

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.



First featured in Inside Time in December 2023

Christmas

A regular column to help you find a good read.

Christmas is timeless and so are the best Christmas books. So here's a selection of winners that first appeared in Inside Time 2021

CHRISTMAS BOOKS

Let's start with the most famous one of all. Whether you know it as told by Charles Dickens or the Muppets, it's got to be **A Christmas Carol**. The story of Ebenezer Scrooge, the most miserable miserly man on the planet until he is visited one Christmas Eve by three spirits: the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. As they turn the clock back on Scrooge's own life and reveal the shadow of what's to come, he begins to understand the true meaning of Christmas.

Ghost stories at Christmas

Ebenezer Scrooge wasn't the first fictional character to see ghosts around Christmas time. As one writer puts it:

'The tradition of holiday ghost stories goes much, much farther back—farther, perhaps, than Christmas itself. When the night grows long and the year is growing to a close, it's only natural that people feel an instinct to gather together. At the edge of the year, it also makes sense to think about people and places that are no longer with us.'

Thus, the Christmas ghost story. Its origins have little to do with the kind of commercial Christmas we've celebrated since the Victorian age. They're about darker, older, more fundamental things: winter, death, rebirth.'

For top-notch chills and scarier than the blood and guts of horror, try some of these authors and titles:

M R James, especially his brilliant story '**Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad**'

Susan Hill, **The Woman in Black**

Michelle Paver, **Dark Matter**

Emma Stonex, **The Lamplighters**

Shirley Jackson, **The Haunting of Hill House**

Henry James, **The Turn of the Screw**

Charles Dickens especially '**The Signalman**'



Crime at Christmas

It may seem an unlikely pairing but Peter Swanson made a powerful case in the Guardian last year: *'I'd say that Christmas and crime are not such strange bedfellows. For one thing, Christmas is that time of year during which families are thrown together in close proximity, often in overly warm houses with bad weather threatening outside. The liquor flows, and dusk arrives early. Sounds like an occasion for murder to me.'*

Classics include P D James, *The Mistletoe Murder and Other Stories* (or anything else by her), Agatha Christie, *Hercule Poirot's Christmas* or *Midwinter Murder* or story collections like Cecily Gayford (ed), *Murder Under the Christmas Tree*.

More recent titles:

James Patterson, ***Merry Christmas Alex Cross***

Three different cases that interrupt Alex's family Christmas: a small incident in a church; a domestic hostage situation in the suburbs; and a terrorist attack in Washington DC.

Tammy Cohen, ***Dying for Christmas***

A novel full of twists, surprising turns, and suspense, *Dying for Christmas* is Tammy Cohen's most disturbing psychological thriller yet.

Louise Penny, ***A Fatal Grace***

Welcome to winter in Three Pines, a picturesque village in Quebec, where the villagers are preparing for a traditional country Christmas, and someone is preparing for murder. As a bitter wind blows into the village, something even more chilling is coming.

Also : James Ellroy, ***Perfidia***, Lee Child, ***The Christmas Scorpion***, George Pelecanos, ***Nick's Trip***, R D Wingfield, ***Frost at Christmas***, Michael Connolly, ***Angle of Investigation***, Colin Dexter, ***A Very Murderous Christmas***, J D Robb, ***Festive in Death***



Christmas books for kids

Do you remember Christmas stories you heard or read as a child? There are some great ones around, old and new. If you have kids, encourage whoever's looking after them to check out the library or local bookshop for titles. Reading is a great way to get excited about Christmas – AND books!

Dr Seuss, ***How the Grinch Stole Christmas***

Tim Thornborough, ***A Very Noisy Christmas***

Mary Hoffman, ***Grace at Christmas***

Chris van Allsburg, ***The Polar Express***

Tim Burton, ***The Nightmare Before Christmas***

Michael Morpurgo, ***The Snowman***

Orlando Weeks, ***The Gritterman***

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. *If you've read a good book recently send a review in no more than 100 words and mark it 'Finding a Good Read'. We'll print the best ones. And if you have suggestions for other city settings, let us know and we'll search out some titles.*