

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 100 groups in over 80 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.



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Finding a Good Read: Magic

A regular column to help you find a good read.

Magic can be a wonderful part of childhood, but also an interesting way of understanding the world as an adult.

Magical realism is a genre of fiction that incorporates magical elements into what is otherwise a realistic view of the world. The reader is presented with a real-world or even mundane setting, with supernatural or magical phenomena intertwined.

The Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez is often considered the father of Magical Realism. His book ***One Hundred Years of Solitude***, is perhaps the most famous work of the genre. The epic tale tells the story of seven generations of the Buendía family during a hundred years of turbulent Latin American history, from the postcolonial 1820s to the 1920s. The novel presents the ordinary and familiar, like household chores and domestic worries, but combines them with impossibilities like a levitating priest.

The Chilean author, Isabel Allende, was influenced by Márquez's writing and in 1982 wrote ***The House of the Spirits***. The story depicts the life of the Trueba family over four generations, tracing the post-colonial political and social upheavals in Chile.



Another well-known work is ***Midnight's Children*** by Salman Rushdie, which portrays India's transition from British colonial rule to independence and partition. Set in the context of these historical events, the story is told by its protagonist, Saleem Sinai, who is born with telepathic powers at the exact moment India becomes independent.

Beloved by Toni Morrison, is set after the American Civil War, and tells the story of a family of escaped slaves. Their Cincinnati home is haunted by a malevolent spirit, who they believe to be the ghost of eldest daughter, Beloved, killed by her mother to save her from the horrors of slavery.

The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov, was written between 1928 and 1940, but only published as a book in Paris in 1967 for fear of censorship and punishment in the USSR. The novel combines the supernatural with satire and Christian philosophy, depicting a visit from the devil and his entourage to the officially atheist Soviet Union.

Another famous example is ***Kafka on the Shore*** by Haruki Murakami. The text portrays the bookish young Kafka Tamura who runs away from a curse, and Satoru Nakata, an old, disabled man with an uncanny ability to talk to cats.

Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter focuses on the life and exploits of Sophie Fevvers, a woman who claims to be a Cockney virgin, hatched from an egg and now in possession of swan's wings. When the story begins, she has become a celebrated aerialist, and quickly enraptures the young journalist Jack Walser, who runs away with her circus and falls into a world he is entirely unprepared for.

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'The way in which magic realism actually works is for the magic to be rooted in the real.'- Salman Rushie.

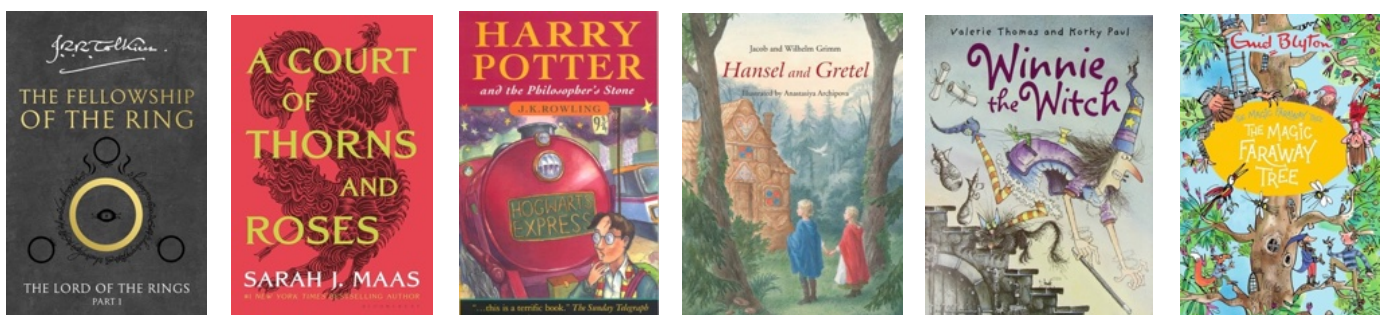


In contrast, fantasy literature is set in an imaginary universe, usually without any locations, events, or people from the real world. Magic, the supernatural and magical creatures are employed in many of these imaginary worlds.

The Lord of the Rings, published in 1954 by J. R. R. Tolkien, is perhaps the most famous work of fantasy. More recently, George R. R. Martin's series **A Song of Ice and Fire**, the first book being **A Game of Thrones**, was adapted into a wildly popular TV series. Sarah J. Maas writes a series of popular fantasy books called **A Court of Thorns and Roses**, which she continues to publish. Brandon Sanderson's **Mistborn** fantasy series is similarly successful.

A series of books which could be considered fantasy is the **Harry Potter** series by J.K. Rowling. These books, set in a world full of magic, can be enjoyed by adults and children alike. Similarly, the fairytales of **Hans Christian Andersen** may seem like they are for children but are often eerie and spooky. Some of his most famous fairytales include "**The Emperor's New Clothes**," "**The Little Mermaid**" and "**The Ugly Duckling**". Likewise, the fairytales written by **The Brothers Grimm**, like "**Hansel and Gretel**," "**Snow White**," "**Sleeping Beauty**," and "**Rumpelstiltskin**", can also be enjoyed by adults.

Other fantastic magical books for children are the **Winnie the Witch** books by Valerie Thomas and the **How to Train Your Dragon** series by Cressida Cowell. The heroine in **Matilda** by Roald Dahl has magical powers which are full of fun, while Enid Blyton's **The Faraway Tree** series is full of magical characters and fantastical lands.



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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