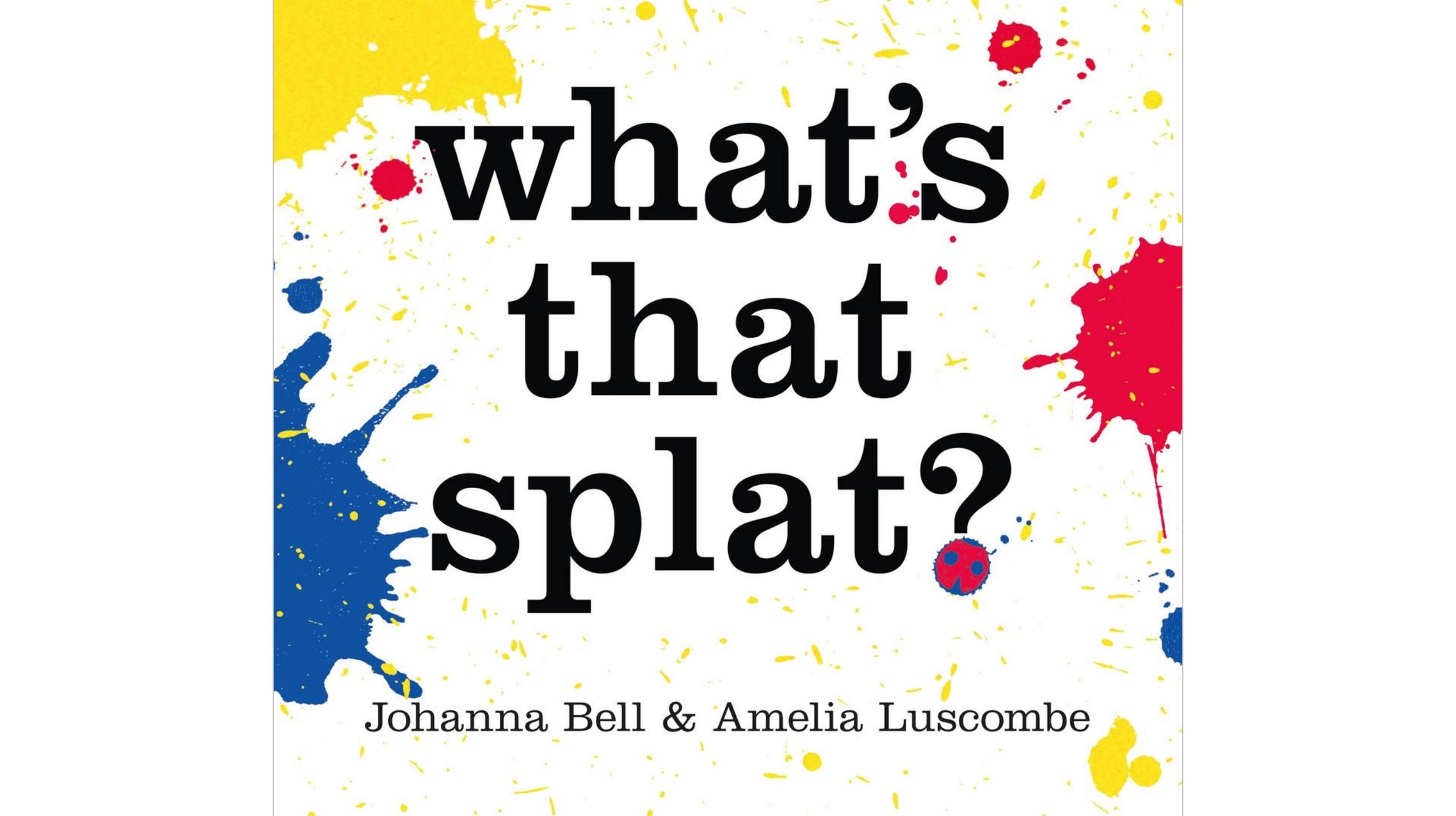


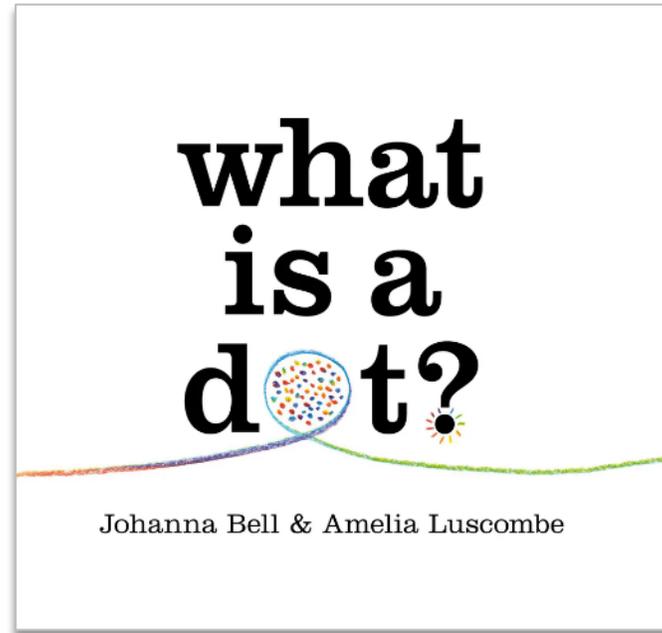
JUNE 2026
KIDS' LEAD TITLES



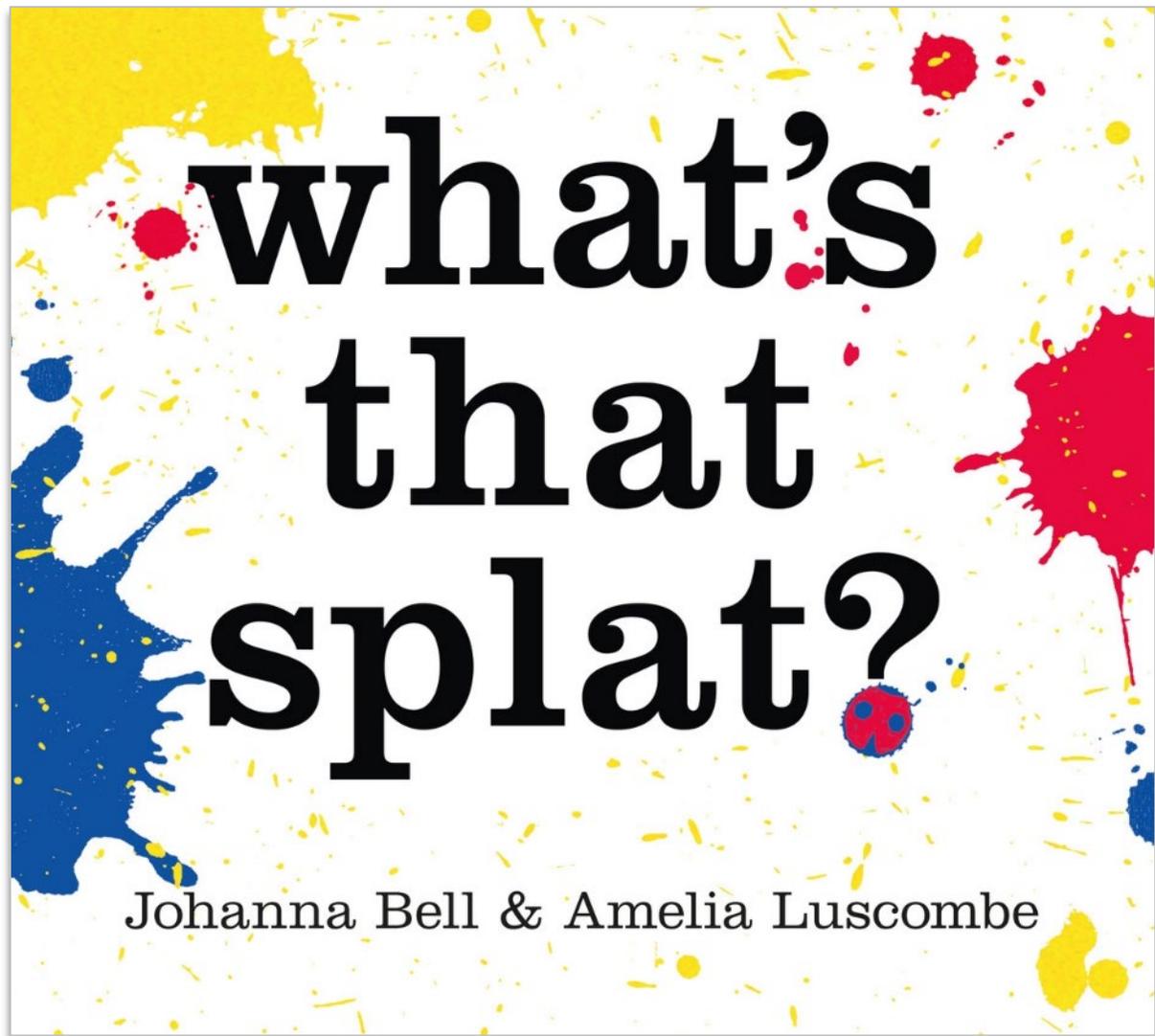
what's that splat?

Johanna Bell & Amelia Luscombe

ALSO AVAILABLE



9781760764814



What's that Splat?

Johanna Bell

From the creative team behind *What is a Dot?* comes this lively book about finding all kinds of wonderful stories in abstract images and making art from anything.

*Sometimes a splat is just a splat
but sometimes a splat is
much more than that!*

- Experience the fun of transforming abstract shapes into just about anything with this playful rhyming book. What will your splat become?
- Johanna Bell is an award-winning author with a healthy backlist (2016 *Go Home Cheeky Animals* 8,399 copies, 2016 *Go Home Cheeky Dogs* 5,937 copies and 2023 *Hope is the Thing* 2,217 copies)
- A bright and rhythmic book for children that nurtures a love for art, fun and mark-making
- Simplistic but sophisticated artwork style in the vein of Hervé Tullet's *Press Here* books with a touch of Mr Men
- Encourages young readers to be creative

AU \$24.99 | NZ \$29.99

9781760764821

22 Pages | Hardcover

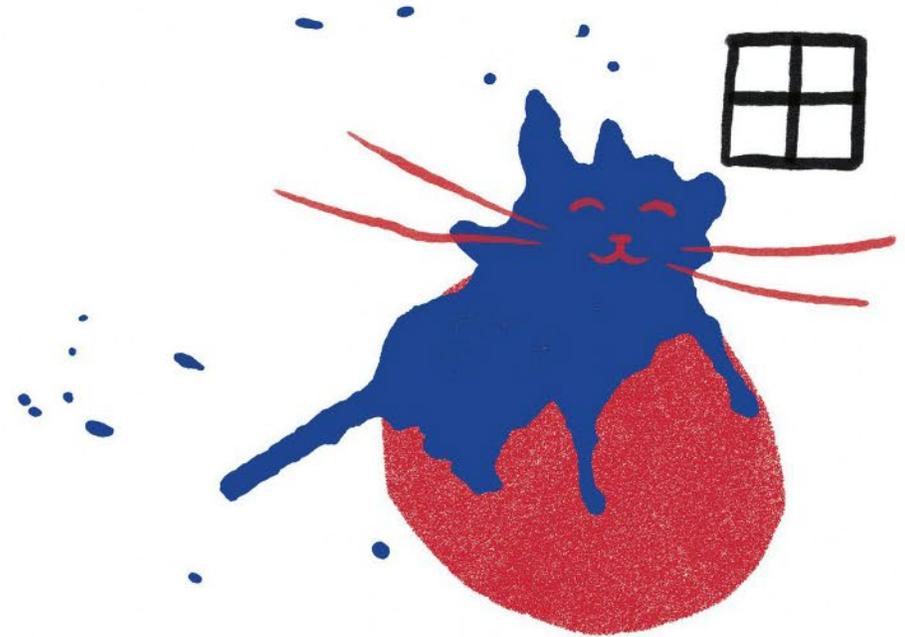
Illustrated throughout

220 mm x 250 mm



Sometimes a splat is just a splat

but sometimes a splat



is much more than that!

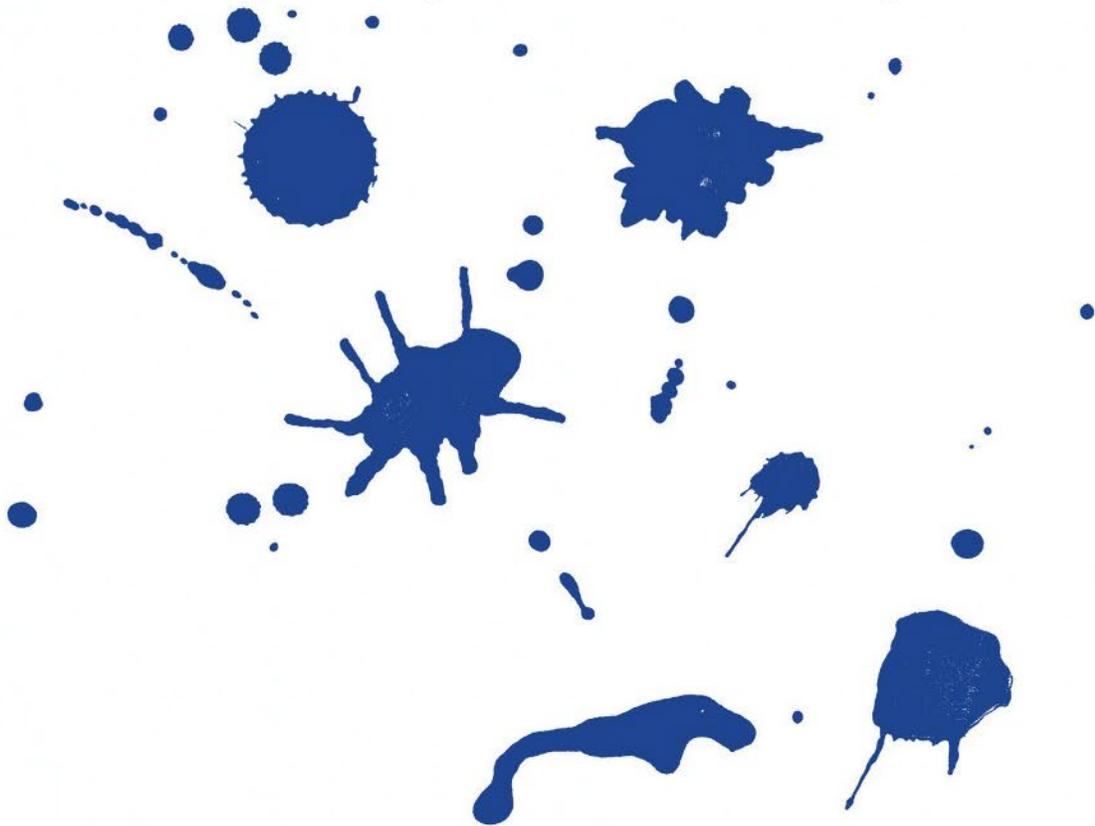
Some splats have feathers



and others have wool.



The thing about splats is there's so many kinds.



The more you look,



the more you
find.

But wait a minute, what's *that* splat?



Is it this?

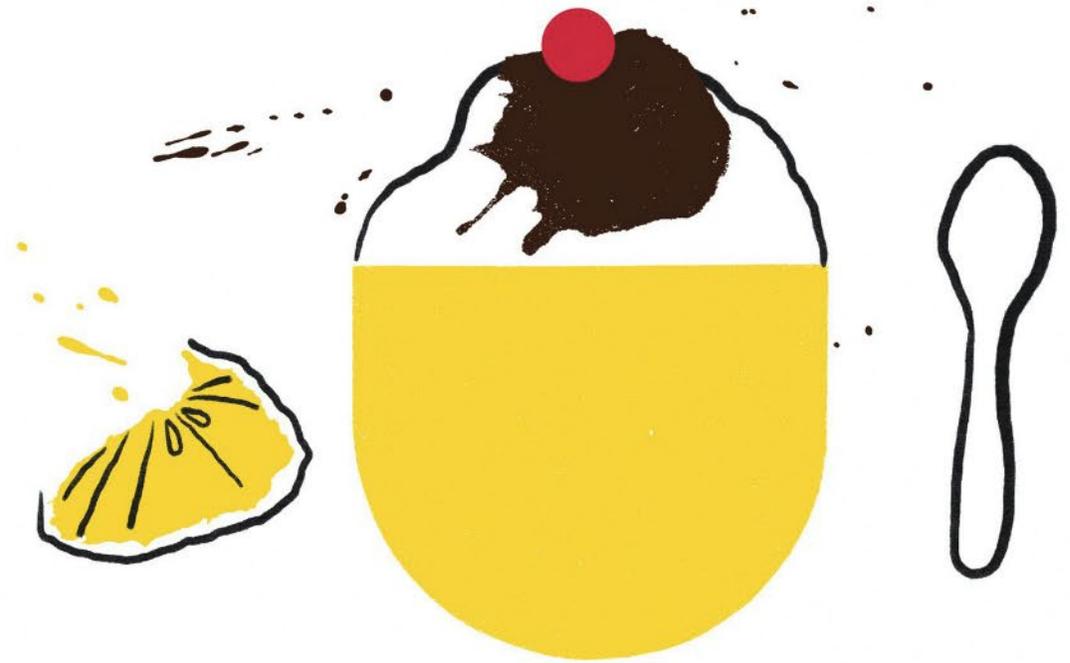
Or is it that?

Do drizzles make splats?



And what about squirts?

Can splats be sour and also desserts?



Splats can be little



and splats can be **BIG**.

Some splats zag



and some splats zig.

What's that Splat?

Johanna Bell and Amelia Luscombe

KEY INFORMATION

- **Johanna Bell** is an award-winning author with a strong backlist including *Go Home Cheeky Animals* which won the CBCA Picture Book of the Year award, and *Cheeky Dogs: To Lake Nash and Back* which was nominated for a Prime Minister's Literary Award.
- **Amelia Luscombe** is a visual artist from Broome and has worked in galleries across the Kimberley and the Top End, informing her art practice. She also currently works at Magabala Books.
- *What's that Splat?* is the follow up to the duo's previous book *What is a Dot?* and encourages young readers to make marks and get creative.
- **Johanna is based in Hobart after many years of living in Darwin, while Amelia lives in Broome and works at Magabala Books.**

Pictured left: illustration from *What's that Splat?*





What's that Splat?

Johanna Bell and Amelia Luscombe

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Target Audience: Young children and their parents.

Key insight/USP: Encourage children to explore, play and create.

Tagline: Ready, set, SPLAT!

Campaign Vision: Inspire kids to explore how a splat can become so much more.

Campaign Goals:

- Build on the success of *What is a Dot?*
- Encourage activity and engagement on a trade and educational level
- Fun activities designed to keep kids off screens available on T&H website via QR Code





What's that Splat?

