



# Stars with Flaming Tails

Books Reviewed:

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Here is another excellent, varied collection from Valerie Bloom. The subjects are perhaps familiar enough in poetry for children. Family, friends and animals feature quite a lot, but the poet approaches each poem with rare empathy and often a sly humour that doesn't simply play to the gallery. Her images can be fun too. In the opening poem 'Welcome', I love the idea of a baby encountering an elderly relative as 'a wrinkled face [that] unwrapped empty gums above her?', as if a sweet might be coming rather than a toothless grin. There are sensuous poems that are filled with wonder at the beauty and variety of the world, and the poet also approaches more difficult subjects directly and subtly, and firmly within a child's experience. She is comfortable writing about how time 'creeps like a baby' when you are hungry and lunch is an hour away, yet flies like an arrow when you are with 'mates out at play'. And she is equally at home writing about the feelings of a child with separated parents, 'I only wish they could love me together', or a child soldier: 'the mortal enemy he hunts/ are members of his own family.' She has a playful side too. She clearly relished the poems in which she rehearses her repertory of short poetic forms (is that still required by the national curriculum?) including riddles that had me guessing and limericks that do what limericks should. In 'Names' she has great fun with words that have more than one meaning. It begins: 'There is no brim on the cap of my knee, / No keys for the locks in my hair' and goes on in the same vein for four stanzas and sixteen lines. Perhaps the tour-de-force of the collection is 'The Isle of Negatyves' in which we encounter all the monstrous attitudes that might dismay or belittle us - the Kantdos or the Incredulous ? and how we might combat them ? 'Mix certaynties with Iwontlissen?'. By far the most inventive and least po-faced exhortation to self-assertion that I have come across.

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