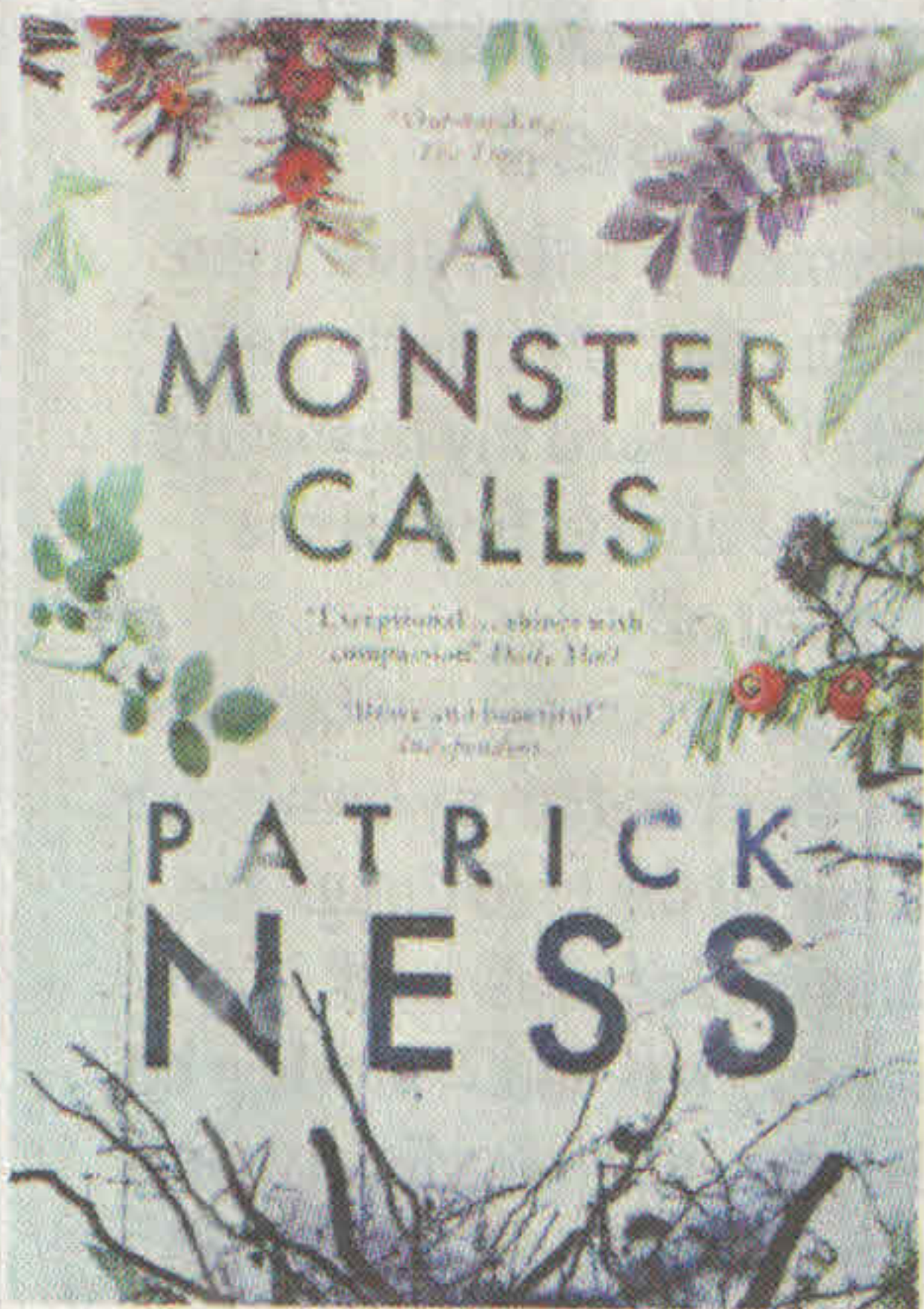




The Village School's Children's Book of the Month



'A Monster Calls' By Patrick Ness

**Book reviewed by
Myra Chapman,
4th-6th grade teacher**

"A Monster Calls," written by Patrick Ness, is a young adult book woven with deeply powerful emotions. The book's main character is Conor O'Malley, a young boy coming to grips with the gravity of his mother's illness. It is not a happy book but it pulls you in with dark humor and dares you to face the discomfort of difficult emotions.

At 13 Conor thinks he is too old to believe in monsters until the night a monster visits his room. The monster knows his name. But Conor isn't scared. In fact, he's a little disappointed. As the giant yew tree stands outside his window with a face made from branches it tells Conor it has come for him. It tells Conor that it has three stories to tell him, and then it expects Conor to tell it his own story. Conor has no idea what the monster wants, what his story is. But it keeps coming back. "It is a true story," the monster said. "Many things that are true feel like a cheat." As it shares its stories the monster reveals how the nature of emotion can be a monster in and of itself.

Conor's parents are divorced and he lives with his mother in England while his father lives in New York, with his new family. He and his mother have a close relationship; they are virtually inseparable. Ever since his mother got sick Conor has taken on the role of caretaker, tending to his own needs, as well as to hers.

Not only has his mother's illness changed their relationship; it has seeped into other aspects of his life. Each day on his way to school a trio of school bullies meets Conor. He welcomes this distraction and almost revels in the pain they inflict, as it distracts him from life at home and his worry over his mother's health. When the school principal tries to intervene and help him, Conor pushes her away; in fact he pushes away all the extra attention and sympathy people give him. Conor has even pushed away his former best friend, Lily, the daughter of his mother's friend. He blames her for telling everyone about his mom, for being the reason everyone looks at him differently.

"A Monster Calls" tackles difficult and important themes, including bullying and loss, and will not appeal to everyone. I recommend it for readers 12 and up who enjoy realistic fiction with a twist of fantasy.