Johanna Bell and Amelia Luscombe

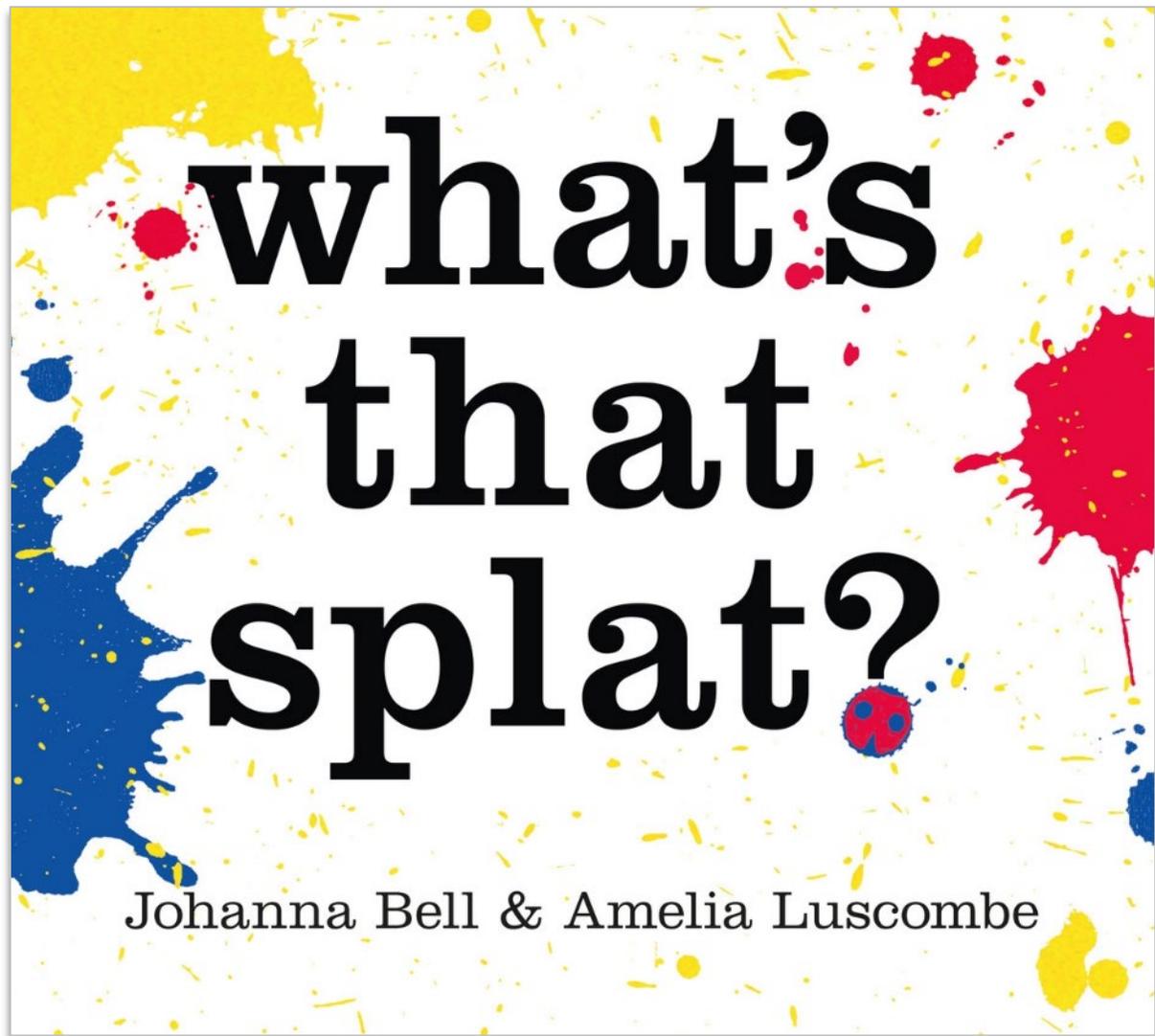
PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN

- **CAMPAIGN LEAD:** [Lucy Inglis – l.inglis@thameshudson.com.au](mailto:l.inglis@thameshudson.com.au)
- Pitching the book for **review and extract**, and Johanna for **author profiles** across **broad media, lifestyle and wellbeing media, arts media, weekend gift guides, retailer magazines** and **kids print and online media** such as *Kids Book Review* and *Better Reading Kids*.
- Pitching for **events/story time sessions** at local bookshops and festivals in Tasmania and WA.
- **Targeted influencer campaign.**



Pictured top left: Johanna Bell

Pictured bottom left: Amelia Luscombe



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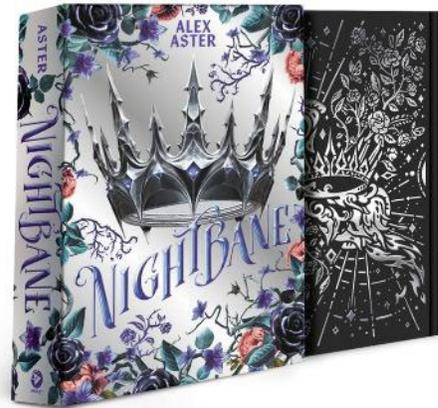
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ALSO AVAILABLE



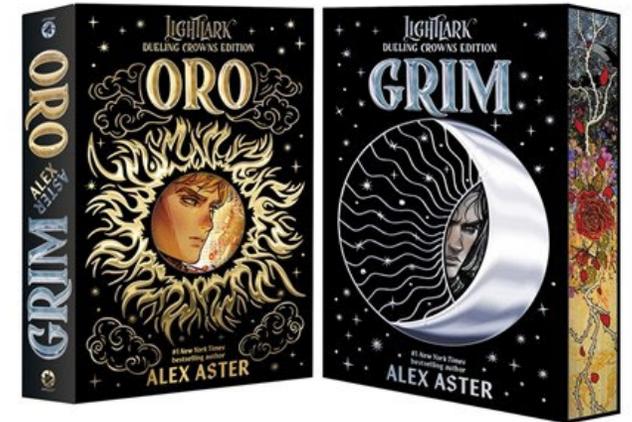
9781419778797



9781419784583



9781419782664



9781419785627

Skyshade: Collector's Edition (The Lightlark Saga Book 3)

Alex Aster

This gorgeous collector's edition of the pulse-pounding third novel in Alex Aster's #1 bestselling Lightlark Saga includes a suite of deluxe features:

- Premium metallic slipcase
- Satin cover with foil stamping
- Map-illustrated endpapers
- Stenciled edges
- 8 pages of full-colour character art and scene illustrations
- An 8-page bonus romance scene written from the POV of Isla's love interest

Lightlark was an instant #1 New York Times bestseller and has remained on the list for more than two years, recently appearing in the #1 position on the notoriously competitive Children's and Young Adult Series List with the publication of *Skyshade*. The series has sold more than 3 million copies to date.



AU \$54.99 | NZ \$59.99

9781419790942

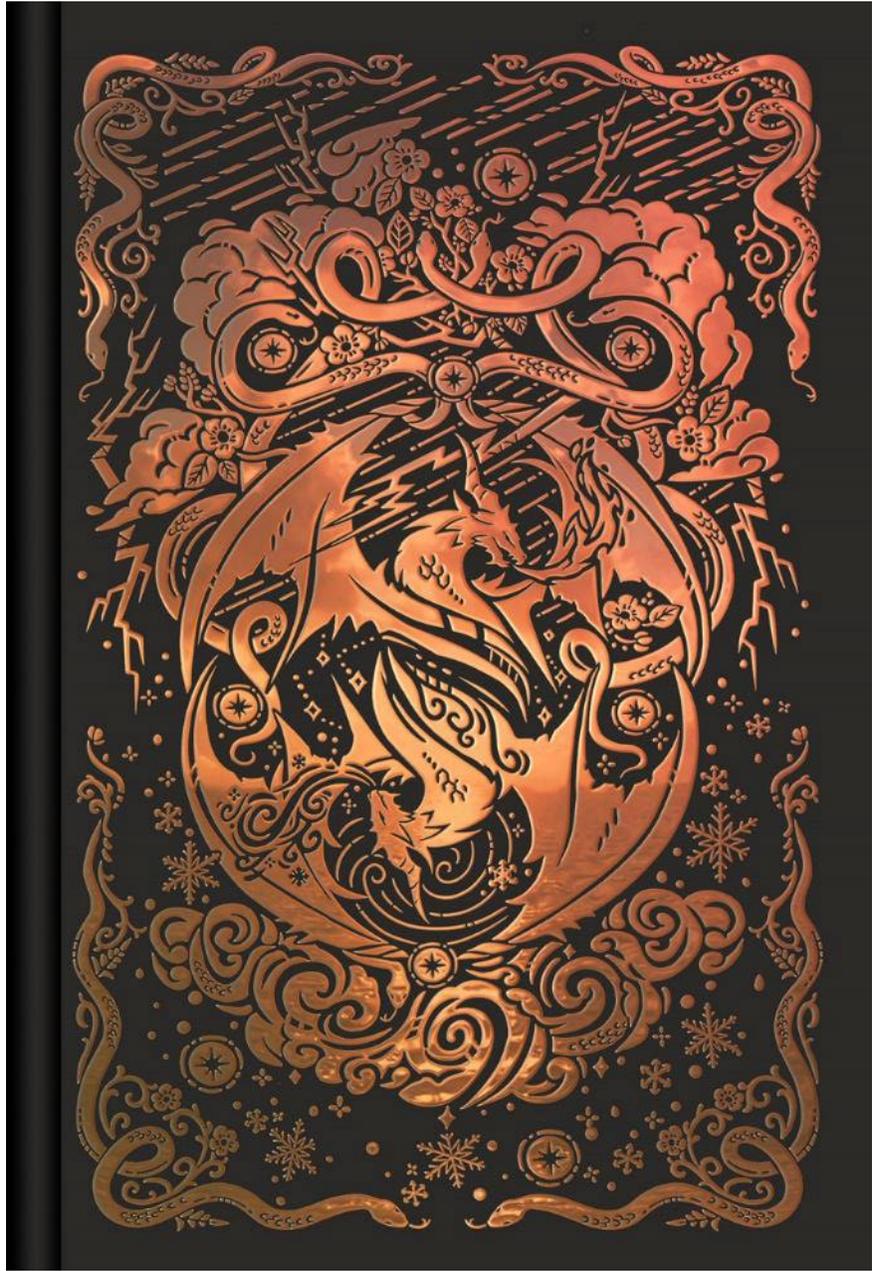
400 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 14 And Up

8 pages of full-colour character art and scene illustrations

210 mm x 140 mm







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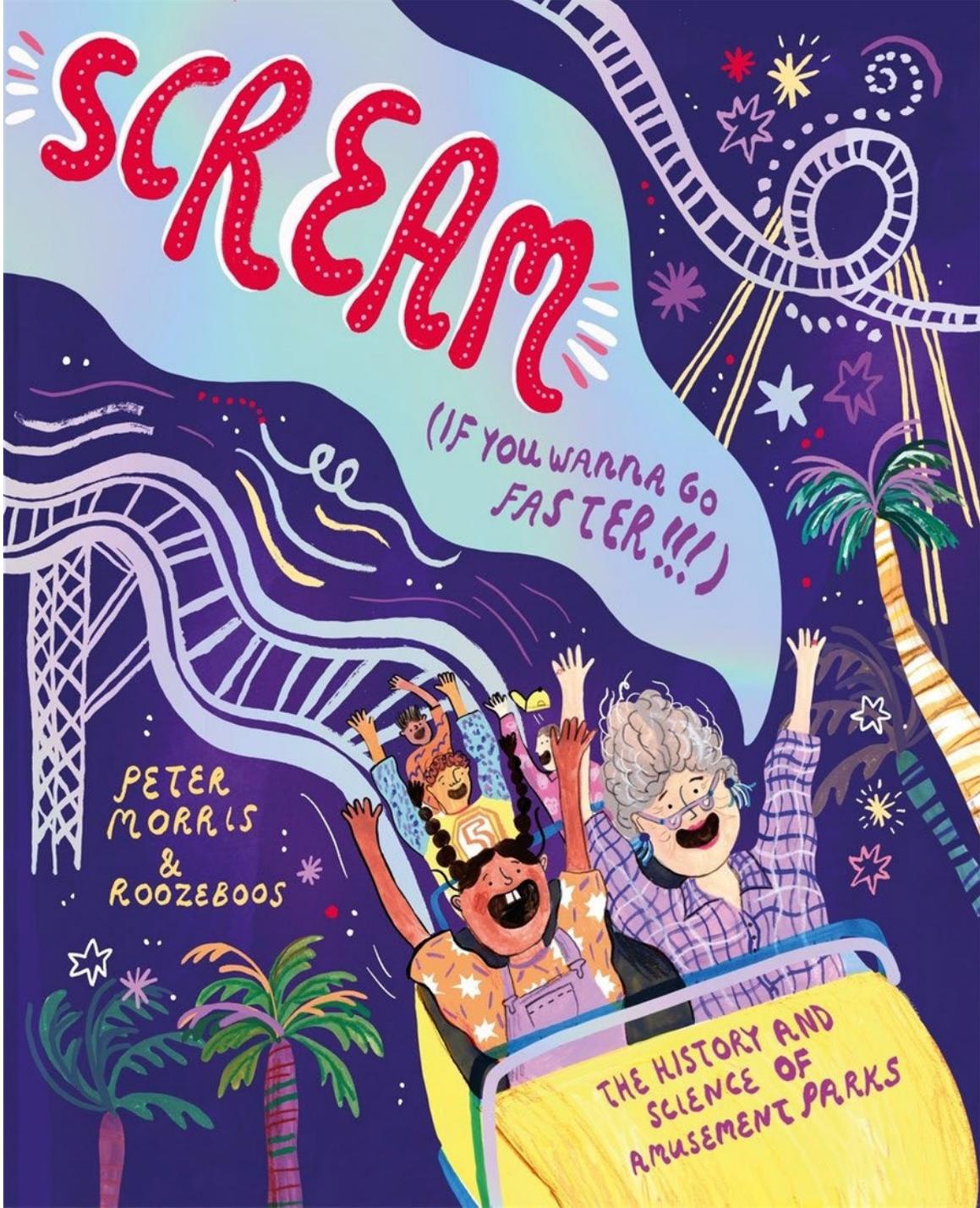
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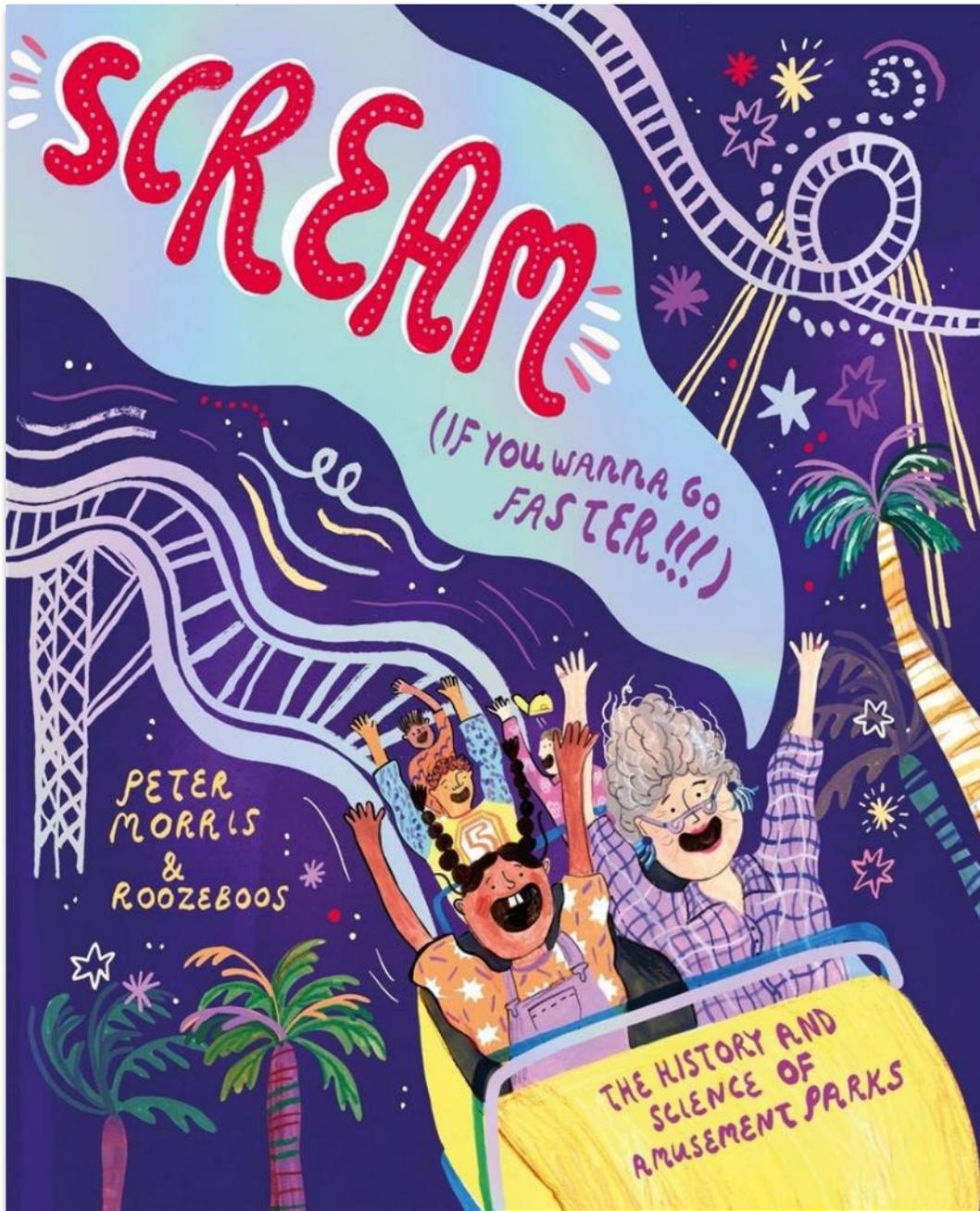


SCREAM

(IF YOU WANNA GO FASTER!!!)

PETER MORRIS & ROOZEBOOS

THE HISTORY AND SCIENCE OF AMUSEMENT PARKS



Scream If You Wanna Go Faster!

THE HISTORY AND SCIENCE OF AMUSEMENT PARKS

Peter Morris

Hold on tight and enjoy the thrills and spills of fairgrounds through the ages!

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- The science of fairground rides is illuminated with clear explanations of how a steam engine works, for example, what forces are at play on a Ferris wheel and a swing boat and why rollercoasters don't need engines to soar.
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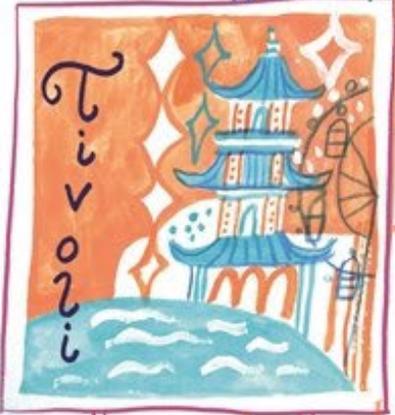
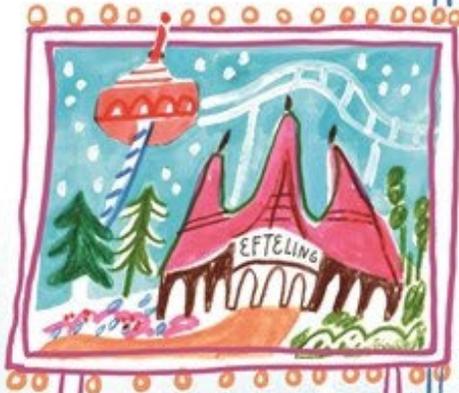
48 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 7 to 11, Grades 2 to 5

48 Illustration(s)

285 mm x 235 mm

HOLD ON TIGHT!
THE RIDE STARTS HERE



Have you ever felt your stomach drop on a roller coaster, or laughed so hard on a spinning ride that you could barely breathe? That mix of fear and fun is no accident; it's science at full speed!

The story of amusement parks starts in Victorian times, when steam engines powered not just trains, but the first moving fairground rides. Inventors like Frederick Savage used steam to make wooden horses gallop in circles and ocean liners swing on pendulums. People were hooked.

From there, the thrills got bigger. Coney Island brought electricity, lights and early roller coasters, while Disneyland turned imagination into reality with rides that told stories whilst also making your stomach drop.

As the years rolled on, engineers and scientists kept finding new ways to make rides faster, taller, and twistier... and safer, too! They learned how to use centripetal force, gravity, and magnetism to make us scream, laugh, and hang on for dear life without ever being in real danger.

So buckle your seatbelt, check your safety bar and get ready to dive into the wild world of amusement parks, where physics meets fun, and history races ahead on rails, wheels and a whole lot of courage.

Ready? Then scream if you wanna go faster!

FREDERICK SAVAGE

FATHER OF THE FAIRGROUND RIDE

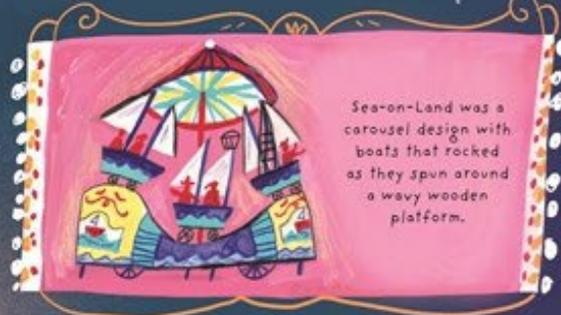
Frederick Savage was born in England in 1828. By the age of ten he was already hard at work as a farm labourer. He was bright and diligent and he soon got promoted to maintaining farm equipment. By 1850, he had started his own farm machinery business.

