

‘Hyperbole’, ‘harried’, ‘onomatopoeia’ – Colossal Words for Kids, by Colette Hiller and Tor Freeman, will have clever young tongues wagging

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/childrens-books/review-colossal-words-kids-colette-hiller-tor-freeman/>

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For parents looking for some discreetly educational bedtime reading, the author Colette Hiller and illustrator Tor Freeman have become something of a dream team. Their first collaboration, *The B on Your Thumb* (2020), was a collection of catchy rhymes, intended to help young readers spell: “Q met U / while in a queue / waiting for / a bus... ‘How I love U,’ / announced the Q... ‘I love Q too,’ / replied the U. / ‘I’ll be your queen forever.’”

Now the duo have come up with *Colossal Words for Kids*, a book designed to broaden children’s vocabulary. As Hiller explains in the introduction, “Your word is your wand”, and the right word is best: “Who’d ever want to say second to last when instead you could say... penultimate!” The purpose of the book is therefore to introduce us to 75 “tremendous” new words which can be incorporated into seven-to-12-year-olds’ everyday vocabulary. “After reading [the book] through, you’ll feel able to use the word. It’s a ready-to-use collection.”

Many of the words – “onomatopoeia”, “hyperbole”, “harried”, “hirsute” – would tax the average adult, let alone the target readership. But Hiller stresses that her books are intended not so much to teach literacy as to install a love of language, to which end all the words are defined in playful and exuberantly illustrated rhymes, specifically designed to engage a child’s imagination. The definition of “volatility”, for example, will resonate with any young reader who has survived the playground: “When somebody is volatile / their mood just switches, like a dial: / at first they’re nice, then suddenly / they’re as mean, as mean can be.”

Some of the rhymes address the classroom fundamentals. We learn, for example, about alliteration – “A group of grinning gremlins / is an excellent example. Sixty singing Santas / is another super sample” – and how to distinguish an adjective from a noun: “If adjectives were not allowed / things could not be straight or round.” And Hiller’s definition of “translucent” is likely to stay in young minds more easily than anything read in a science textbook: “Jelly is translucent. / Tracing paper too. / When something is translucent / just a bit of light comes through.”

A few words might strike readers as more “ready-to-use” than others. It’s hard to imagine, for example, that many seven-year-olds will make words such as “hirsute” part of their everyday vocabulary, however engaging the explanation that “Santa Claus is hirsute / with his flowing beard. / If Mrs Santa was hirsute / that might be slightly weird.” But if those children read Hiller’s poems, they’ll at very least know what the words mean – and in an age when dictionaries are being replaced by computerised spell-checking tools, such books are to be treasured.

Colossal Words for Kids is published by Frances Lincoln at £9.99. To order your copy, call 0808 196 6794 or visit [Telegraph Books](#)