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The 50 books every child should read



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Clockwise from top left: 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', 'Pinocchio', 'Emil and the Detectives', 'Swallows and Amazons', 'When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit', 'Carry On, Jeeves', 'The Tygrine Cat', 'The Hobbit'

Michael Gove says he wants 11-year-olds to read the equivalent of a book a week. So what should they be? We ask the experts

Education Secretary Michael Gove says that children aged 11 should be reading 50 books a year to improve literacy standards.

We asked three of Britain's leading children's authors and two of our in-house book experts to each pick 10 books, suitable for Year 7 students.

The authors chose books that have brought them huge joy, while expressing their outrage at the "great big contradiction" of Mr Gove's claim to wish to improve literacy while closing libraries across the country.

Michael Morpurgo said: "This target sounds like a neat solution, but the Government is depriving the massive number of children who don't read of the chance to discover books."

Mr Gove made his comments after observing a school in Harlem, New York, which sets pupils a "50-book challenge" over a year.

Philip Pullman

* Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll. Indispensable. The great classic beginning of English children's literature.

* Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi. What effortless invention looks like.

* Emil and the Detectives by Erich Kastner. A great political story: democracy in action.

* Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome. As clear and pure as Mozart.

* Black Hearts in Battersea by Joan Aiken. If Ransome was Mozart, Aiken was Rossini. Unforced effervescence.

* The Owl Service by Alan Garner. Showed how children's literature could sound dark and troubling chords.

* The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster. Superb wit and vigorous invention.

* Moominsummer Madness by Tove Jansson. Any of the Moomin books would supply the same strange light Nordic magic.

* A Hundred Million Francs by Paul Berna. A particular favourite of mine, as much for Richard Kennedy's delicate illustrations (in the English edition) as for the story.

* The Castafiore Emerald by Hergé. Three generations of this family have loved Tintin. Perfect timing, perfect narrative tact and command, blissfully funny.

Michael Morpurgo

* The Star of Kazan by Eva Ibbotson.

The heroine is blessed with such wonderful friends who help her through the twists and turns of this incredible journey.

* A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. The first few pages were so engaging, Marley's ghostly face on the knocker of Scrooge's door still gives me the shivers.

* Just William books by Richmal Crompton. These are a must for every child.

* The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde. This was the first story, I think, that ever made me cry and it still has the power to make me cry.

* *The Elephant's Child* From *The Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling. The story my mother used to read me most often, because I asked for it again and again. I loved the sheer fun of it, the music and the rhythm of the words. It was subversive too. Still my favourite story.

* *Treasure Island* by R.L. Stevenson This was the first real book I read for myself. I lived this book as I read it.

* *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. A classic tale of man versus nature. I wish I'd written this.

* *The Man Who Planted Trees* by Jean Giono. A book for children from 8 to 80. I love the humanity of this story and how one man's efforts can change the future for so many.

* *The Singing Tree* by Kate Seredy The story of two children who go to find their father who has been listed missing in the trenches of the First World War.

* *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson-Burnett. I love this story of a girl's life being changed by nature.

Katy Guest, literary editor for *The Independent on Sunday*

* *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah. Story of a young Ethiopian boy, whose parents abandon him in London to save his life.

* *Finn Family Moomintroll* (and the other Moomin books) by Tove Jansson.

A fantasy series for small children that introduces bigger ones to ideas of adventure, dealing with fear, understanding character and tolerating difference.

* *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney. It's rude, it's funny and it will chime with every 11-year-old who's ever started a new school.

* *I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith. Written for a teenage audience but fun at any age.

* *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien. Be warned, these tales of hobbits, elves and Middle Earth are dangerously addictive.

* *The Tygrine Cat* (and *The Tygrine Cat on the Run*) by Inbali Iserles. If your parents keep going on at you to read *Tarka the Otter*, *The Sheep-Pig* and other animal fantasies, do – they're great books – also try Iserles' stories about a cat seeking his destiny.

* *Carry On, Jeeves* by PG Wodehouse. A grown-up book – but not that grown-up.

* *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* by Judith Kerr. Judith Kerr's semi-autobiographical story of a family fleeing the Nazis in 1933.

* *Moving Pictures* by Terry Pratchett. Elaborate mythological imagery and a background based in real science. If you like this, the *Discworld* series offers plenty more.

* *The Story of Tracy Beaker* by Jacqueline Wilson. The pinnacle of the wonderful Jacqueline Wilson's brilliant and enormous output.

John Walsh, author and *Independent* columnist

* *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Irresistible puzzle-solving tales of the chilly Victorian master-sleuth and his dim medical sidekick.

* *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. Age-transcending tale, both funny and sad.

* *Mistress Masham's Repose* by TH White. Magical story of 10-year-old Maria, living in a derelict stately home, shy, lonely and under threat from both her governess and her rascally guardian.

* *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Inexplicably evergreen, trend and taste-defying 1868 classic.

* *How to be Topp* by Geoffrey Willams and Ronald Searle. Side-splitting satire on skool, oiks, teachers, fules, bulies, swots.

* *Stormbreaker* by Anthony Horowitz. First of the action-packed adventures with 14-year-old Alex Rider.

* *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo. "Dulce et Decorum Est" for pre-teens.

* *Artemis Fowl* by Eoin Colfer. Lively, amoral, wildly imaginative debut (six more followed) about the money-grabbing master-criminal Artemis, 12. The author called it "Die Hard with fairies".

* *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier. Inspiring wartime story of the Balicki family in Warsaw.

* *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Smart 11-year-olds won't need any pre-knowledge of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and 1917 to appreciate this brilliantly-told fable.

Michael Rosen

* *Skellig* by David Almond. Brings magical realism to working-class North-east England.

* *Red Cherry Red* by Jackie Kay. A book of poems that reaches deep into our hidden thoughts but also talks in a joyous voice exploring the everyday.

* *Talkin Turkeys* by Benjamin Zephaniah. A book of poems that demands to be read aloud, performed and thought about.

* *Greek myths* by Geraldine McCaughrean. Superheroes battle with demons, gods intervene in our pleasures and fears – a bit like the spectres in our minds going through daily life, really – beautifully retold here.

* *People Might Hear You* by Robin Klein. A profound, suspenseful story about sects, freedom and the rights of all young people – especially girls.

* *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman. A book that dared to go where no one thought you could with young audiences because it raises tough stuff to do with race.

* *Einstein's Underpants and How They Saved the World* by Anthony McGowan. A crazy adventure set amongst the kids you don't want to know but who this book makes you really, really care about.

* *After the First Death* by Robert Cormier. Cormier is never afraid of handling how the personal meets the political all within the framework of a thriller.

* *The London Eye Mystery* by Siobhan Dowd. A book that allows difference to be part of the plot and not a point in itself.

* *Beano Annual*. A cornucopia of nutty, bad, silly ideas, tricks, situations and plots.