But Savage wasn't content with boring ploughs and diggers. He loved inventing and soon turned his attention to something much more exciting – fairground rides!

At travelling fairs, roundabouts were pulled by tired horses. Savage had a better idea. In 1868, he put a powerful steam engine in the centre of a ride. The world's first steam-powered carousel was born!

His rides were dazzling. They featured golden paint, carved horses, mirrors, bright lights and music from roaring steam organs. They weren't just rides, they were magical machines of joy. These are a few of his most famous:

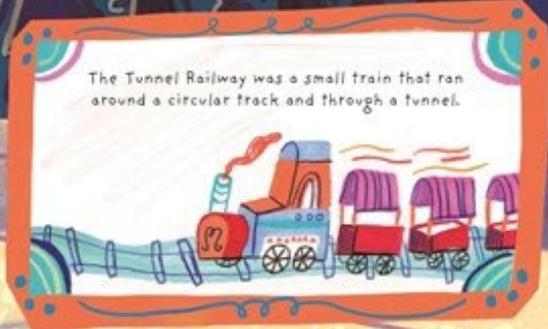
The Velocipede Carousel allowed fairgoers to try new bicycle technology by pedalling around a spinning platform.



Sea-on-Land was a carousel design with boats that rocked as they spun around a wavy wooden platform.



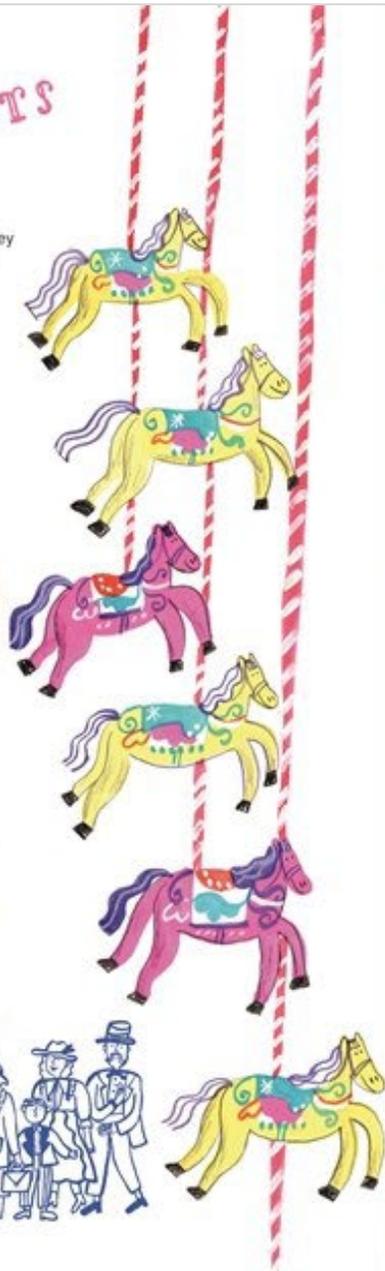
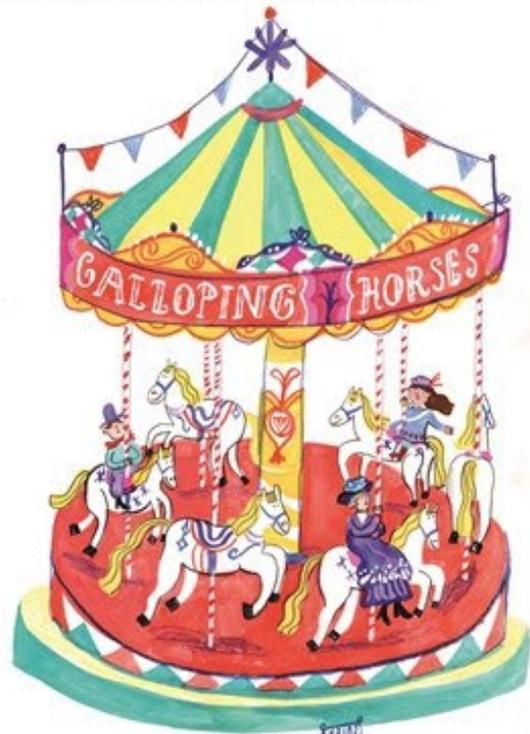
Razzle Dazzle had a round platform mounted on a pole that tilted as it turned. An early Tilt-a-Whirl!



The Tunnel Railway was a small train that ran around a circular track and through a tunnel.

Platform gallopers

Platform Gallopers Frederick Savage's most successful ride. It was the first carousel that looked like the ones we know now. Savage used a horizontally mounted steam engine to power carved wooden horses that didn't just spin, they galloped! Overhead cranks made the horses move up and down, and on some rides, they even swung out to the sides as the speed picked up.



The ride was a huge hit. A single carousel could make £100 a day. That's about 5,000 rides at two pennies each. Soon there were carousels at every fairground!



Steam Yachts

Victorians already loved giant swings, but with Steam Yachts, Savage took them to the next level. Instead of men pulling ropes, he used steam power to rock giant boats filled with passengers.



Victorian ocean liners were the height of luxury, and Savage's Steam Yachts were modelled after these glamorous ships, with one boat on either side of a huge steel frame, swinging in opposition. At full speed, the boats reached almost vertical heights, making passengers feel like they were flying. The ride became hugely popular and variations of the ride remain popular today.



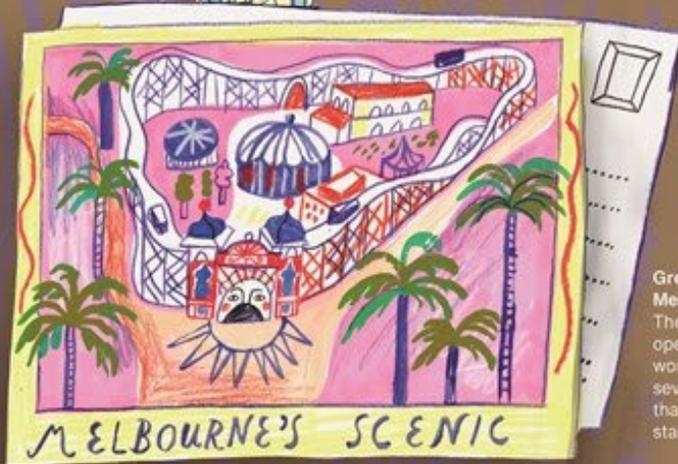
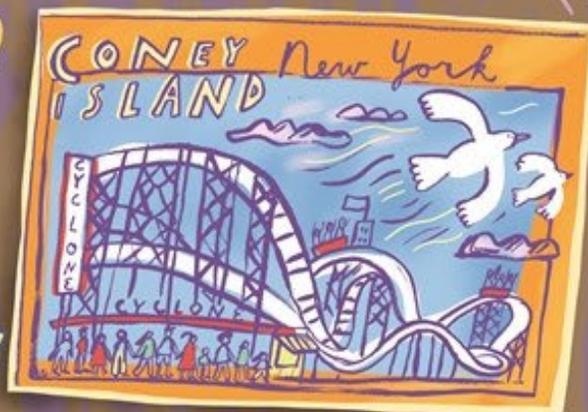
Steam-driven rides like these were heavy and difficult to transport. Soon it became clear that they needed permanent setups, and the modern amusement park was finally born.

5 EARLY WOODEN ROLLER COASTERS

(Still operating today!)

Coney Island Cyclone,
Brooklyn, NY, 1927

Aviator Charles Lindbergh, the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic, famously said that riding the Cyclone was "greater than flying an airplane at top speed".



Great Scenic Railway
Melbourne, Australia, 1912

The oldest continuously operating roller coaster in the world. The ride is one of only seven rollercoasters remaining that requires a brakeman to stand on the train.



Giant Dipper, Santa Cruz, California, 1924

Designer Arthur Looff aimed to create a ride with "the thrill of a plunge down a mine shaft, a balloon ascent, a parachute jump, airplane acrobatics, a cyclone, a toboggan ride and a ship in a storm."



Jack Rabbit,
Pennsylvania, 1920
Featured a 20 m (65 ft) drop – the largest in its day!



The Scenic Railway, Margate, UK, 1920

This coaster uses a gravity-driven system with two trains and a brakeman, who controls the speed with a large lever.



How does a ROLLERCOASTER work?

A rollercoaster doesn't need an engine to soar! It works by using a combination of gravity, momentum, and energy transfer to create a thrilling ride. Here's how it works:

THE BIG LIFT (POTENTIAL ENERGY)

First, the rollercoaster is pulled up to a high point, usually with a big chain. When it's up there, it has a lot of potential energy. This is kind of like holding a ball up high. The higher it is, the more energy it has, ready to be turned into speed.

THE DROP (KINETIC ENERGY)

Once the rollercoaster starts going down, that stored potential energy turns into speed (called kinetic energy). Gravity pulls the coaster down, and it starts going faster and faster.

MOMENTUM AND LOOPS

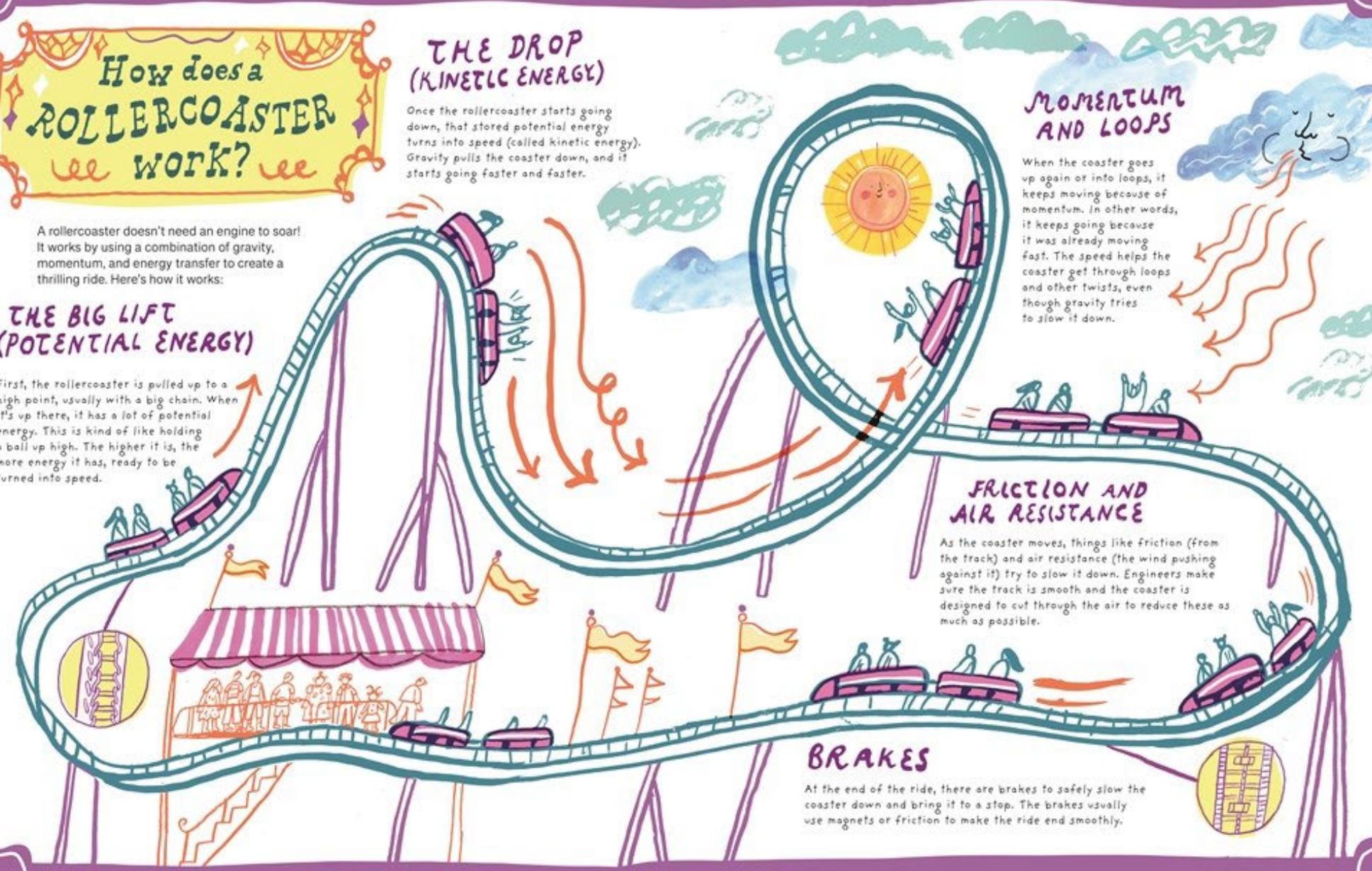
When the coaster goes up again or into loops, it keeps moving because of momentum. In other words, it keeps going because it was already moving fast. The speed helps the coaster get through loops and other twists, even though gravity tries to slow it down.

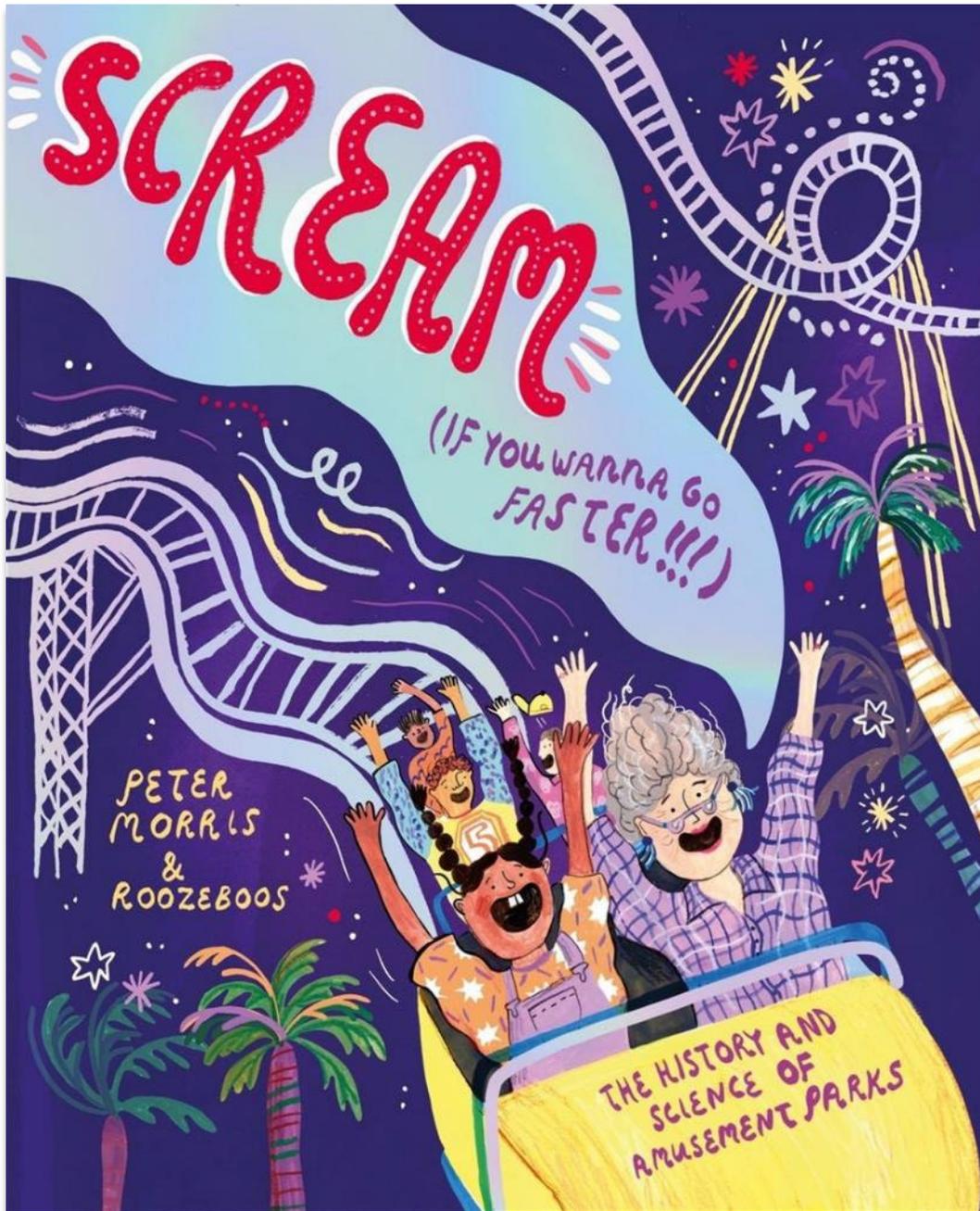
FRICITION AND AIR RESISTANCE

As the coaster moves, things like friction (from the track) and air resistance (the wind pushing against it) try to slow it down. Engineers make sure the track is smooth and the coaster is designed to cut through the air to reduce these as much as possible.

BRAKES

At the end of the ride, there are brakes to safely slow the coaster down and bring it to a stop. The brakes usually use magnets or friction to make the ride end smoothly.





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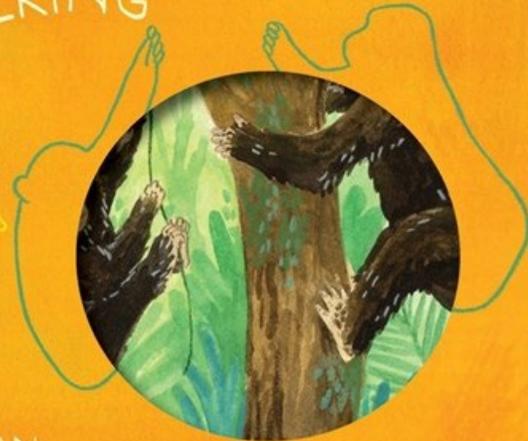
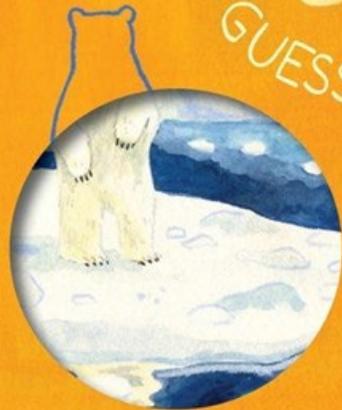
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Fancy Feet

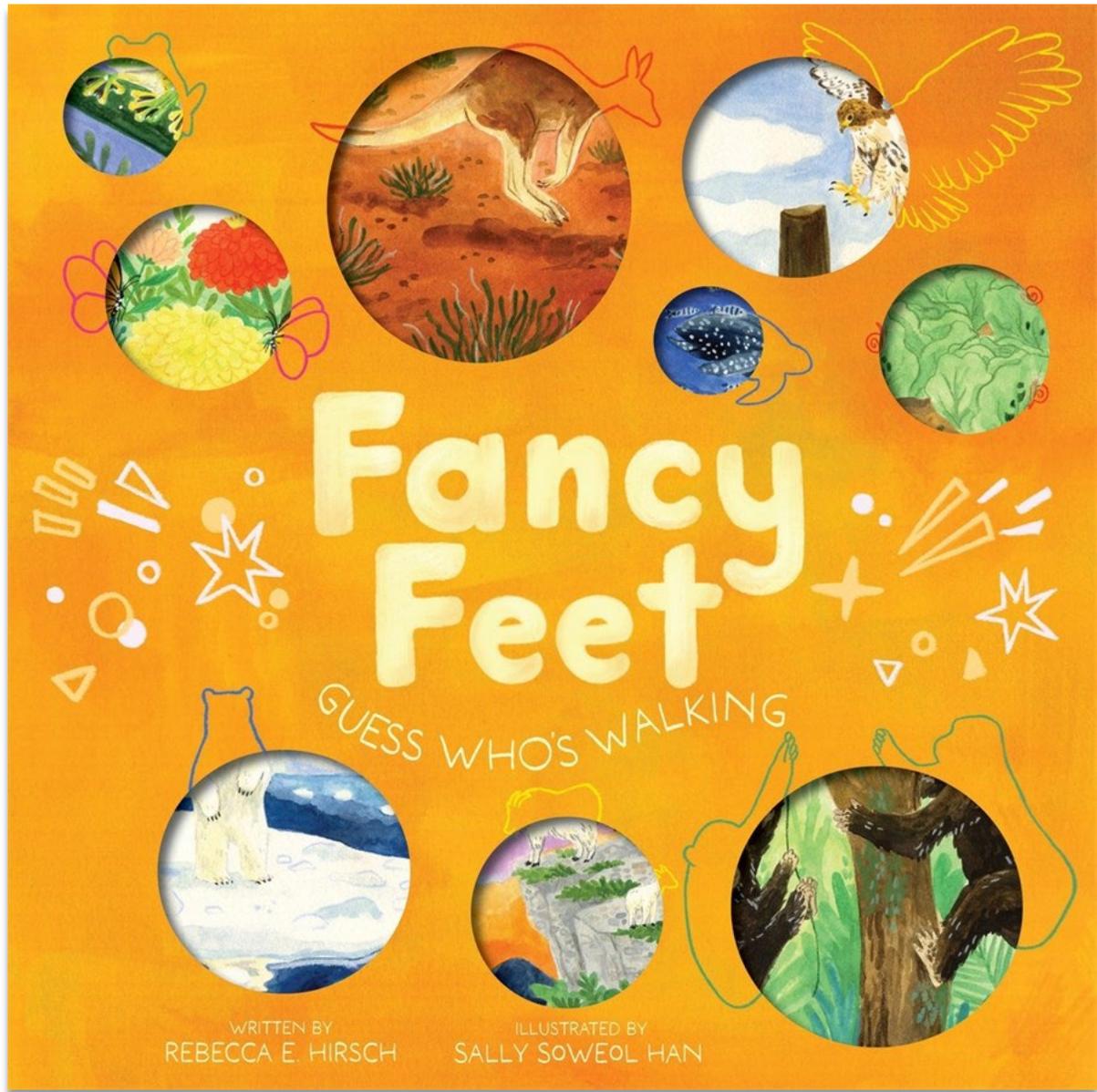


GUESS WHO'S WALKING



WRITTEN BY
REBECCA E. HIRSCH

ILLUSTRATED BY
SALLY SOWEOL HAN



Fancy Feet

GUESS WHO'S WALKING (THE NATURE RIDDLES AND RHYMES SERIES)

Rebecca E. Hirsch

From the slimy snail to the jumping kangaroo, kids will delight in learning about the many fantastic feet of our world in this nonfiction picture book guessing game and companion to Wonder Wings from critically acclaimed creators Rebecca E. Hirsch and Sally Soweol Han.

