



Book Club Conversation Starters



About the book

A disappearance. An infatuation. *The Frog Prince* is an intriguing, multi-layered novel giving us a story, within a story, within a story.

Remember the kiss between the frog prince and the princess? What about the part where the princess angrily flings the frog against the wall? What was that about?

At an international school in France, the young teacher Cara writes her own version of the classic tale by the Brothers Grimm. Their fairy tale is nothing like Cara's relationship with David, but when Cara disappears, can the story help David unravel what has happened?

As for the various princesses and frogs in this intriguing multi-layered novel, will any live happily ever after?



About the author

James Norcliffe is an award-winning poet, educator, editor and author of books for adults and children.

He was the 2018 Creative New Zealand Randell Cottage Writing Fellow, the 2012 University of Otago College of Education Writer in Residence, the 2006 Fellow at Iowa University and the 2000 Robert Burns Fellow at Otago University.

His many awards include the inaugural Christchurch Press Literary Liaisons Honour Award for 'lasting contribution to literature in the South Island', the Lilian Ida Smith Award, the New Zealand Poetry Society's international competition, the Sir Julius Vogel Award for the best New Zealand fantasy novel, the NZ Post Junior Fiction Award and a number of Storylines Notable Book Awards.

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A note from the author for book clubs

The inspiration for *The Frog Prince* took place when I saw a copy of Jack Zipes' monumental translation of the collected stories of the Brothers Grimm (*The Complete Fairy Stories of the Brothers Grimm, translated and with an Introduction by Jack Zipes*). Because this looked like the real thing, not a version paraphrased for children, and because I remembered from childhood the wonderfully evocative illustrations of Arthur Rackham, I immediately bought the book.

