

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 60 groups in over 45 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.



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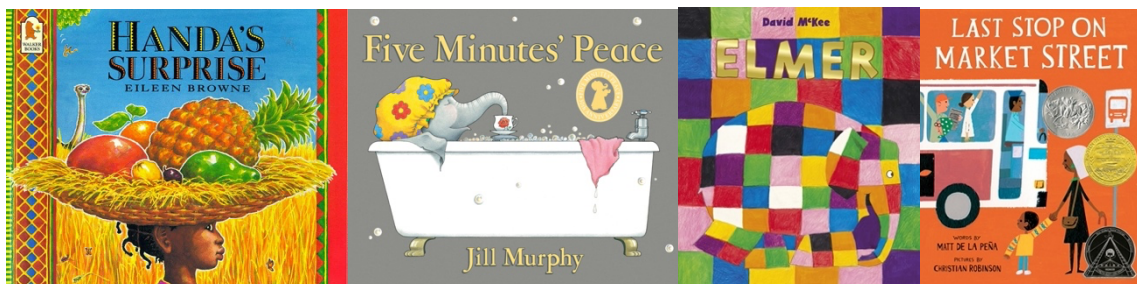
Finding a Good Read: Children's books you should read as an adult

A regular column to help you find a good read.

Children's books are far from just simple storylines and pretty pictures, they carry messages we as adults still have trouble understanding. Re-reading children's classics as an adult was partly for the nostalgia but has also given me a greater appreciation for the authors and illustrators. The way they grapple with difficult topics and express them with such ease and simplicity to a young audience is an incredible skill. Whilst many titles I'm about to encourage you pick up and read are childhood favourites, there are some more recently published titles which I hope stay as timeless as my ones have for me.

Picture books

A display of children's picture books is such an appealing sight. In this category we'll start with ***Handa's Surprise*** by Eileen Browne, a wonderful tale about Handa and her basket of fruit. Along the way to visit her friend, various animals steal each a piece of fruit until she's eventually left with nothing. Beautifully illustrated and one to make your mouth water. The Large Family books in particular ***Five Minutes Peace*** and ***A Piece of Cake*** by Jill Murphy are classics. The glorious matriarch Mrs Large and the boisterous children are relatable for both kids and parents. Judith Kerr and her legendary ***The Tiger Who Came to Tea*** is about a young girl, her mother and the imposing anthropomorphic tiger who installs himself in their home eating and drinking everything. Kerr spent much of her childhood in Berlin before the Third Reich. The tiger could symbolise the Nazi's and their disruptive and dominant presence, taking everything from the young girl. A prime example of teaching children about a complex subject.

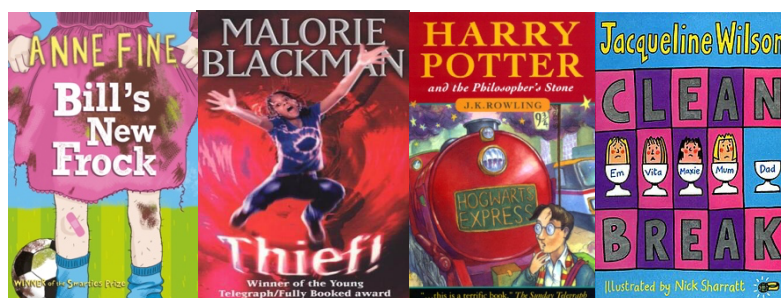


Moving into the 21st century, ***Milo Imagines the World*** by Matt de la Peña raises the topic of parental imprisonment. Having a parent in prison is tough to live through or talk about and is rarely a subject for children's books. Another title from the same author ***Last Stop on Market Street*** deals with inequity, CJ wonders why they always take the bus, why they don't have a car and why they always make this journey. As the reader makes the bus journey with CJ, he learns to appreciate his surroundings and what he has rather than wanting what others have.

Last but not least is ***Elmer the Elephant*** by David McKee. Not only is it's multicoloured front cover iconic, it's moral message is one for all ages. Everyone has something that sets them apart from others. Let that part of you shine, be proud and don't hide it in shame because it's different.

Early Chapter Books

Reading aloud is associated with childhood, but it shouldn't stop there. Whether you are the reader or listener, reading aloud is a shared experience whatever your age. ***Bills New Frock*** by Anne Fine concerns a young boy who wakes up one morning as a girl. The book has since been used to challenge gender stereotypes in primary schools. ***Quirky Tails*** by Paul Jennings was the ultimate crowd pleaser during story time at my school, short stories about tennis playing toads, what happens if you make a copy of yourself and a real life Santa ClaWs. They were wacky but got our brains churning. ***Thief!*** by Malorie Blackman is the story of 12 year old Lydia who is accused of being stealing. She runs away onto the moors and is flung into the future, a great introduction to the fantasy genre. ***The Queens Nose*** by Dick King Smith tells the story of Harmony, who finds a magical 50p which grants wishes everytime you rub the queen's nose. A great lesson in the 'be careful what you wish for' realm. Last in this category, ***The Firework Makers Daughter*** by Philip Pullman features a strong female lead which is possibly why I was so drawn to it, not many books did at that age. Lila wants to be a firework maker but first must make a dangerous journey to prove herself. These stories helped me understand topics without having to experience it myself. They helped me make sense of the world around me.



Children's or adults?

Here is where the lines between children's and adults books begin to blur. The ***Harry Potter*** series by J K Rowling for example, a classic children's story but one that is a hit with adults too. Brilliant if you are not the biggest fantasy fan, and the plot is so rich with detail. Their appeal to an older audience is in the depth of conversation between the young pupils of Hogwarts and their professors. The conversations deal with deep subjects, life and death, love but framed in a child's narrative.

Jacqueline Wilson was also a staple author of my childhood and is still going strong. ***The Suitcase Kid***, ***Lola Rose***, ***Clean Break*** and ***Best Friends*** explore divorce, domestic violence, illness and losing your best friend – to Scotland. Jacqueline Wilson made you feel like you weren't treated like a child, like you were old enough and trusted to deal with these topics and understand them. More recently ***Wonder*** by R J Palacio is a coming of age story about August 'Auggie' Pullman a 10 year old boy with Treacher Collins Syndrome and his journey starting mainstream school. A strong lesson for children and adults about acceptance and compassion.

Children's books should be treasured by adults. They're there when the idea of a novel can feel too weighty, they lift your mood and they let us make sense of the world without thinking too much. They are a place of mental release.

Note: your library may not have all of these titles or even any of them, but it's sure to have some of the authors mentioned. So if you like the sound of any of the books mentioned, just include 'or any other books by ...' on your request app.

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