- Some feet swing from vines, some feet fly through the air, and some feet carry us to other worlds. Can you guess who these feet belong to?
- Learn about the fantastic world of feet through rhyming riddles that will encourage little readers to guess along with every page turn. From butterflies to dinosaurs, garden snails to polar bears—each set of feet is unique, and each gets its due in this delightful nonfiction picture book.

AU \$29.99 | NZ \$34.99

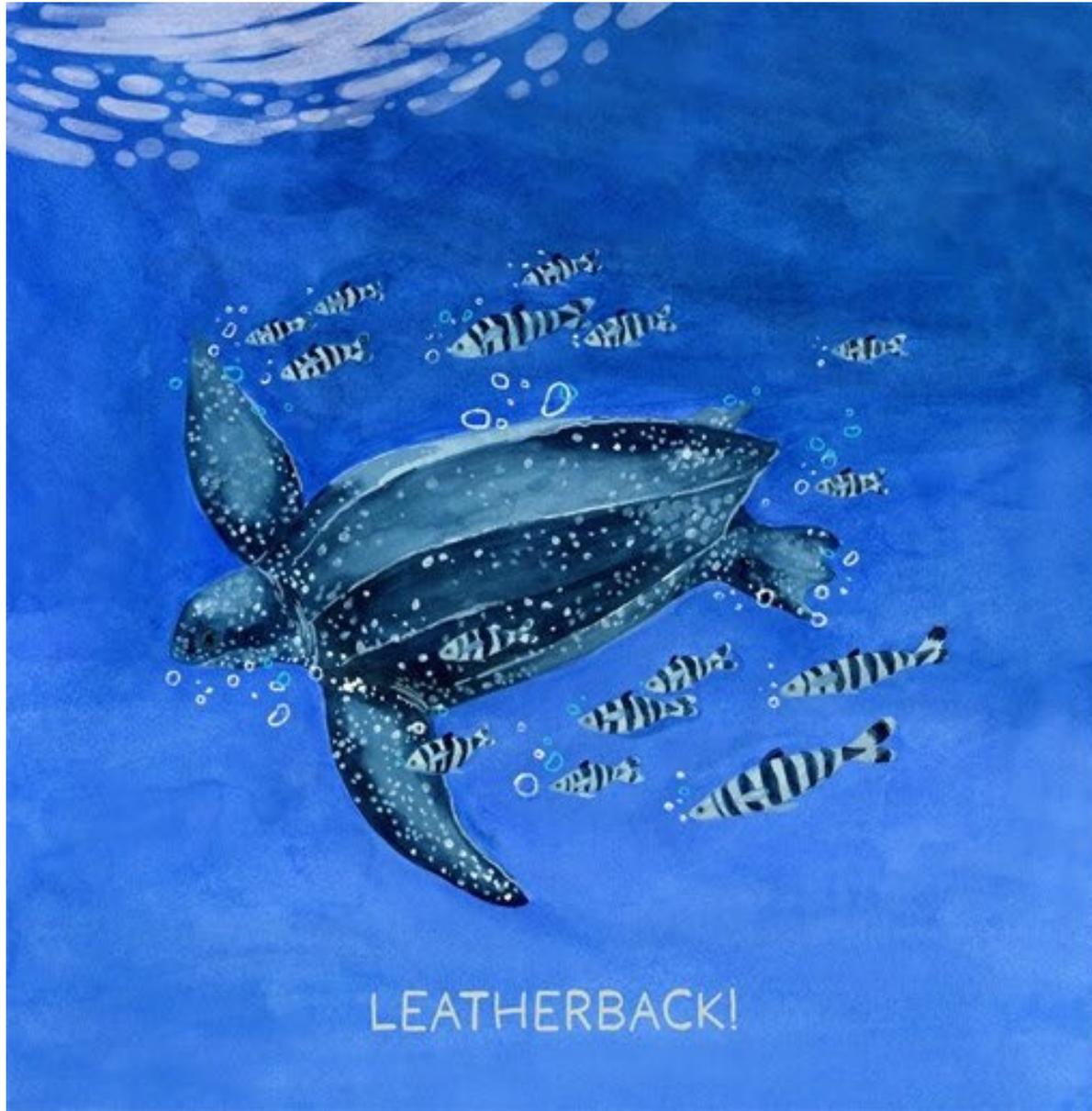
9781419769269

40 Pages | Hardcover

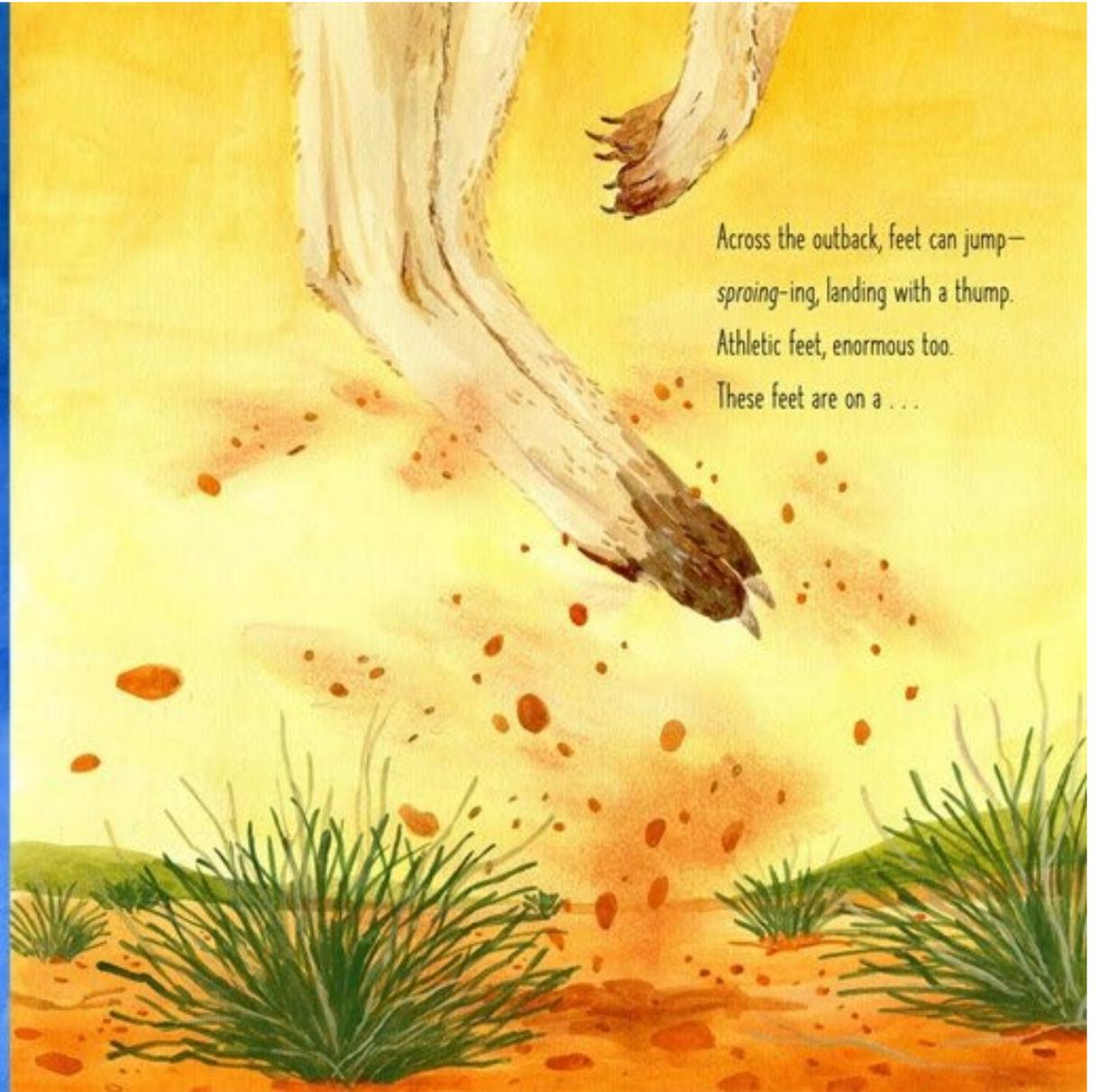
Ages 4 to 8

Full-colour illustrations throughout

261 mm x 261 mm



LEATHERBACK!



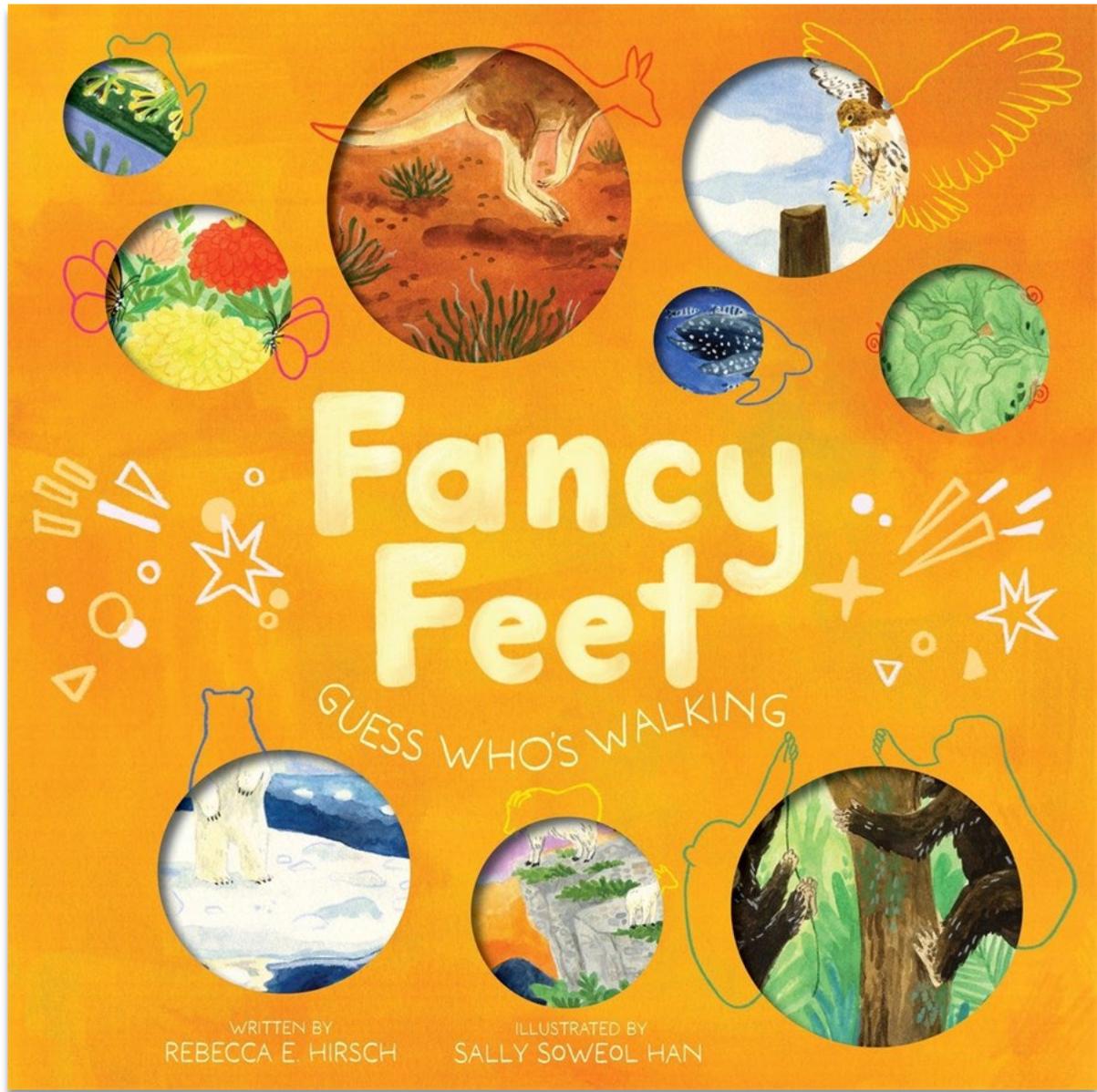
Across the outback, feet can jump—
sprong-ing, landing with a thump.
Athletic feet, enormous too.
These feet are on a . . .

KANGAROO!



MARS ROBOT!





Fancy Feet

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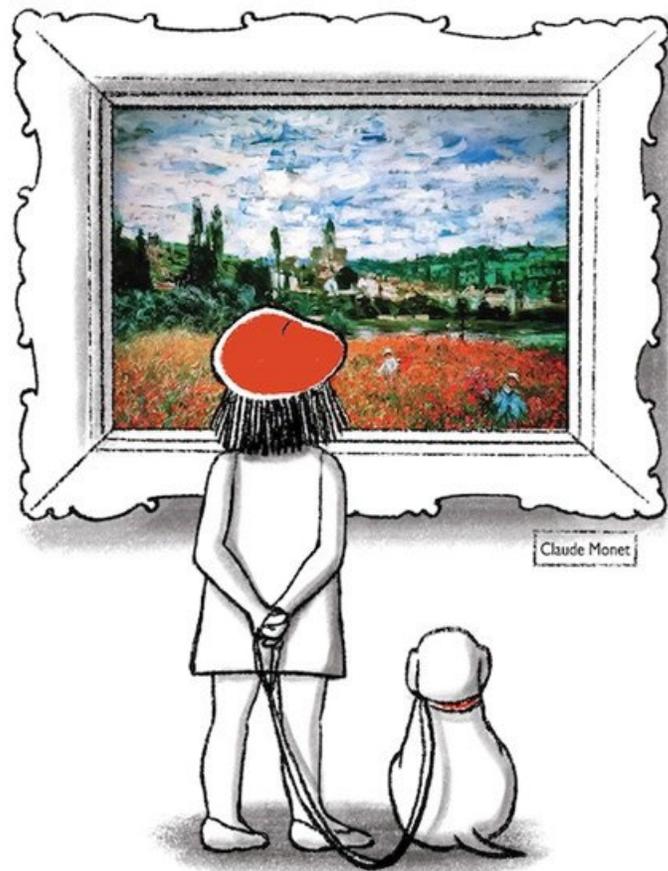
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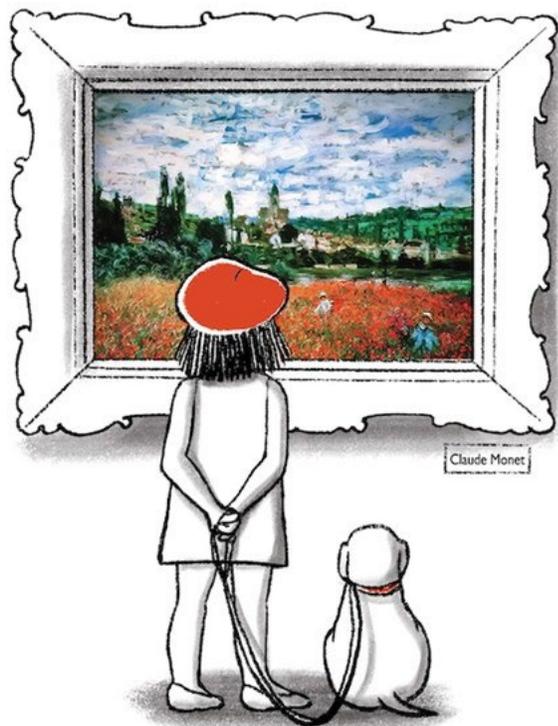
Claude

by Phyllis Harris



Claude

by Phyllis Harris



Claude

A WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK ABOUT ART

Phyllis Harris

Take young artists on a journey of creative self-expression with this wordless picture book about art, Claude Monet, and Claude the dog.

- Inspired by a beautiful Claude Monet painting, a little artist decides to create her own masterpiece, but her puppy has other ideas. From grabbing his favorite ball to rolling on the floor, he tries everything to get her attention, and chaos ensues, creating a big, colourful mess. Or is it a mess after all? Perhaps Claude the dog and Claude Monet have a lot more in common than we think.
- Told entirely in stunning illustration, Claude is a wordless picture book that introduces young artists to the works of Monet while inspiring creativity and promoting passion over perfection. And at the end, kids can read about the life of Monet and his role in art history.
- With bold splashes of colour across white pages, this inspirational story shows the creative process in full transparency, proving that there are no bad creations, just happy mistakes that are worth more than a thousand words.