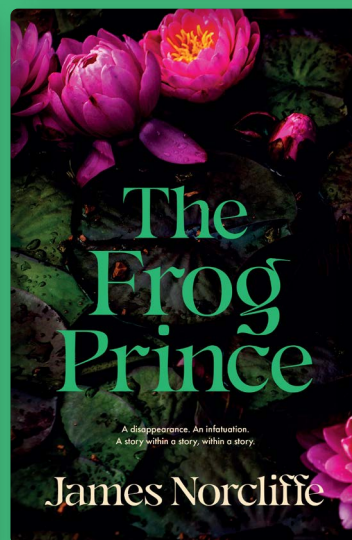
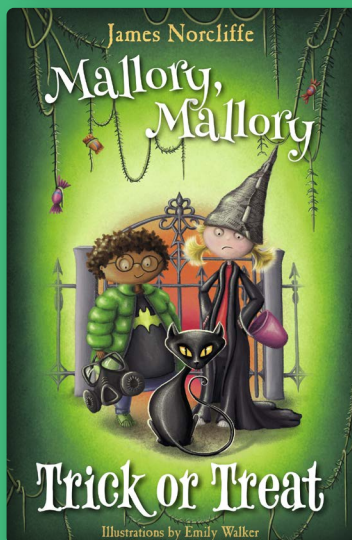
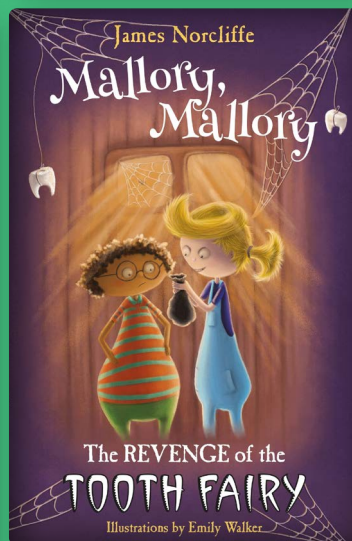
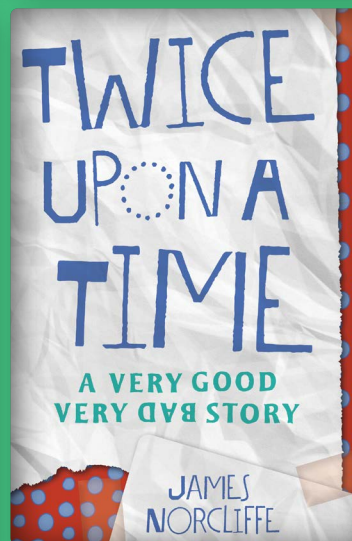
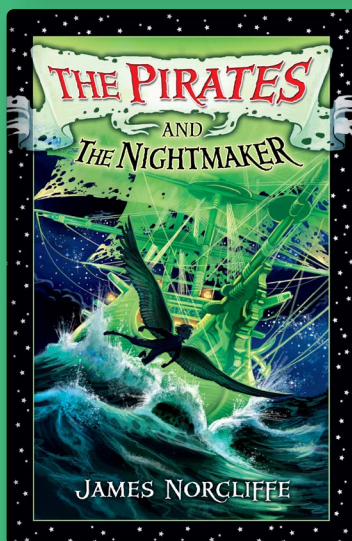
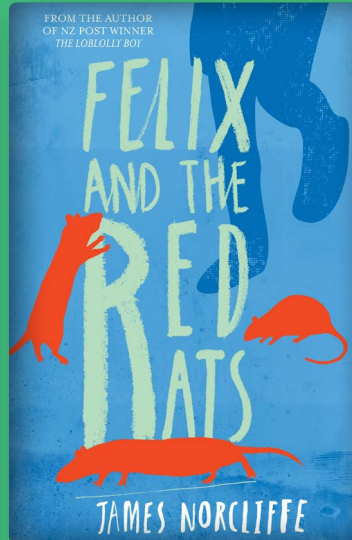
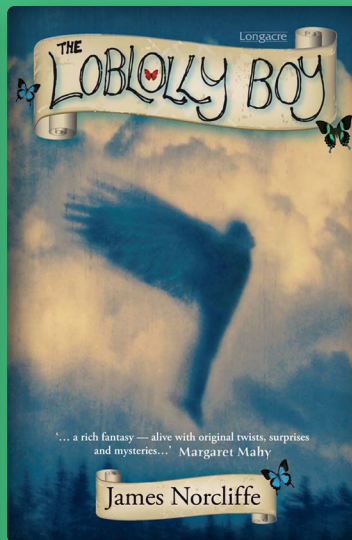
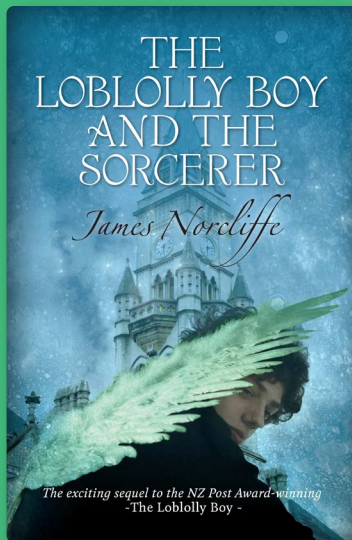
In keeping with the tradition of all collections of the tales, the book opens with the story 'The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich'. It is quite a brief tale — only four pages — and in many ways very odd in terms of character and structure. I wrote *The Frog Prince* to offer a possible explanation as to why the story came to be so strange. To this end, I invented the Heller sisters, typical of the women who were contributors of folk tales to the now famous brothers. In turn, the story within a story structure of my book fell into place when I invented a writer, a teacher of French, Cara Bernstein, who tells the story of the Heller sisters in her young-adult novel.

Cara's story and the Heller sisters' story are revealed in a dual narrative. I greatly enjoyed playing with this Russian doll-like structure and teasing out the see-saw unfolding of the stories, one with a contemporary setting, the other historical, set in Kassel, Germany in the early 19th century.

Conversation starters

- How many angles are there on the theme of storytelling?
- Fake news, #MeToo – how are these reflected in the novel?
- What is the novel saying about the reality of love stories in contrast to the tradition of love stories?
- Is the novel about love or infatuation?
- Many of the contemporary settings (Bonn, Arras, London, Sumner, although not Kassel) I have visited – do you find them any more real than Kassel in 1810, which clearly I have not been to?
- I have encountered a few Mirandas in my teaching career. What does she contribute to the novel? Does she make you laugh or cringe?
- How do the three story lines reflect and comment on each other?
- I have written a lot of poetry. Perhaps the most poetic elements in *The Frog Prince* are Helga's dreams. Are such dream sequences useful in terms of theme, character and atmosphere?
- One obvious symbol in the book is the forest. Did you note any other elements with symbolic suggestion?
- There are no heroes or heroines as in the classic fairy story. All characters are flawed. In what way does the novel subvert the idea of the romantic hero/heroine?
- What does the novel have to say about trust?
- How well, do you think, writing novels for children, could be a good preparation for writing a novel for adults?

Other books by James Norcliffe



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what you think!

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