organise for books to be available for sale
- Let your local paper know

On the day

Make sure your author is well looked after – know when they're arriving, meet them and greet them. If they are coming in on public

transport have someone there ready to collect them and drive them to the venue. Make sure to have refreshments available, and that everything they need for their presentations and workshops is set up ready for them.

After the visit

Encourage the children to write to the author and say thank you, perhaps including some work about the day or about the book.

Barrowby and Grantham's top tips for preparing for visits to schools:

- Google the author, find out more about them and what they've written.
- Read the book with the children, so that they are familiar with the story.
- Ask students to draw a favourite character or scene from the book, or do some writing about it, and use these to create a display ready for when the author visits.
- For a non-fiction author visit why not do some research about the topic?
- Get hold of promotional material from the publishers.

Where to find more information:

www.literacytrust.org.uk

www.ncll.org.uk

www.booktrusted.co.uk

www.artscape.org.uk

www.scottishbooktrust.com

With thanks to the Society of Authors and Illustrators and to Barrowby and Grantham CBG

If there is someone that your group would like to recommend – an author or illustrator that was particularly good fun, or had a really interesting and engaging session, we would like to know about it – please tell us who it was, and what made them so special.



www.fcbg.org.uk

NEWS from the groups



Thank you to all the groups who send in details about their events. The web site is regularly updated with group activities.

Hove CBG

were joined just before Christmas by Brighton based Sam Lloyd, author/illustrator of *Calm down Boris* and *Hello Dudley*. She read to the children from her puppet books, and held a workshop where they made masks of some of the characters from her stories. Sam ended the event with a puppet show featuring *Boris and Doris* and sang Christmas songs using musical instruments with the children.

In February they held an event with Giles Paley-Phillips, local author of *The Fearsome Beastie* and *There's a Lion in my Bathroom: Nonsense poetry for children*. Both the events were a huge success with many local families joining in the fun.

Ipswich CBG

hosted a successful conference *Picturing the Past* in mid November with fascinating talks from Kevin Crossley-Holland, Harriet Castor and James Mayhew, among others, sharing their passion for history.

They have also had a pretty busy time during February, with visits from several authors, kicking off with Steve Cole, writer of the *Astrosaurs* series, at the beginning of the month. Finding time to fit in a fun evening with The 2 Steves who are always amusing and entertaining on the 28th and rounding out the month with an evening with Rob Eastaway, author of *Maths for Mums and Dads* who demonstrated mind reading and maths mysteries.

Lewes CBG

held a very successful poetry workshop in October with local poet Sonya Smith, who provided inspiration and guided the children who attended through the process of writing poems based on lists with some wonderful results.

They combined their AGM in late January with a talk from Laura Atkins, LCBG member and senior lecturer at the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, which was entitled 'What's the Story? Issues around diversity in children's publishing in the UK'. This proved to be a very interesting topic. They have also been organising book swaps at a local cafe.

Oxford CBG

Have enjoyed looking back over a busy and successful 2011 and are very much looking forward to continuing their fun into this, their 20th anniversary year. Getting off to a strong start in February with an event discussing the issues raised by *Go the F*** to sleep* by Adam Mansbach, which was led by Gerry Byrne, a child psychotherapist. They are also continuing their creative writing workshops and have several exciting and interesting events planned for later in the year.

Get Reading Reading

were excited for the chance to see *The Gruffalo* performed at their local arts centre during late February, especially in combination with an event held in early march at Reading Central Library where pre-school children had the opportunity to meet the beast himself, during a Rhyme Time session.

South Bucks CBG

In an ongoing project with local primary schools South Bucks has been hosting book swaps, what a fun way to recycle!

In early March they held a cosy bedtime stories session, encouraging children to come along in their pyjamas and bring their cuddly friends for hot chocolate and stories before bed, creating some lovely memories for those children who took part.

Wolverhampton CBG

Hosted an interesting evening in early February with two writers of historical fiction for older children: Paul Dowswell, author of *Sektion 20*, and Barbara Michelhill, who wrote *Run Rabbit Run*.

Yeo Valley CBG

held an event with author Caryl Hart in January, she is known for books *How to Grow a Dinosaur* and *Don't Put your Pants on your Head Fred* alongside a book swap and raffle. During December they held a Storytime event for younger children and their exciting new Yeo V Reading Gang was launched, which is a book group for year 2 and above; their first meeting was Christmas themed with stories and craft, with a book being decided upon for discussion at their next event early this year.



Don't forget that you can keep up with events on the website www.fcbg.org.uk and many of the groups now have their own website where you can find even more ideas!

In the news...

A Squash and a Squeeze at Seven Stories

A new retrospective of the work of Julia Donaldson opens at Seven Stories this month, giving visitors the chance to step into her world, find out more about how she wrote her books, and explore the illustrations that enrich them. Children and their families will be able to share stories and explore sensory environments based on Julia's books. They can follow in Toddle Waddle's footsteps, climb into the cave with the Cave Baby and meet The Gruffalo.

Julia Donaldson will be at Seven Stories on Thursday 12th and Friday 13th April to run two storytelling events, *The Gruffalo and Friends* and a fun-filled event based around *Princess Mirror-Belle*. *A Squash and a Squeeze: Sharing Stories with Julia Donaldson* will run until March 2013. To find out more about the exhibition, or to book a place for the events visit www.sevenstories.org.uk

Secrets of the Henna Girl - Book Give Away!

Secrets of the Henna Girl is a new book by author Sufiya Ahmed, her first for teenagers. Published this month, it tells the story of Zeba Khan, a 16 year old Muslim girl living in Yorkshire, who has just left school and is looking forward to a long, lazy summer with her friends - until she finds out that her parents have other ideas. The book explores the issue of arranged marriage, and what it means for the young girls involved.

In order to celebrate International Women's Day 2012 (which fell on 8th March) Penguin have offered us 5 copies of *Secrets of the Henna Girl* to give away. To be in with a chance of winning a book, visit our website www.fcbg.org.uk.

Information for the Executive 2012-2013 will be in the next issue.

Next issue: Summer 2012

Please send your copy, pictures and ideas to:
Rebecca Knight, Flat 2, 96 Ifield Road,
London, SW10 9AD
Or email: rebeccajaneKnight@gmail.com
Tel: 0207 3515355

Copy deadline is 2nd June 2012

Editorial Team – Rebecca Knight, Daniella Gluck, Ellie John, Jessica Knight and Louise Stothard

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Books on Film

2011 was a huge year for children's books in the world of film, seeing the final instalment of the *Harry Potter* franchise, as well as *Breaking Dawn: Part 1*, *War Horse* and *Hugo* (based on *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick). What's been fantastic has been the reception these films have received, particularly when it's come to critical recognition and the awards season. Both *Hugo* and *War Horse* were nominated in many categories, including Best Picture at the Oscars, where they sadly lost out to *The Artist*. In many of these categories they were up against each other, and often it was *Hugo* that carried the day. But, whilst *War Horse* may have been a little disappointed at the Baftas and the Oscars, it was named as the American Institute Film of the Year.

The next big film based on a book for Young Adults will be the much anticipated *The Hunger Games*, based on the book by Suzanne Collins (an RHCBA past winner!), coming out at the end of March.

Join the Hachette Children's Books Review Crew!

Hachette Children's Books are recruiting keen readers to join their 'Review Crew'!

Members of the 'Review Crew' provide valuable feedback on cover designs and also receive copies of soon to be published books in manuscript form. By filling in a simple review questionnaire they really help to inform and shape the publishing process.

Sign up today at www.hachettechildrens.co.uk/reviewcrew