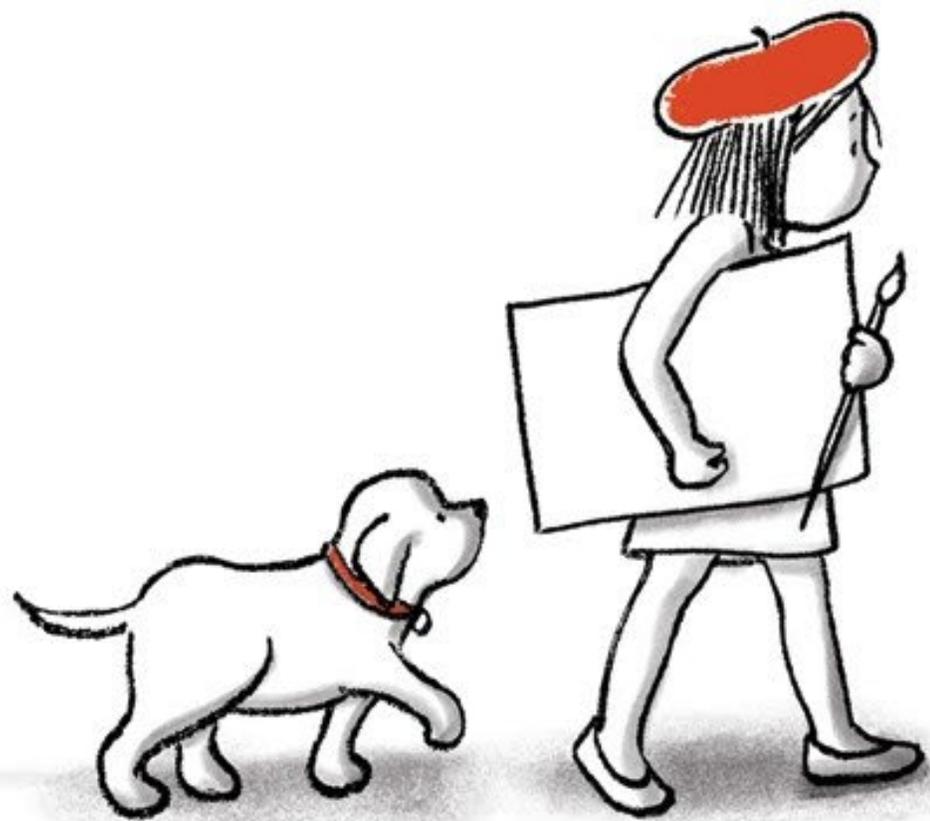
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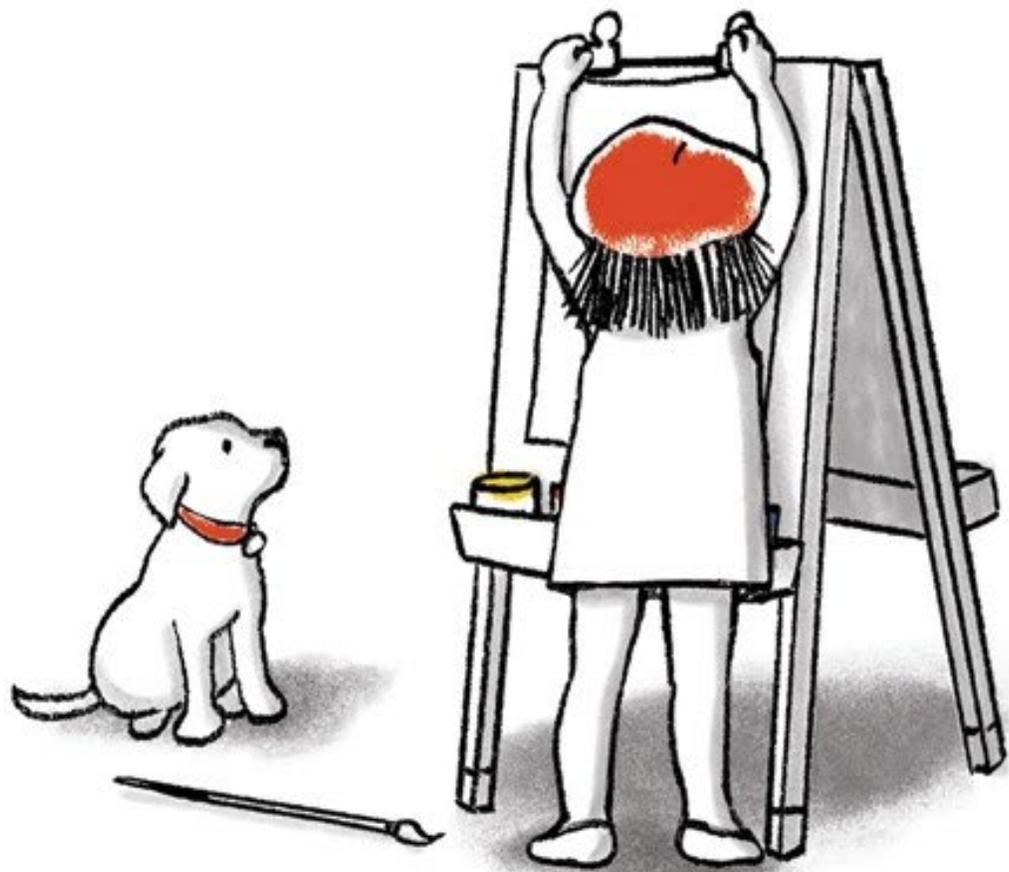
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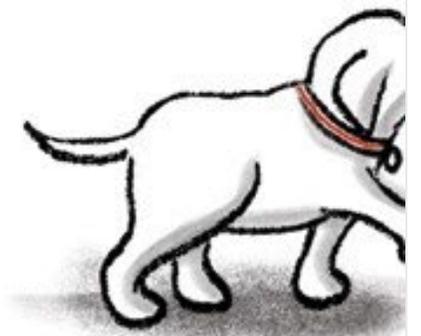
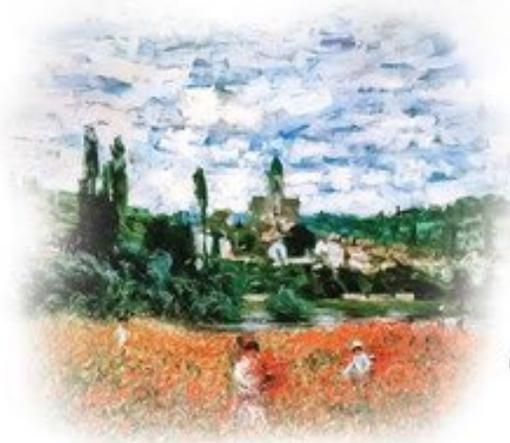
32 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 5 to 7

Fully illustrated, spot varnish,
debossing, 3-piece binding

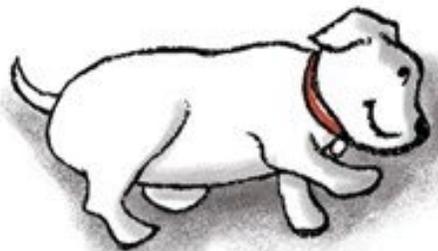






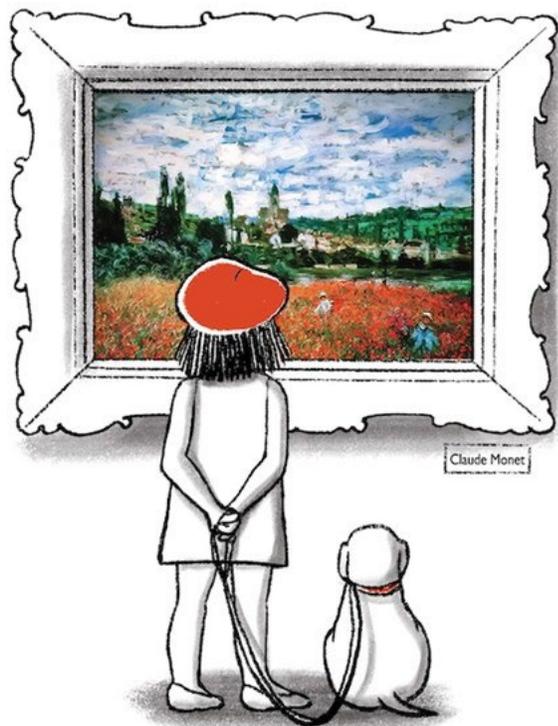






Claude

by Phyllis Harris



Claude

A WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK ABOUT ART

Phyllis Harris

Take young artists on a journey of creative self-expression with this wordless picture book about art, Claude Monet, and Claude the dog.

- Inspired by a beautiful Claude Monet painting, a little artist decides to create her own masterpiece, but her puppy has other ideas. From grabbing his favorite ball to rolling on the floor, he tries everything to get her attention, and chaos ensues, creating a big, colourful mess. Or is it a mess after all? Perhaps Claude the dog and Claude Monet have a lot more in common than we think.
- Told entirely in stunning illustration, Claude is a wordless picture book that introduces young artists to the works of Monet while inspiring creativity and promoting passion over perfection. And at the end, kids can read about the life of Monet and his role in art history.
- With bold splashes of colour across white pages, this inspirational story shows the creative process in full transparency, proving that there are no bad creations, just happy mistakes that are worth more than a thousand words.

AU \$24.99 | NZ \$29.99

9798893960495

32 Pages | Hardcover

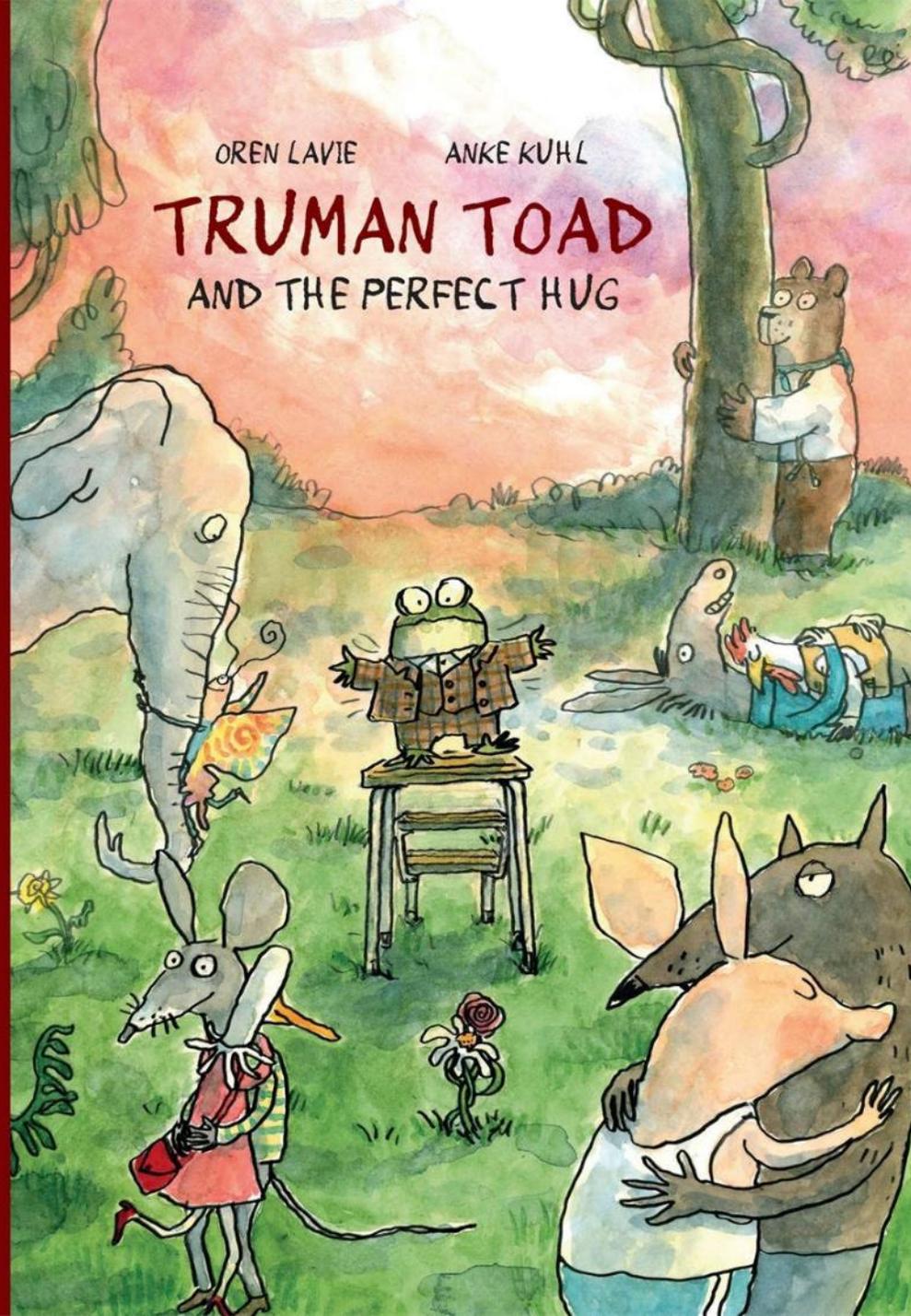
Ages 5 to 7

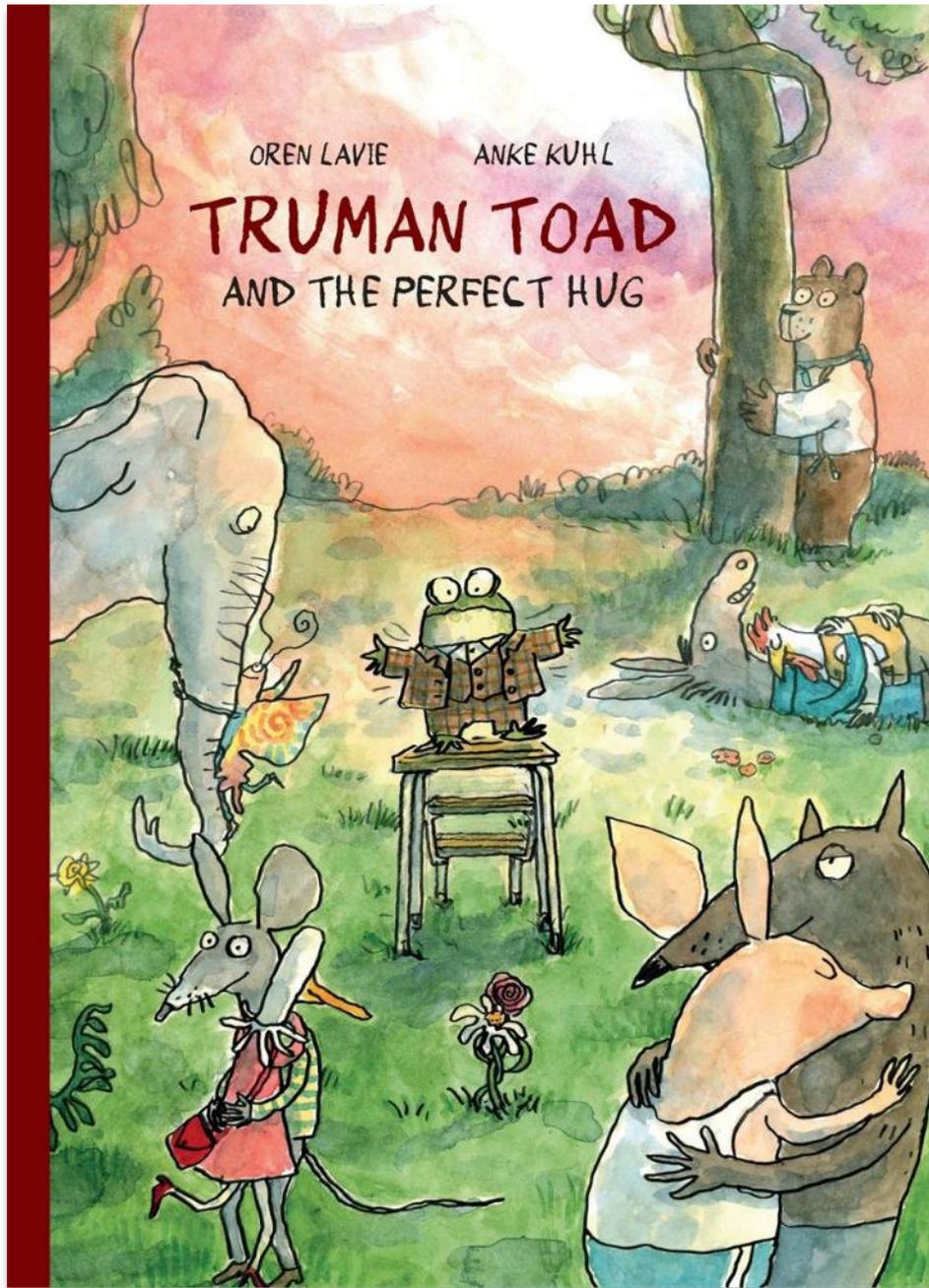
Fully illustrated, spot varnish,
debossing, 3-piece binding

OREN LAVIE

ANKE KUHL

TRUMAN TOAD AND THE PERFECT HUG





Truman Toad and the Quest for the Perfect Hug

Oren Lavie

A self-important but good-hearted toad, with an ample amount of self-love, discovers his love for others in this entertaining, award-winning picture book originally published in Germany.

- Truman Toad lives in a cozy little apartment, all by himself. In fact, he loves his own company so much that he keeps a giant mirror nearby so that he's never too far from his reflection. After all, who better than himself to spend all his time with!
- One day, Truman wakes up from the most wonderful dream about the most wonderful hug—and he's determined to make it come true. The quest for the perfect hug has begun... but nothing seems quite perfect enough to Truman: the hugs he gets from his animal friends are too long or too slippery, too soft or too hard, too wild or too gentle. Truman is discouraged. Will he ever find the perfect hug?
- Charming, quirky, filled with heart and wholly one of a kind, Oren Lavie's story, coupled with Anke Kuhl's delightfully spirited illustrations, will make readers of all ages laugh—and make them think about letting go, letting others in, and the power of hugs!

AU \$29.99 | NZ \$34.99

9781592704590

40 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 5 to 8

Full-colour illustrations throughout

280 mm x 212 mm

Truman Toad lived in a little apartment with a very big mirror. His favorite hobby was looking at himself while trying to guess what he was thinking. He usually guessed that he was thinking about himself, and he was usually right. For, you see, of all the toads in Green Grove, Truman had mastered the art of self-appreciation like no other. He spent many happy hours talking to his reflection about such pleasant topics as Toad Fashion, Swamp Culture, and the charm of Puddle Picnics.



Truman enjoyed his own company so much that he put his bed right in front of the mirror, just in case he wanted to watch himself while he slept!

First he went to see his good friend Geri the Giraffe.

"Geri darling," he said, "there's no time to explain, let's hug!"

"Of course," said Geri, who was always up for a surprise hug.

Geri was a good hugger, but her neck was very long, and the toad slipped all the way down.

"No, that didn't feel right!" cried Truman.

"It felt good to me," said Geri.

"Good perhaps. But not perfect!" the toad grunted, and ran out the door.



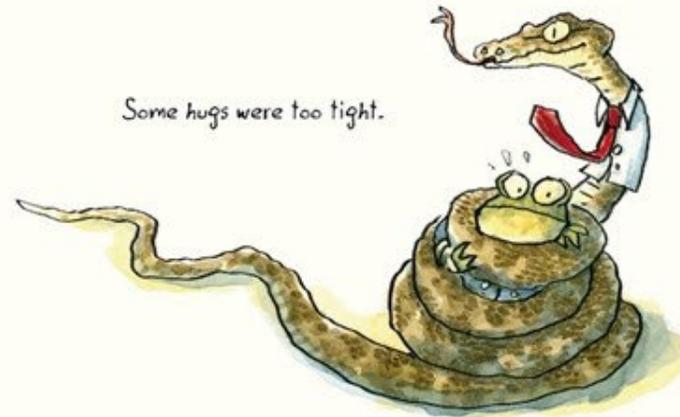


He spent the rest of the day hugging.

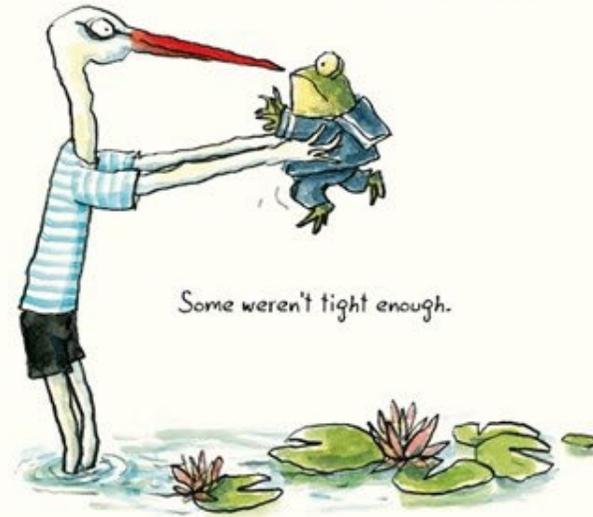
Some hugs were very soft.



Some weren't soft enough.



Some hugs were too tight.

