

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: Retellings

A regular column to help you find a good read.

One of the most popular book genres in recent years is retellings. More authors are re-writing their favourite titles to offer readers something fresh and exciting.

Love in Colour: Mythical Tales from Around the World by Bolu Babalola is a varied collection of short stories containing folktales from West African, Middle Eastern, and Greek cultures. The iconic figures in each story are skilfully modernised by the author, such as the queen of the 18th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt. Although historically known for her religious worshipping alongside her husband, in this retelling Bolu manages to shift the focus of Nefertiti's life.

Greek and Roman retellings include: ***Ariadne*** by Jennifer Saint, a retelling of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, but this time from the perspective of Ariadne. ***Piranesi*** by Susanna Clarke, based on the Greek maze The Labyrinth, but replaced with a house containing an ocean and a hidden world. And lastly, ***A Thousand Ships*** by Natalie Haynes, which unlike the original that focuses on the greatness and conquests of men, instead concentrates on the presence of goddesses such as Aphrodite and Calliope in The Trojan War.



Other frequently reviewed and recommended titles are ***Galatea***, ***The Song of Achilles***, and ***Circe*** by American novelist Madeline Miller. In Miller's retelling, Galatea is portrayed as a controlled and abused woman desperate for freedom, as opposed to her traditional characterisation as weak and obedient. The Song of Achilles retells The Iliad with an emphasis on the romantic bond of Achilles and Patroclus and how their love impacts on the outcome of The Trojan War. Miller's sequel Circe retells The Odyssey in such a way that the reader does not experience a short encounter with Circe like they do in the original poem, but rather an in-depth insight into Circe's lonely childhood, the birth of her powers, and the men she turns into pigs.

If your preference is mythology: consider ***Medusa*** by Jessie Burton. By re-introducing Medusa to a new generation of readers, Burton highlights the true story of Athena's curse. Medusa is then able to transform from a 'hideous monster with venomous snakes for hair' into a powerful feminist icon.

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Fairytale retellings include: ***To Kill a Kingdom*** by Alexandra Christo, retold from A Little Mermaid. In this dark fantasy 'Lira' aka Ariel, is transformed from Disney princess to lethal siren who literally collects the hearts of different princes. ***A Court of Thorns and Roses*** by Sarah J. Maas, began as a retelling of Beauty and The Beast. In this mature adaptation of the original fable, the beauty (Feyre) is a huntress, and the beast (Tamlin) is a shape-shifting Farie lord. Glittering survival fantasy filled with forests and country magic; ***Spinning Silver*** by Naomi Novik is a loose retelling of Rumpelstiltskin. You will recognise certain elements from the original such as turning things into gold, but here the author creatively introduces different characters and new plot lines. The story is also made more complex and weaves the narrative of how the rich and powerful exploit the poor and vulnerable.



For modern versions of classic literature, try ***Fragile*** by Sarah Hilary, a fresh take on Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier. Whilst *Fragile* keeps the Gothic themes of Rebecca and maintains similar tropes, it is nevertheless a unique standalone psychological thriller. Other notable mentions include: ***The March Sisters*** series by Virginia Kantra, inspired by Louisa May Alcott's timeless masterpiece Little Women. And secondly, ***These Violent Delights*** by Chloe Gong, a remix of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet set in 1920's Shanghai and follows a new blood feud between rivals The White Flowers and The Scarlet Gang. One of the only options for a modern retelling of the 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is ***Great*** by Sara Benincasa. The book is set apart from the original due to the amped-up drama and added romantic twist.

It's easy to see why some the bestselling books are retellings. Through the reimagining of characters and worlds, writers can provide new perspectives on tales steeped in history. Most impressively though, is how authors merge the past and the present to keep the most beloved stories alive for years to come.

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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