

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 91 groups in over 70 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.



First featured in Inside Time in July 2024

Finding a Good Read: Greece

A regular column to help you find a good read.

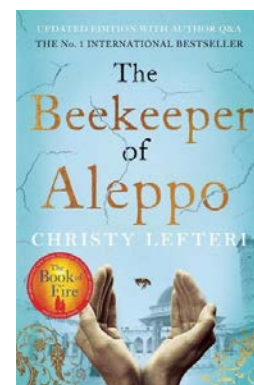
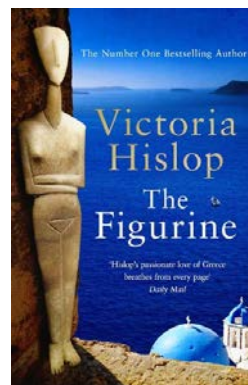
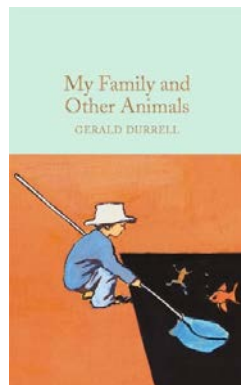
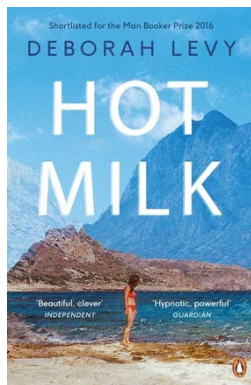
2024 marks 25 years of Mamma Mia's original production, only the third musical in West End's history to reach this landmark. With this in mind, and summer befalling us, it seems an appropriate time to discuss the many excellent novels based in, or centred on, Greece.

Modern classic, *My Family and Other Animals*, is Gerald Durrell's delightful autobiography, detailing his childhood relocation from dreary England to sunny Corfu in the 1930s. Being a naturalist, the author embraces the immense natural history of the Greek island throughout his book.

Deborah Levy's dreamlike writing in *Hot Milk* also celebrates the gorgeous Spanish and Greek settings she describes. Protagonist, Sofia, whose name derives from the Greek word for wisdom, is on a quest for self-discovery, as well as a cure for her mother's paralysis. Sofia's life is eerily tied to that of the mythical monster, Medusa, a female character punished for her femininity.

In a similarly introspective novel, *The Figurine* by Victoria Hislop, we meet Helena as she finds a collection of priceless artefacts in Athens, in her late-grandparent's apartment. Helena seeks answers to the price her ruthless grandfather, a general of Greece's brutal military dictatorship, paid for these valuable antiquities, whilst wrestling with what the idea of 'home' means to her.

Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* follows Syrian couple, Nuri and Afra, as they are ripped from their peaceful life, to a refugee centre in Athens. The author, daughter of Cypriot refugees, bases this story on her volunteering experience in Greece. This novel is heartbreaking and demonstrates the strength of human spirit.

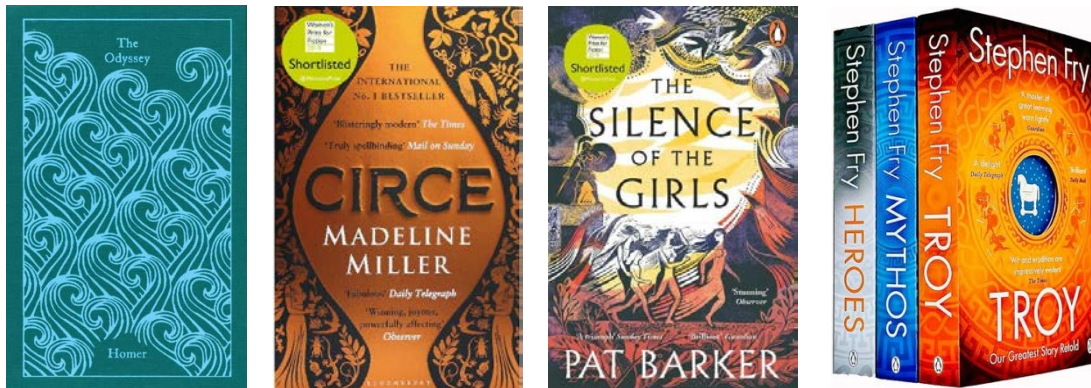


Ancient Greek literature is expansive and timeless. *The Odyssey* by Homer is the oldest surviving record of Classic verse. This tale follows Odysseus on his ten-year voyage home after the Trojan War, as he faces various natural and supernatural obstacles.

Retellings of Ancient Greek mythology have become popular in recent years; in *The Silence of the Girls*, Pat Barker reimagines the Trojan War through the perspective of the previously voiceless women in the story. Queen Brisies's life is turned upside down when she is enslaved and bestowed upon demigod Achilles as a war prize, an experience echoed by many women throughout her society. Barker's sequel, *The Women of Troy*, is also a bestseller.

Another feminist retelling, **Circe**, Madeline Miller's sequel to bestselling novel, **The Song of Achilles**, reinvents The Odyssey through the eyes of a sorceress. Circe grapples with whether she belongs with the Gods she is related to, or the humans she has grown to love.

Famous UK actor and comedian, Stephen Fry, has also tried his hand at Ancient Greek retellings with his successful **Great Mythology** series: **Mythos**, **Heroes** and **Troy**. Fry rewrites many of his favourite Greek myths, imbued with his typical sense of humour, as well as references to pop culture, music and contemporary literature.



Many children and young adult books are also based on Ancient Greek myths. Instead of rewriting these stories through the lens of existing female characters, in **Gender Swapped Greek Myths**, Jonathan Plackett simply swaps the genders of the protagonists. We are encouraged to question why strength and brutality tends to only be reserved for male characters in literature.

Rick Riordan's incredibly popular children's fantasy series, **Percy Jackson and the Olympian**, follows the adventures of 12-year-old semi-god Percy and his friends, as they reason with the Greek gods and battle mythological beasts. The series was adapted into two films in the 2010s, which performed poorly at the box office, as well as a much more successful television series on Disney+ last year.

Last but not least, in **Who Let the Gods Out** by Maz Evans, the Olympian god's are on a quest to save the world... and fix schoolboy Eliot's spiralling problems at the same time. This novel won the Waterstones Children's Book of the Month prize in February 2017 and Evans has since released two excellent sequels, **Simply the Quest** and **Beyond the Odyssey**.



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.