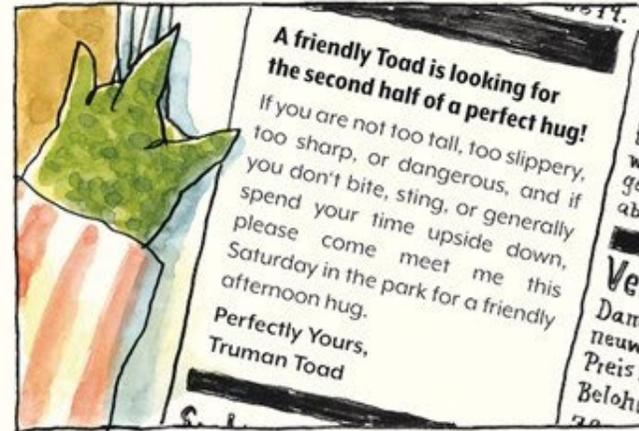


Some weren't tight enough.



The toad moped and sulked, then suddenly his eyes lit up and he sprang into the air.

The next morning, he placed an ad in the local newspaper:



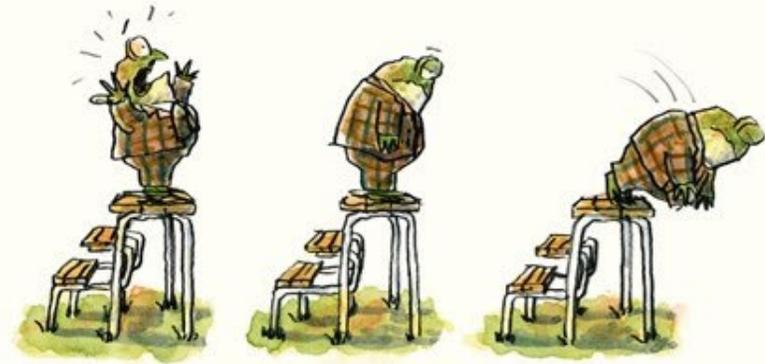
"Mr. Toad," a voice came from behind. It was a reporter from the local TV station. "Have you found the perfect hug? Please speak into the microphone."



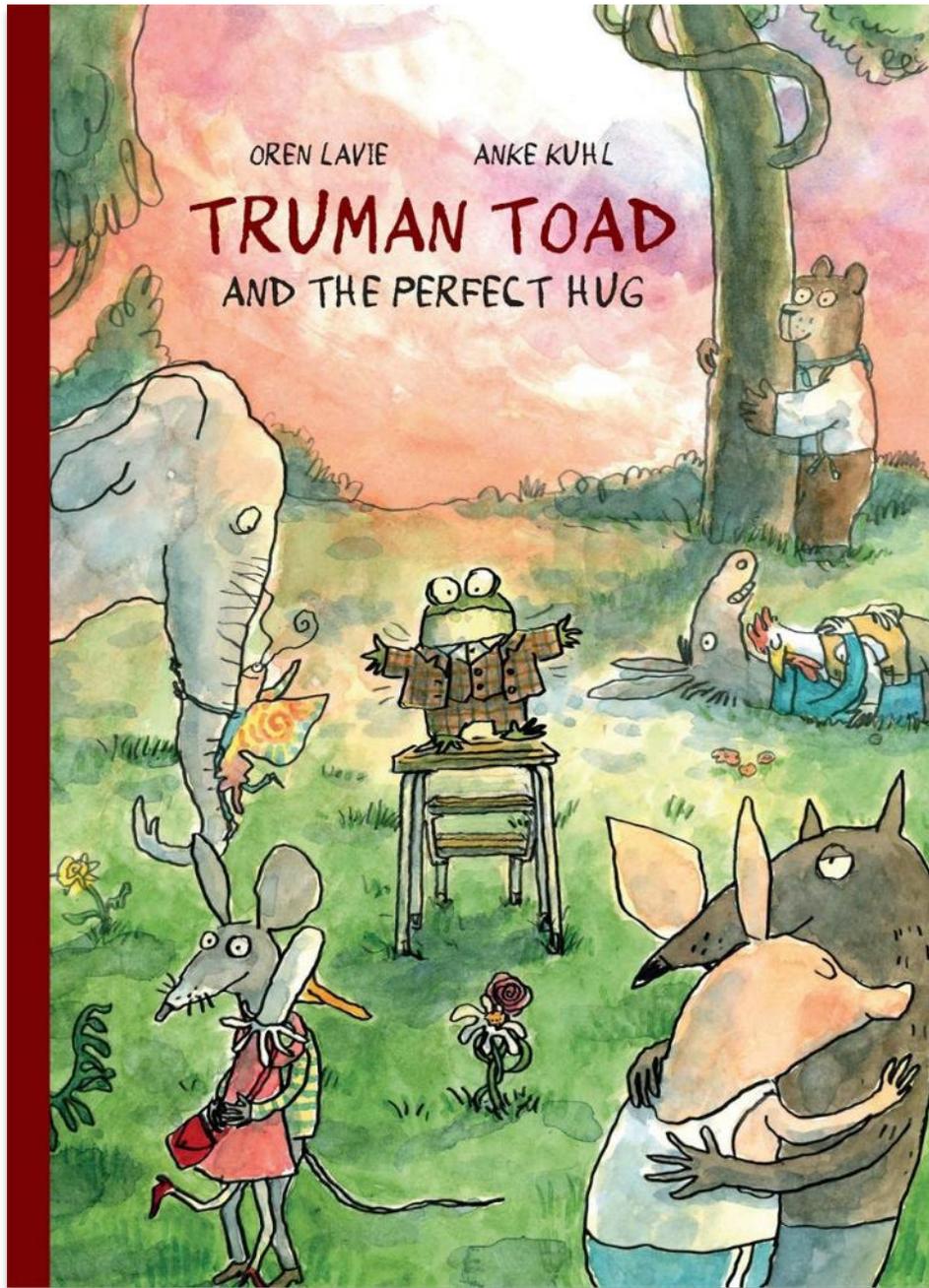
Everybody in the park turned toward him, curious.

Looking out at all of the hugging animals, Truman suddenly felt very lonely and tired. "No, I haven't!" he cried out. "And I'm not happy at all. I am the stiffest, bitterest, most boring Toad that has ever lived."

Truman finally let go of his hands, and with all of the self-pity of a disappointed toad, he threw himself onto the ground.



But he landed on something soft. It was...



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Oren Lavie

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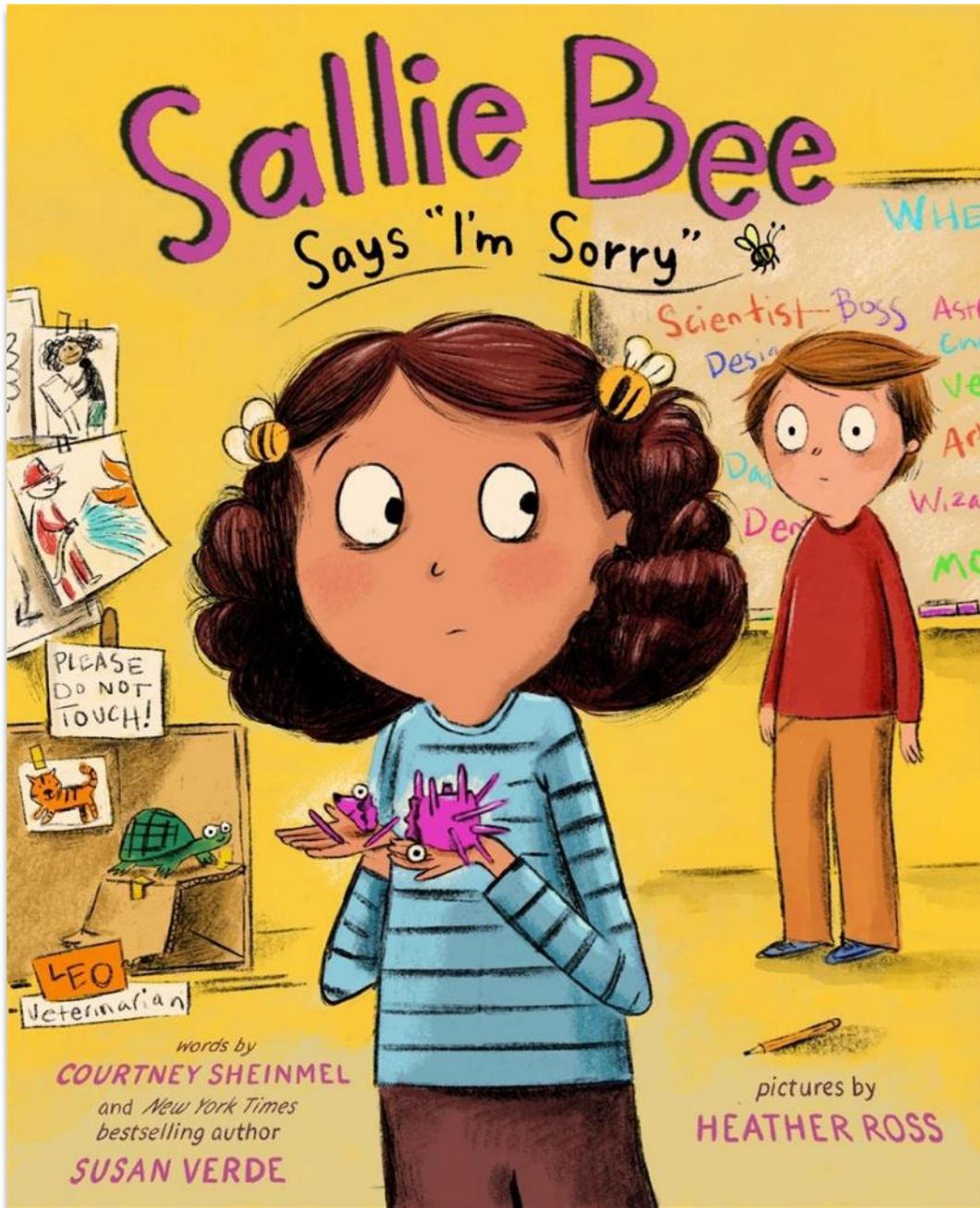
Sallie Bee

Says "I'm Sorry" 



words by
COURTNEY SHEINMEL
and *New York Times*
bestselling author
SUSAN VERDE

pictures by
HEATHER ROSS



Sallie Bee Says "I'm Sorry"

A PICTURE BOOK

Susan Verde and Heather Ross

Sallie Bee learns how to apologize authentically in this funny and encouraging companion to *Sallie Bee Writes a Thank-You Note* from New York Times bestselling author Susan Verde, Courtney Sheinmel, and Heather Ross

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- She tries to make it better. A knock-knock joke? Check. A snickerdoodle? Yum. A quick "sorry"? Done! So why is Leo still upset?
- Maybe because Sallie hasn't thought about how Leo feels—or added the most important part to her apology: the because.
- Time for a do-over. With a little courage and a lot of heart, Sallie is ready to make things right—for real.
- Sallie Bee Says "I'm Sorry" is a warm, relatable story about taking responsibility, offering true apologies, and learning from our mistakes.
- Includes an author's note with steps for saying "sorry"

AU \$29.99 | NZ \$34.99

9781419783012

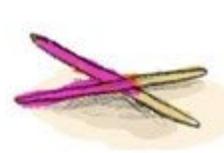
32 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 4 to 8

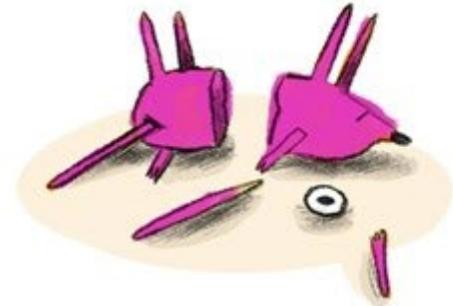
Full-colour illustrations throughout

267 mm x 216 mm





"Oh no!" Leo cried.



"I'm sorry," Sallie said.
"But someone left their pencil
on the floor! It wasn't my fault!"

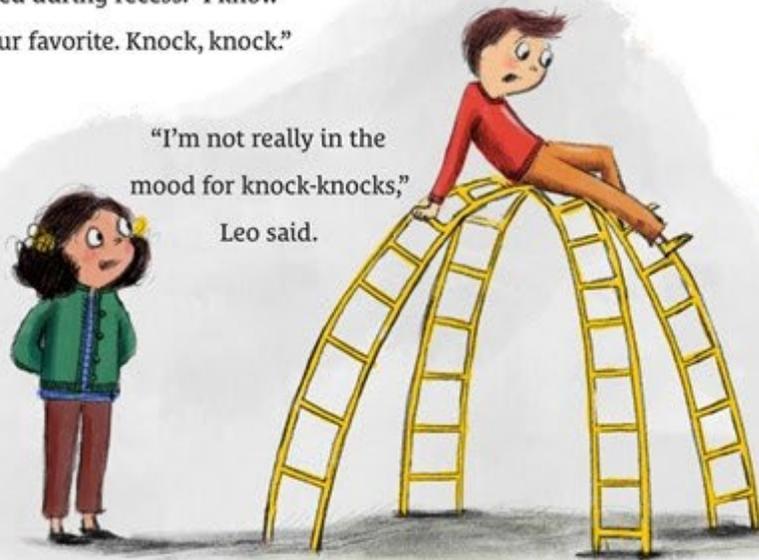




At lunch, Sallie called out to Leo. "Hey Leo. I saved your usual seat!"

"I'm sitting with Freddie today," Leo said.

"Wanna hear a knock-knock joke?" Sallie asked during recess. "I know they're your favorite. Knock, knock."



"I'm not really in the mood for knock-knocks," Leo said.



On the bus ride home, Sallie had a snickerdoodle for Leo. But Leo was already sitting with Stella.



Only she hadn't said sorry the right way.
She hadn't thought about what she'd done and how it made Leo feel.
She'd said I'm sorry *but*.

Sallie wanted the chance to try again.

Sallie thought about what
had happened with Leo.
She had saved him a seat.



She'd had a
knock-knock joke for him.
She had brought him a
snickerdoodle.
She'd even said she was sorry!





But first she needed
to practice.

“Leo, I’m sorry,
but there was
a pencil in the way.”



No. No.
That wasn’t right.

“I’m sorry, because I didn’t look where I was going.”

Better, but not quite.

“I’m sorry . . .”

Yes! She knew exactly what to say.



Dear Reader,

Have you ever made a mistake like Sallie? Did you ever want to apologize, but you didn't know how? Maybe you tried saying "sorry but," and it didn't make things better?

Here are some tips:

1. Think about what happened and the part you played in it.
2. Ask yourself how it made the other person feel.
3. Gather up your bravery.
4. Say that you're sorry because . . . (No "but's").
5. Be specific about what you're sorry for.
6. Is there something you can do to make things better, like offering to put a broken hedgehog back together?
7. Know that everyone makes mistakes, and it's OK. That is how we grow and learn, and showing that you're sorry can make things better.

Love, Courtney & Susan

P.S. In case you want to know,
this was Sallie's knock-knock joke:

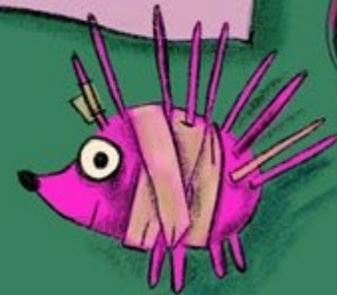
Knock, knock.

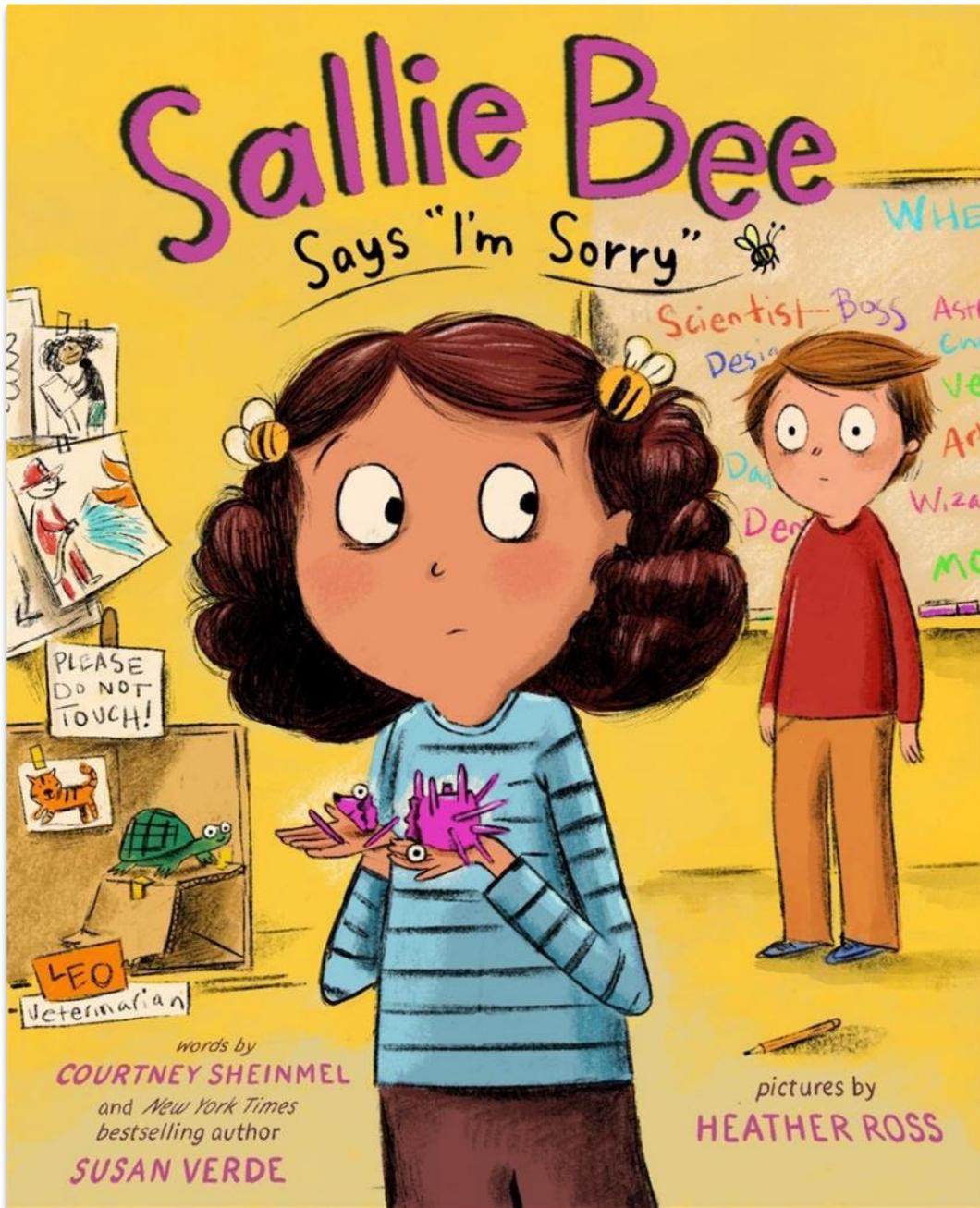
Who's there?

Owls go.

Owls go who?

You're right! They do!





