

Books all children should read – Michael Morpurgo

Early Years and KS1

The Twits, by Roald Dahl

(Puffin, £4.99)

Mr and Mrs Twit pass the time playing nasty tricks on one another. They're both horrid. In his hairy beard, Mr Twit "was always able to find a tasty morsel to nibble on".

Burglar Bill, by Janet and Allan Ahlberg

(Puffin, £4.99)

"I'll 'ave that," is the catchphrase of the rogue who stars in this engaging and beautifully illustrated tale. When Bill accidentally burglarises a baby, it turns out to be a blessing in a stolen basket. "Runfrit, Boglaboll!"

The Tiger Who Came To Tea, by Judith Kerr

(HarperCollins, £5.99)

Newsnight's Emily Maitlis has a theory that this book is an allegory about sex. Most children understand it as the story of a tiger that eats its hosts out of house and home. Debate continues.

Where the Wild Things Are, by Maurice Sendak

(Red Fox, £5.99)

When Max engages in mischief, he is sent to bed without his supper. That's just the start. Sendak's paintings sing, and the text is a joy.

The Tale of Samuel Whiskers, by Beatrix Potter

(Frederick Warne, £4.99)

Tom Kitten learnt nothing from his parents about the consequences of curiosity. Abducted by a psychotic rat, he comes within a whisker of being turned into a pudding. Nightmares guaranteed.

Yertle the Turtle, by Dr Seuss

(Collins, £4.99)

Theodor Geisel's response to Hitler was more oblique than Stauffenberg's, but as effective. Yertle, king of the pond, commands all the turtles to stack themselves up so he can be top of the heap. Someone's riding for a fall.

Fungus the Bogeyman, by Raymond Briggs

(Puffin, £5.99)

What boy won't thrill to the world of the Bogeymen, all snot, armpits and boils? This gave Raymond Briggs's green crayon the workout of its life.

The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew It Was None of His Business, by Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch

(Chrysalis, £4.99)

Someone's dropping lands on poor mole's head. Who's the culprit? A farmyard investigation is conducted with Germanic seriousness. Mole's revenge is sweet.

Room on the Broom, by Julia Donaldson

(Macmillan, £4.99)

Punchier than The Gruffalo, this has children chanting along as a witch and her animal friends see off a dragon in search of "witch and chips".

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle

(Puffin, £5.99)

"In the light of the moon, a little egg lay on a leaf..." so begins this classic board book, its pages drilled with holes as the caterpillar eats his way through the week.

The Cat in the Hat, by Dr Seuss

(Colins, £4.99)

"Look at me! Look at me! Look at me now!" The cat's a big show-off, but he knows how to have fun, and his chaotic antics delight.

Charlotte's Web, by EB White

(Puffin, £5.99)

White's 1952 masterpiece describes the friendship between a lonely pig and a talented spider. This poignant tale teaches lessons about love, death and differing life expectancies.

The Story of Babar, by Jean de Brunhoff

(Egmont, £5.99)

When Babar sees his mother shot he reacts as any modern child might: a few tears, then off on a shopping spree. Nice green suit, though.

Winnie-the-Pooh, by AA Milne, illustrated by EH Shepard

(Egmont, £11.99)

Visit Hundred Acre Wood, and meet Pooh, Piglet and Christopher Robin, based on AA Milne's son. This classic story hasn't aged, and EH Shepard's understated illustrations remain the best

Lower KS2 – Year 5

Stig of the Dump, by Clive King

(Puffin, £6.99)

When Barney falls down a dump the last thing he expects is to meet a cave boy. Stig was an eco-warrior before the term was invented. Sprightly, comic, classic.

Ballet Shoes, by Noel Streatfeild

(Puffin, £5.99)

Adopted sisters Posy, Pauline and Petrova Fossil train as a dancer, an actor and an aeroplane pilot. A bally treat.

Howl's Moving Castle, by Diana Wynne Jones

(HarperCollins, £5.99)

The Witch of Waste puts Sophie under a spell. To break it, she must brave the castle of the Wizard Howl. Imaginative and terribly funny.

Just So Stories, by Rudyard Kipling

(Walker, £9.99)

Learn how the leopard got his spots and the camel his hump. And remember "The Elephant's Child" - whose "satiabale suriosity" turns his "bulgy nose" into a trunk?

The Borrowers, by Mary Norton

(Puffin, £6.99)

First published in 1953, this remains a deserved favourite. The Clock family live beneath a floorboard, making do with what "human beans" drop, until one day one of them allows herself to be seen...

Struwwelpeter, by Heinrich Hoffman

(Dover, £6.99)

These pungent 1840 morality tales are not to be taken literally: in one, a boy gets his thumbs chopped off.

The Magic Faraway Tree, by Enid Blyton

(Egmont, £5.99)

Jo, Bessie and Fanny climb to the top of a magical tree, above which are endlessly circulating worlds: the Land of Birthdays, or, more unluckily, of Dame Slap.

Danny, the Champion of the World, by Roald Dahl

(Puffin, £5.99)

Danny and his hard-up father bond over poaching pheasants from nasty Mr Hazell's land - before moral dues are paid.

