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# Jammy Dodgers go Underground

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The Perkinski Brothers sounds like the name of a circus act and Jem, Ned and Billy posses some of the performer's skills: the patter to woo the most reluctant punter and the ability to disappear at short notice, when 'customers' turn sticky. This is just as well since their trade consists of blagging, begging and stealing whatever they can to survive in a Victorian London that owes little to antimacassars and lace and everything to thieves' dens and the violent world of the Fancy, the illegal boxing fraternity to which their Dad - aka Bert the Beast - belongs. Soon after the brothers try to con a crossing-sweeper, Clara, out of her pitch, they find them themselves on the wrong side of the law. An unsympathetic copper arrests them for vagrancy and they are thrown into the dreaded Strand Workhouse run by the monstrous Mr and Mrs Blood. Shortly afterwards Clara is sent to the same workhouse and the four children hatch a desperate plot to escape, but the only way out of the fortress-like building is through the stinking sewers of London, with the ever-present threat of flooding and lurking wildlife. The word 'rumbustious' could have been invented for this hugely enjoyable adventure with its gallery of grotesques and alternately grim and hilarious incidents. The exaggerated characters whether Gran Perkinski with her dubious crystal-gazing, Killer Kelly, Pa's boxing rival or Captain, the young king of the down-trodden crossing sweepers, are all richly and affectionately drawn. Quiet, plucky Clara adds a touch of Dickensian pathos. Bowering Sivers has enormous fun with her 'galopshus' vocabulary of Victorian slang, listed in a glossary for young readers in a story which is solidly based on research into the Victorian underworld. Upper Juniors will relish both the detail and the energetic sweep of the narrative. The 'Jammy Dodgers' titles are a welcome alternative to all the formulaic fictions, which are churned out to accompany curriculum Victorian studies.

Running Order:

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