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AU \$29.99 | NZ \$34.99

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32 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 4 to 8

Full-colour illustrations throughout

267 mm x 216 mm

TAJÍN

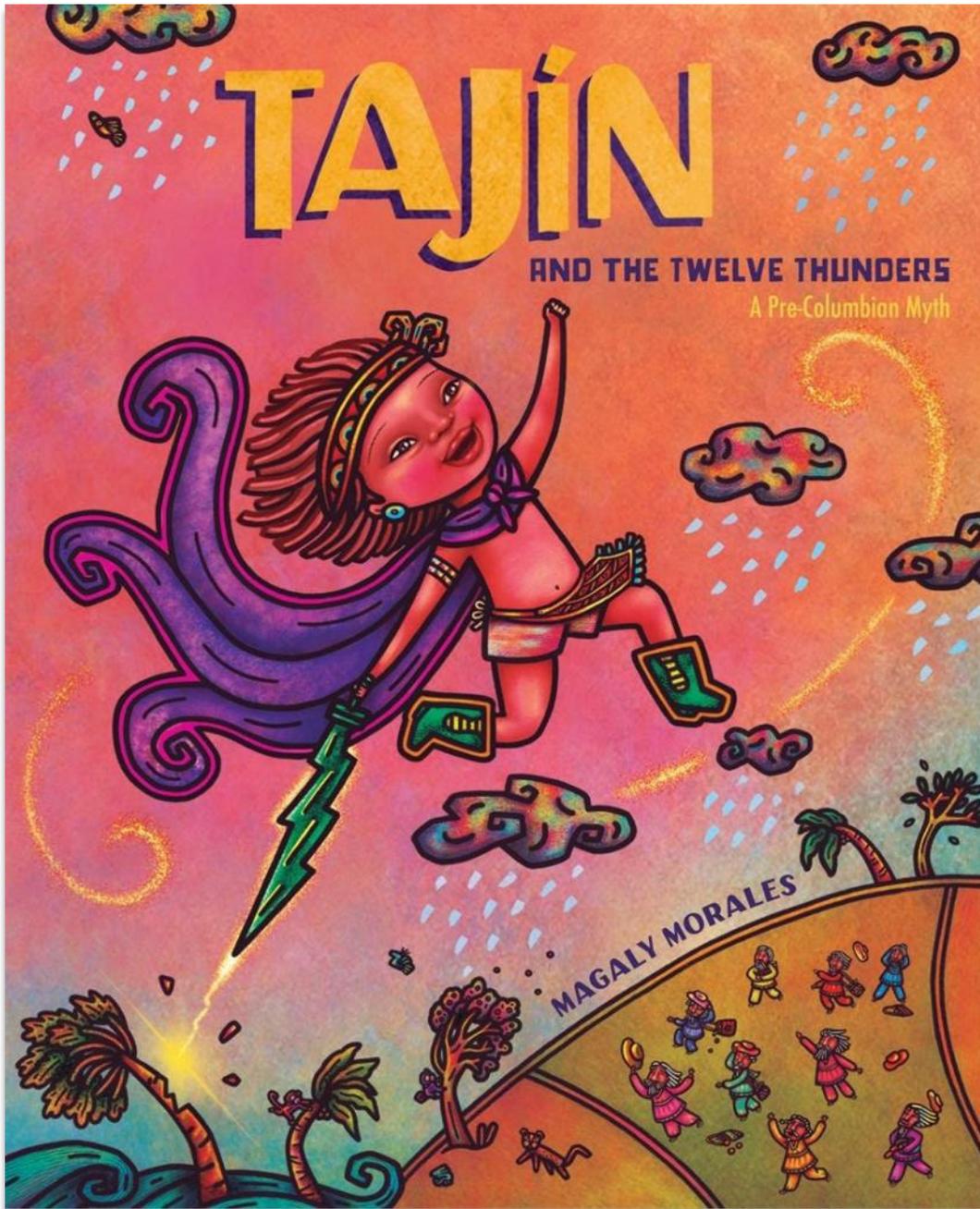
AND THE TWELVE THUNDERS

A Pre-Columbian Myth



MAGALY MORALES





Tajín and the Twelve Thunders

A PRE-COLUMBIAN MYTH (A PICTURE BOOK)

Magaly Morales

A mischievous boy tricks the 12 thunder gods in order to create the first hurricanes in Magaly Morales's debut author-illustrated picture book, a retelling of a Mexican folktale.

- Tajín is a fun-loving child full of energy and mischief. When his antics prove too rough for even the monkeys of the forest, he's sent to the pyramid of Los Nichos.
- There live the Twelve Thunders, who, with their sweeping capes, thunderous boots, and flashing swords, make the weather. For a time, the boy is on his best behavior while in their service . . . but all too soon, he yearns to join the Thunders in the sky.
- Based on a popular Mexican myth, *Tajín and the Twelve Thunders* is the origin story of how the first hurricanes were created—with the help of one mischievous little boy.

AU \$29.99 | NZ \$34.99

9781419768859

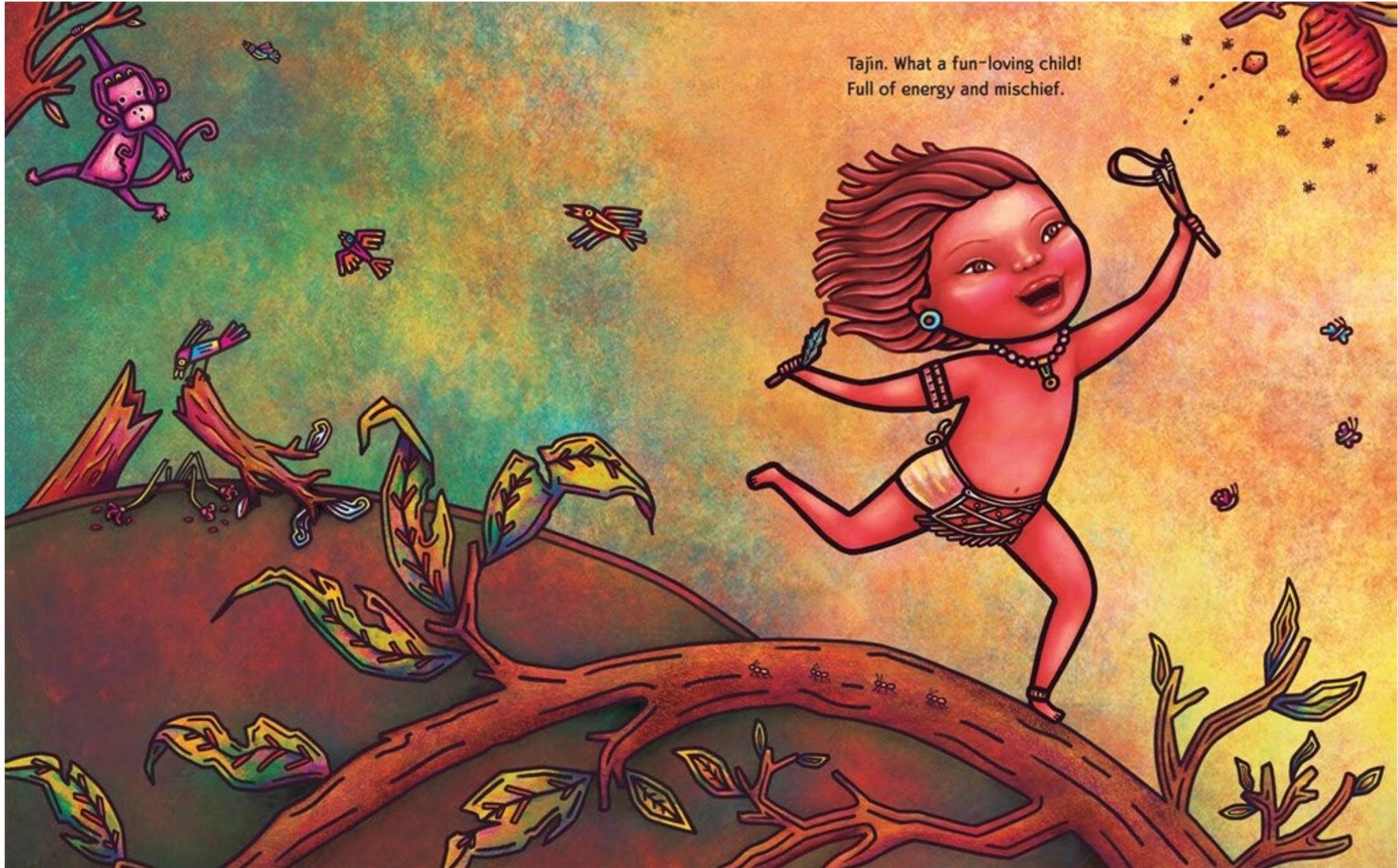
40 Pages | Hardcover

Ages 4 to 8

Full-colour illustrations throughout

274 mm x 226 mm

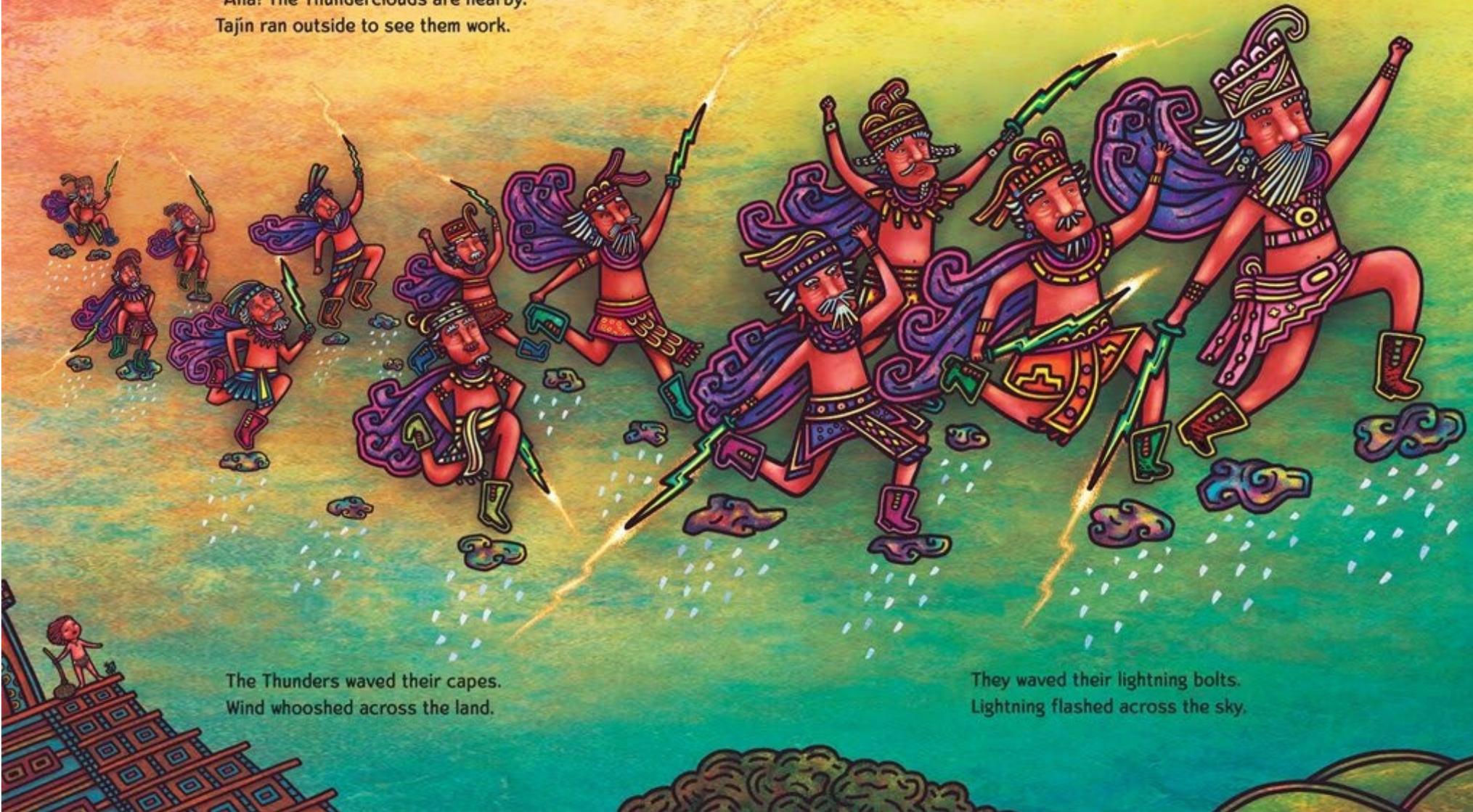
Tajin. What a fun-loving child!
Full of energy and mischief.



One day, it began to rain.

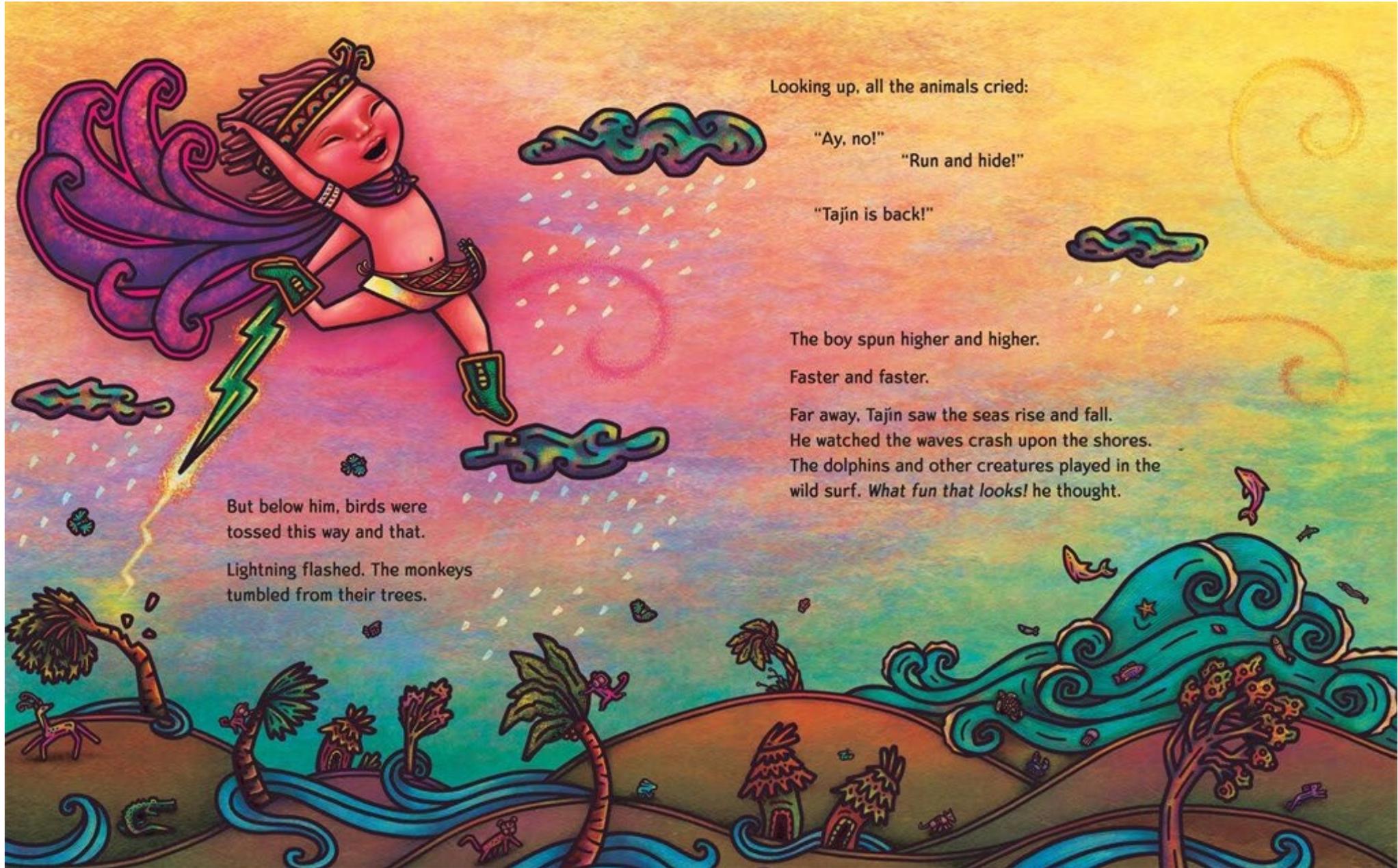
"Aha! The Thunderclouds are nearby."
Tajin ran outside to see them work.

They stomped their heavy boots.
The ground shook with thunder.



The Thunders waved their capes.
Wind whooshed across the land.

They waved their lightning bolts.
Lightning flashed across the sky.



Looking up, all the animals cried:

"Ay, no!"
"Run and hide!"

"Tajin is back!"

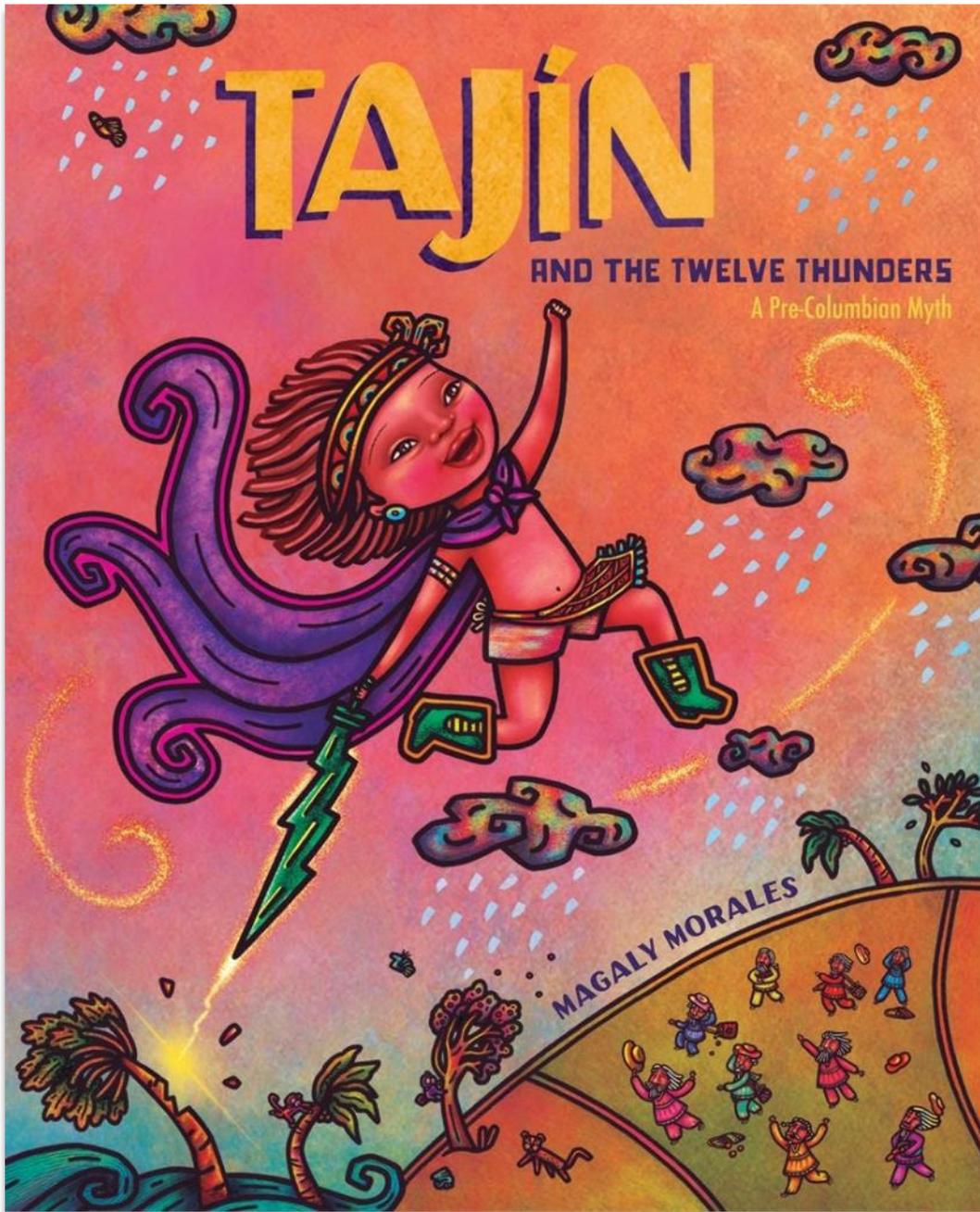
The boy spun higher and higher.

Faster and faster.

Far away, Tajin saw the seas rise and fall.
He watched the waves crash upon the shores.
The dolphins and other creatures played in the wild surf. *What fun that looks!* he thought.

But below him, birds were tossed this way and that.

Lightning flashed. The monkeys tumbled from their trees.



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Karthika
Nair
Joëlle
Jolivet

Electric
Birds
of Polkavudi

TATE



Electric Birds of Pothakudi

Karthika Nair

Inspired by a true story about a family of birds nesting in a village's streetlamp, this poetic picture book is a moving exploration of community, solidarity, ecology and the preservation of wildlife.

- Winner of the 2023 Prix Felipé for Ecological Children's Literature.
- Karuppu Raja dearly loves his small village of Pothakudi. He takes great pride in being responsible for its only source of light, switching the circuit breaker on every night to power the streetlamps. But one evening, he discovers a bird's nest buried deep inside the box.
- He's faced with a terrible dilemma: to turn the switch on and destroy the nest or to leave the village in darkness until the fledgelings are born.

AU \$21.99 | NZ \$24.99

9781849769167

48 Pages | Paperback

Ages 5 to 7

Fully illustrated

294 mm x 240 mm

Far away, tucked well inside the land of Tamil Nadu, near the pointy end of South India, lies a small village – no bigger than a freckle on the country’s belly-button – called Pothakudi.

Imagine a zigzag of huts and teensy houses in a huddle of streets. A village surrounded by miles of paddy fields, thickets with climbers and shrubs, sturdy banyans and sprightly palms, plantain, acacia, mango, guava trees, and more. A village almost swallowed by wave upon wave of sparkling green vegetation that extends, like the sea, to the edge of the horizon.



Is it a magical village?

Not at first glance. And while every place is special to those who live there, Pothakudi’s residents would probably use the word ordinary to describe their home!

Karuppu Raja dearly loved Pothakudi: all its one hundred and twenty thatched huts and cots, dusty streets, and its chattering, often excitable, people. And he knew that his village could be extraordinary, that appearances could truly be deceptive. Yet, even he would not have called it magical ...

Is Raja the king of the village? Aren't rajas kings?

Oh no, there are no kings in Pothakudi, thankfully. Raja is a kind young man, more sensible than many kings, yet far too modest for his own good. His parents are farmers. Raja is just his name — like your friend Bruce King: he’s not a king either, is he? Though the birds, if they were asked, might call Raja the Prince of Hope.

Even today, few of Pothakudi's houses have electricity. The villagers do all their work by the rays of the sun, and at night, they manage with the glow of streetlamps that spill light into their homes.

Now, all thirty-five streetlamps in the village are controlled by a single switchboard on a pole right outside Raja's home. And because he lived next door, Raja had been charged – ever since he was a teenager – with switching on the lamps at sundown and turning them off early next morning. It filled him with pride: the task of ensuring the village was safe at night, of bathing its streets in soft, amber light.

That evening, Raja walked, as usual, to the switchboard. As he raised an arm to pull the lever, he saw something peculiar inside the box. Something that froze his hand in mid-air ...

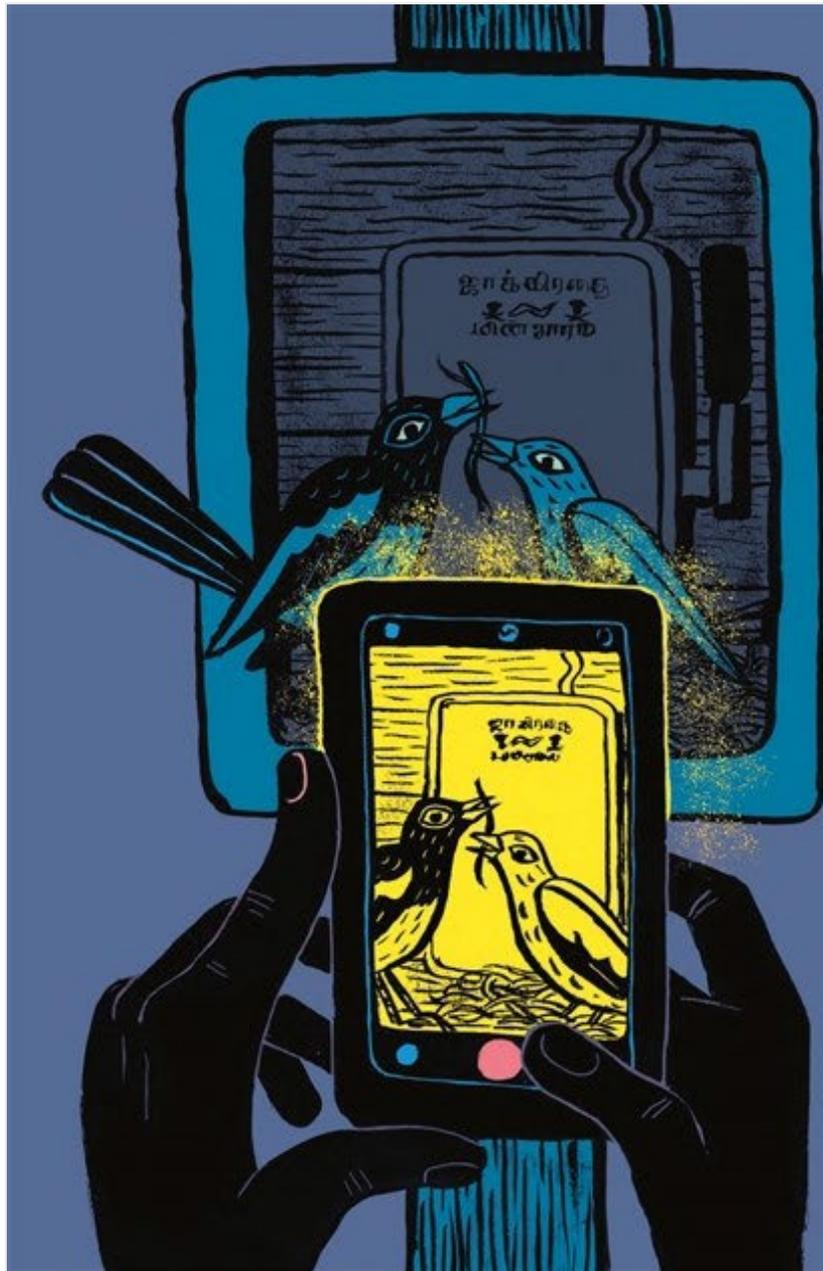


Even in the thin light of dusk, it was clearly visible: a vannathikuruvi.

A vanna-what?

A vann-aa-tthi-kou-rou-vi. It's a magpie-robin found in South Asia, cousin to the ones here: a type of songbird.

A female, Raja decided, spotting the gentle greyish-brown of her head and plumage, the faded ivory around her chest and belly. He and the bird locked glances, the gleaming black pupils of her eyes dancing wide in dread.



Raja stared at the switchboard for a long, long time, eyebrows crisscrossed in furious thought. Then, he plucked out his phone and took several photos, as best as he could with evening spreading around him, smudging the last rays of daylight.

Muttering a quick plea under his breath, Raja sent these photos to the villagers, complete with captions:

"Photos of Mrs. VK busy inside the nest."

"Mr. VK hovering at the entrance of the box."

These, he figured, should explain why he could not activate the streetlamps.



As Raja turned homeward, it struck him that people in homes without a mobile phone wouldn't know what had happened, and might panic at the strange blackout. Some of them might even go out to switch on the streetlamps themselves!

He thought of Salma, the aged mat-weaver whom everyone, even Raja's parents, called Salma Paati. She had become grandmother to the whole village.

Or Kannan Sir, his maths teacher in school, who still refused to use a mobile!

Salma Paati, though bent with age to half her original height, was hard at work, cleaning up after feeding the neighbourhood crows, who flocked to her place every evening. Nothing escaped her eyes: "Raja, son, what happened? Wait, get some food first into that tummy before you breathe a word!"

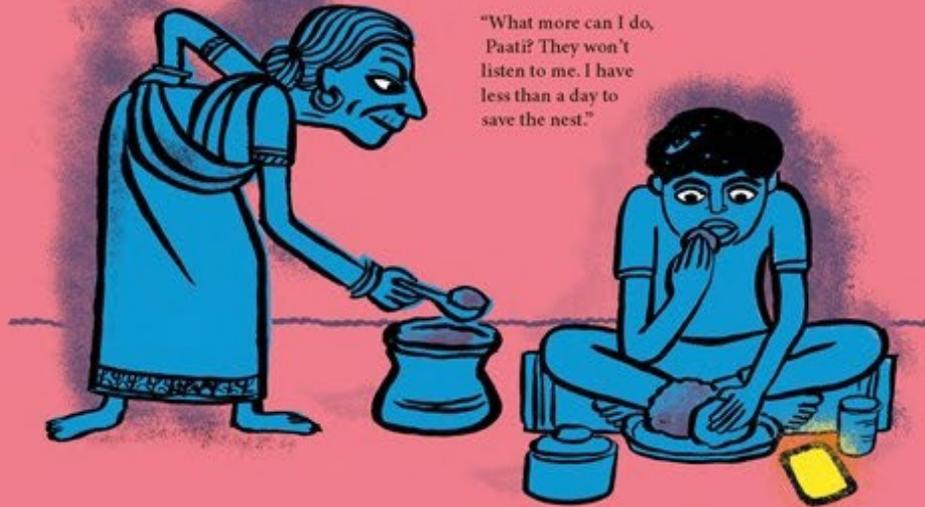
Tucking into the fish fry and mango pickle Salma Paati had doled out on a hillock of red rice, Raja cheered up, enough to pour out his evening's adventures. He had just finished when his phone trilled, the screen lighting up in warning. His heart sank again, right down into the pit of his stomach.



"Oh no, Deepa's appa has called a village meeting tomorrow afternoon to remove the nest!"

"Well, what will you do about it? Surely you can't let that grouch Sekar and his friends chase the poor birds out of their home, son!"

"What more can I do, Paati? They won't listen to me. I have less than a day to save the nest."



"You're a good lad, Raja. But not every battle can be fought alone. You've got friends in every home. Surely this thing you keep fussing over every minute can be useful for once, huh?" Salma Paati grinned wickedly with her three remaining teeth as she poked her ladle at his mobile phone.

When he still looked downcast, she chided, "Surely you can spend a few hours fighting for these birds, Raja. Don't forget: you come from the land of the great Vel Paari!"



Fired up by Salma Paati's mention of the legendarily compassionate king, Raja shot off a second set of messages, this time to all his cousins, friends, and collegemates in the village. He asked them to come with their younger relatives to the switchboard early next morning, right after sunrise.

What happened early next morning?

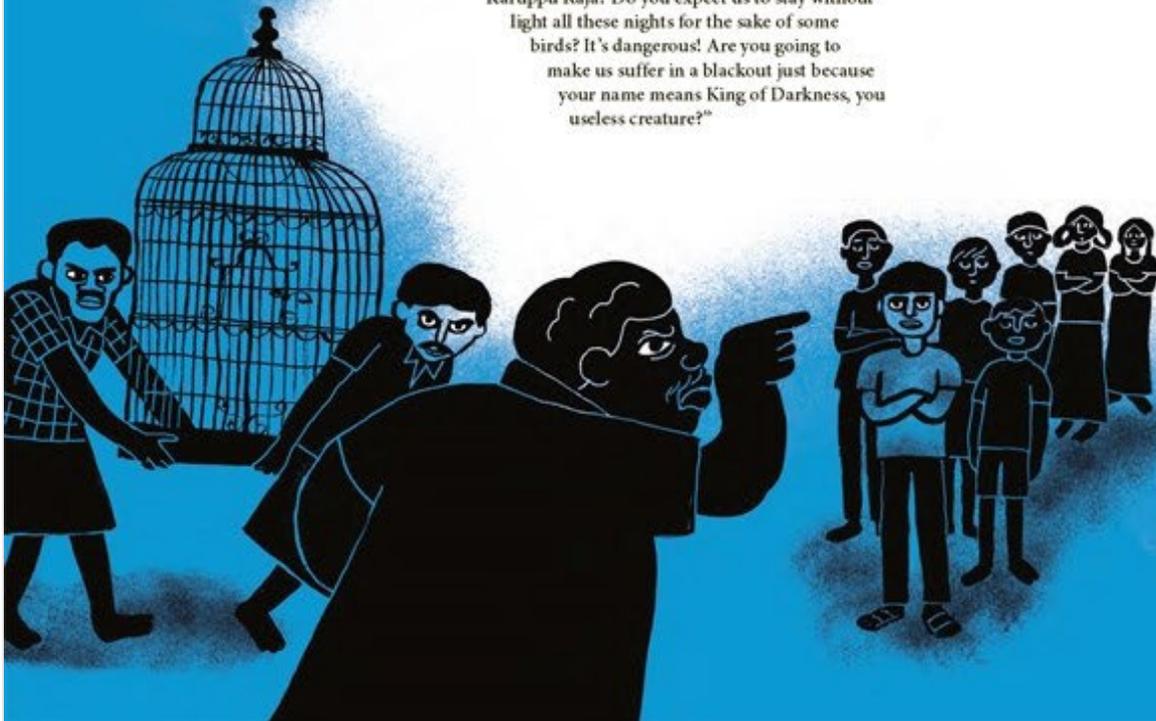
Ah, that's a mystery, Peanut. Nobody ever found out exactly what they discussed that morning. Only the switchboard - which was very good at keeping secrets - and Mr. and Mrs. VK, who were otherwise occupied, overheard the youth of the village.





When Sekar, Yovaan and Kareem, armed with a giant birdcage and followed by other grownups, arrived at the switchboard, they found dozens and dozens of youngsters already lined up. If they had looked up, they would have also seen the crows. Dozens and dozens of crows watching - unusually quiet - from lampposts, trees, the roofs of buildings, atop walls. Salma Paati alone noticed, and smiled to herself.

Sekar growled, "What's all this nonsense, Karuppu Raja? Do you expect us to stay without light all these nights for the sake of some birds? It's dangerous! Are you going to make us suffer in a blackout just because your name means King of Darkness, you useless creature?"

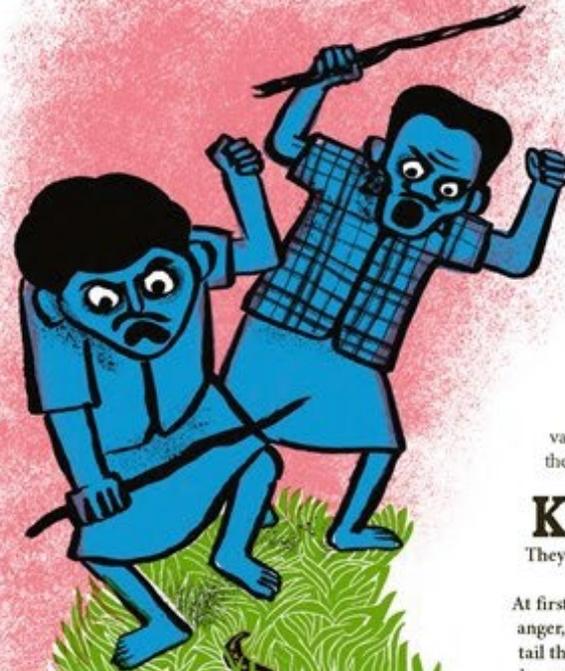


"When did you last hear birdsong in the village, Appa?" Deepa interrupted. "Not the crows' cawing, but hoopoe and koel?"

"Or the birds we saw as children not long ago: jacanas, tailorbirds. Sometimes, you'd wake me at dawn so we could watch peacocks dancing. Don't you miss them, Appa?"



And the surprises were not over ... The next evening Raja spotted a second egg in the nest. One more on the third day: smaller, yet perfect. At first light on the seventh morning, as Yovaan and Kareem were walking out to the fields, they heard an uproar by the switchboard. Rushing across, they found a cascade of crows in mid-air, cawing and screeching, and the VKs chirruping, panic-stricken, from the nest. A polished black-and-bronze question mark was slithering purposefully towards the switchboard. An eli pambu: an Indian rat snake. Swift and hungry. Mere inches away from the pole. Mr. and Mrs. VK were in immediate danger of becoming the rat snake's breakfast.



No, no, not a snake!

Rat snakes are harmless to humans. They are scared of us, Peanut!

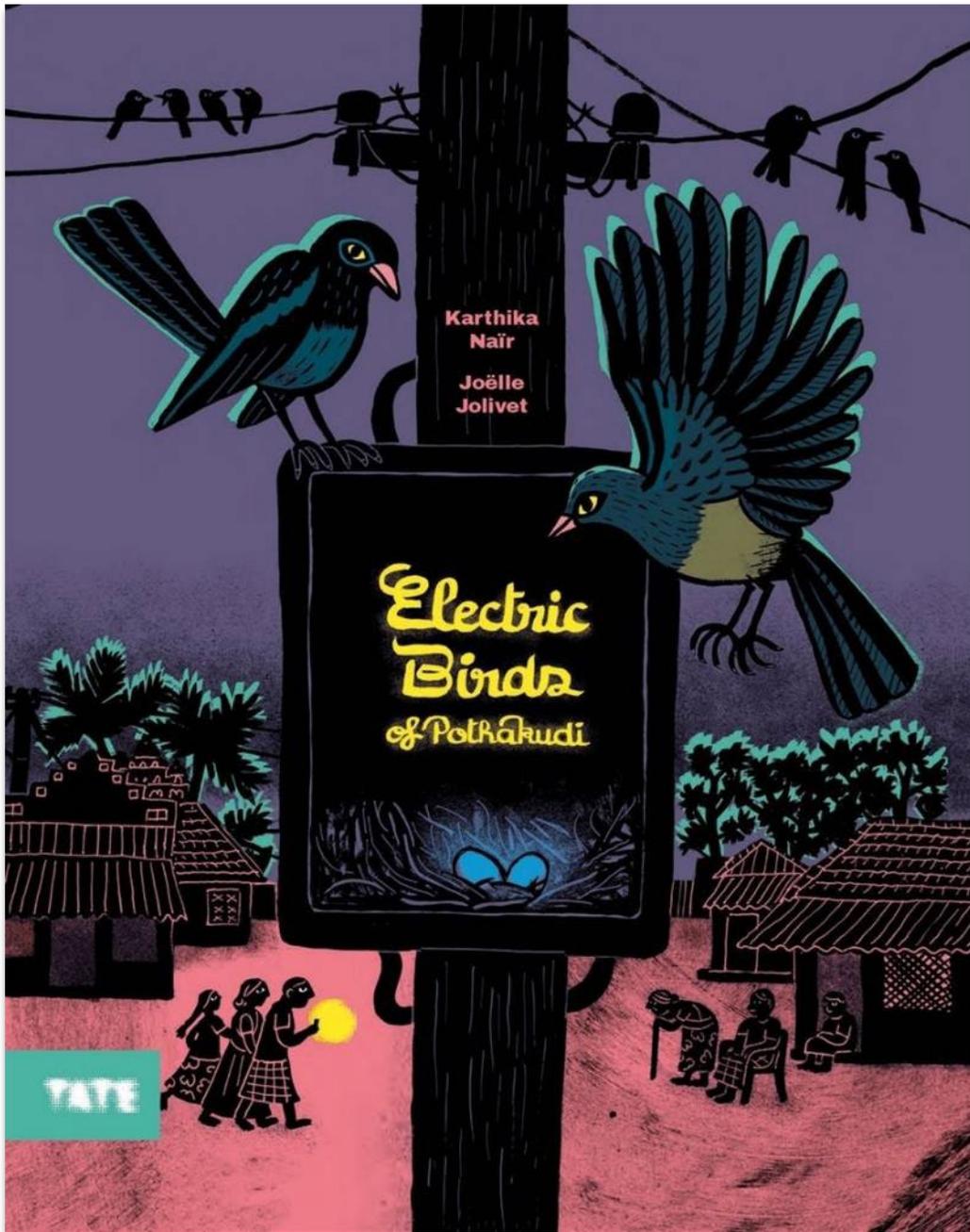
But they ... they eat birds?

If they can catch them. That's rare. This time, however, the vannathikuruvi couldn't fly away because they were protecting their eggs.

Kareem and Yovaan swung into action. They stamped their feet and hollered.

At first, the eli pambu raised its head in anger, forked tongue darting in and out, tail thrashing in warning. But when they banged their sticks hard on the ground and roared louder, it seemed to realise retreat was a wiser option. Within seconds it had vanished into the greenery.

Phew!



Electric Birds of Pothakudi

Karthika Nair

Inspired by a true story about a family of birds nesting in a village's streetlamp, this poetic picture book is a moving exploration of community, solidarity, ecology and the preservation of wildlife.

- Winner of the 2023 Prix Felipé for Ecological Children's Literature.
- Karuppu Raja dearly loves his small village of Pothakudi. He takes great pride in being responsible for its only source of light, switching the circuit breaker on every night to power the streetlamps. But one evening, he discovers a bird's nest buried deep inside the box.
- He's faced with a terrible dilemma: to turn the switch on and destroy the nest or to leave the village in darkness until the fledgelings are born.

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