George's Marvellous Medicine, by Roald Dahl

(Puffin, £4.99)

To cure his grumpy grandmother, George Kranky concocts a medicine from shaving foam, sheep dip, engine oil and brown paint. Granny grows huge. The ending is dark even for Dahl.

Underwater Adventure, by Willard Price

(Red Fox, £4.99)

Willard Price invented zoologist brothers Hal and Roger Hunt to get children interested in nature. Underwater Adventure takes them into shark-infested seas. Some sharks are human.

Tintin in Tibet, by Hergé

(Mammoth, £6.99)

After Tintin reads of a plane crash in the Himalayas, he dreams his friend Chang has survived. Uniquely, there are no villains - just a tender yeti and acres of snow.

The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales

(Chronicle, £11.99)

Sourced from medieval German folktales by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm in the 19th century, these sanguinary stories deal with abduction, cannibalism and worse.

Erik the Viking, by Terry Jones, illustrated by Michael Foreman

(Puffin, £5.99)

Erik tells his wife that he must go to "the land where the sun goes at night"; off he travels on an atmospheric adventure, terrifically illustrated.

When the Wind Blows, by Raymond Briggs

(Penguin, £7.99)

Jim and Hilda Bloggs's preparation for a nuclear attack remains enthralling. First comic, then moving.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, by TS Eliot

(Faber & Faber, £4.99)

This delightful collection of verse sees cat-loving Eliot capering about with his trousers rolled. A perfect introduction to the pleasures of poetry for children.

The Iron Man, by Ted Hughes

(Faber & Faber, £4.99)

Since it appeared in 1968, the late Poet Laureate's children's book has become a classic. Benign iron bloke falls from sky, battles space-bat-angel-dragon, saves world. Bliss.

The Owl and the Pussycat, by Edward Lear

(Corgi, £5.99)

Edward Lear's bizarre story of inter-species elopement and gastronomic adventure still charms and diverts. Runcible.

The Wind in the Willows, by Kenneth Grahame

(Egmont, £5.99)

"Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." But reading about Mole, Ratty, Toad and Badger runs it a close second.

Peter Pan, by JM Barrie

(Puffin, £4.99)

JM Barrie's Neverland adventures were first performed as a play, and later turned into a novel. Clap your hands if you believe.

Mr Majeika, by Humphrey Carpenter

(Puffin, £4.99)

Mr Majeika, with his tuft of hair, is ever ready to cast spells on unruly pupils - most notably Hamish Bigmore, whose rudeness gets him changed into a frog. Charming and funny in equal measure.

The Water Babies, by Charles Kingsley

(Wordsworth, £1.99)

Tom the sweep drowns after being chased from a rich household and falls into a sub-aquatic purgatory. But once he proves his worth he is allowed wonderful adventures.

A Little Princess, by Frances Hodgson Burnett

(Wordsworth, £1.99)

Seven-year-old Sara Crewe is sent back from India to Miss Minchin's Seminary for Young Ladies in England, to discover she has lost her fortune to a swindler and her father to disease. A stirring tale.

I'm The King of the Castle, by Susan Hill

(Penguin, £7.99)

A powerful and claustrophobic study of bullying, this has a real narrative grip and a frightening message. No reader remains untouched.

The Wave, by Morton Rhue

(Penguin, £5.99)

Teacher Ben Ross doesn't think his students understand what it was like to live in Nazi Germany, so he devises an experiment. A powerful story about the risks of conformism.

Pippi Longstocking, by Astrid Lindgren

(Oxford, £14.99)

Pippi is impulsive, irrepressible, red-haired and so strong you won't believe it. Her bizzare adventures delight children and confound health and safety.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, by Roald Dahl

(Puffin, £5.99)

Charlie Bucket's adventures in Willy Wonka's factory - the chocolate rivers, the minia-tuarisation room, the Oompa Loompas - will live forever.

Bambert's Book of Missing Stories, by Reinhardt Jung

(Egmont, £4.99)

Shy Bambert sends his half-written stories into the world attached to balloons for whoever finds them to finish. Stories come back from all over the world, and the final story is heartbreaking.

The Firework-maker's Daughter, by Philip Pullman

(Corgi, £4.99)

Lila's father doesn't want her to follow his career in fireworks so she must prove herself on an epic quest that takes in dragons and pirates.

Tom's Midnight Garden, by Philippa Pearce

(Oxford, £5.99)

As Tom lies in bed preparing for the most boring holiday of his life, the clock strikes 13. Racing downstairs he sees daylight and a beautiful garden where there should be darkness. Incredibly exciting.

The Phantom Tollbooth, by Norton Juster

(HarperCollins, £5.99)

A bored young boy pushes his toy car through a toy tollbooth, and finds himself in the kingdom of Wisdom. Genius wordplay with slapstick and a real sense of fun.

The Silver Sword, by Ian Serrallier

(Red Fox, £4.99)

Just after the Second World War, a group of children navigate war-torn Europe armed with little more than a letter opener. Tense, demanding and adult.

Cue for Treason, by Geoffrey Trease

(Puffin, £5.99)

After Peter Brownrigg chucks a stone at his landlord, he has to flee to London. Here he meets Shakespeare and uncovers a plot to kill Queen Elizabeth. