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Finding a Good Read: Siblings

A regular column to help you find a good read.

Relationships between brothers and sisters can be very different: intense closeness and loyalty or fierce rivalry and hatred. They are at the heart of many creation stories in Greek and Roman mythology, including Zeus and his Olympian siblings, not least Hera who was both sister and wife. Great modern re-tellings include Stephen Fry's **Mythos** and Jessie Burton's **Medusa**. Or try **Anansi Boys**, the second book in Neil Gaiman's American Gods series:

'Fat Charlie Nancy's normal life ended the moment his father dropped dead on a Florida karaoke stage. Charlie didn't know his dad was a god. And he never knew he had a brother. Now brother Spider's on his doorstep -- about to make Fat Charlie's life more interesting... and a lot more dangerous.'

The power of sibling love and hatred has driven the plots of plays from ancient Greece to modern day. In Sophocles' **Antigone**, the heroine defies all the power of the state to give proper burial to her brother, defiance for which she is sentenced to be buried alive. Shakespeare's plays are full of sibling bonds, from the loving brother/sister twins of **Twelfth Night** to the murderous rivalries of brothers and sisters in **King Lear**.



And siblings are central characters in many novels, often used to explore the power and danger of family closeness.

Sibling relationships may be close and protective as with brother and sister Jem and Scout in **To Kill a Mockingbird**. But they can also be poisonous. Barry Hines' **A Kestrel for a Knave** is about a young boy who tries to escape his troubled home life and his vicious older brother by befriending and training a kestrel.

Love and loyalty may lead to sibling sacrifice as in the fantasy series **The Hunger Games** in which Katniss Everdeen volunteers to replace her younger sister in the 'kill or be killed' reality TV show of a future society with unsettling parallels to our own.

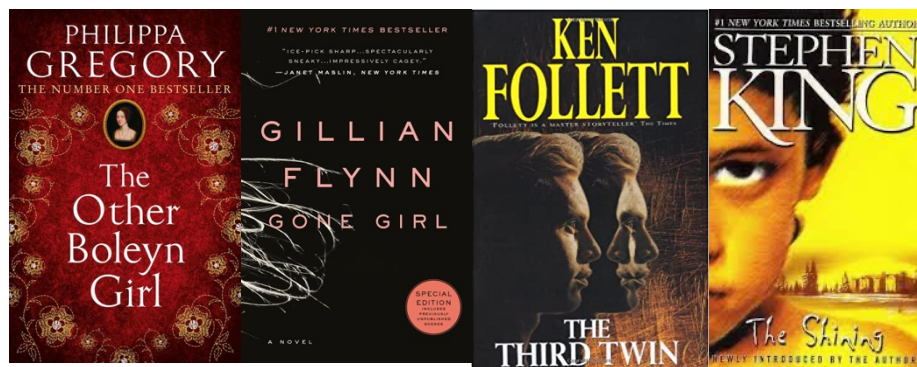
Jodi Picoult's **My Sister's Keeper** explores the experience of 13-year old Anna, who was conceived to provide vital bone marrow for her older sister. But when she is told her sister needs a new kidney, Anna and the reader begin to question the limits of a sister's obligations.

Sibling bonds may be both comic and troubling. Patrick de Witt's **The Sisters Brothers** centres on Eli and Charlie Sisters, brothers bound by blood, violence and loyalty and the novel brilliantly captures the humour, melancholy and grit of their life together in the American West of the 1850s.

Rebecca Wait's **I'm Sorry You Feel That Way** is a novel about toxic mothers, absent fathers, angry sisters and enraging brothers. It manages to be both whip-smart funny and very insightful about family dynamics and mental health.

If you like historical settings, try **The Other Boleyn Girl**, a novel about real sisters Anne and Mary Boleyn and their competing attempts to snare King Henry VIII. Or **Hamnet**, a book that imagines the lives of Shakespeare's wife and his twin children Judith and Hamnet.

Larger issues of culture and politics may also be explored through siblings. **The Vanishing Half** explores the different paths taken by black twin sisters born in the Deep South of the 1950s. One sister stays, the other moves away and secretly passes as white, her origins unknown even to her white husband.



The Fishermen by Chigozie Obioma revolves around four brothers in a small town in western Nigeria. On a fishing trip together they encounter a local madman who predicts that the oldest of them will be killed by one of the others. The novel is rooted in traditions of African storytelling but also explores the clash of cultures between Africa and Europe.

Crime thrillers are full of siblings. Check out Raymond Chandler's **The Big Sleep** or Gillian Flynn's runaway bestseller **Gone Girl**.

On a lighter note, **My Sister the Serial Killer** by Oyinkan Braithwaite is set in Lagos and is about how blood is thicker – and more difficult to get out of the carpet – than water.

The Third Twin is as twisty as the title suggests, described by one critic as 'a heart-stopping, spine tingling story from master of suspense, Ken Follett.'

And no discussion of siblings in fiction would be complete without the creepy twins in the film version of Stephen King's horror classic **The Shining**.

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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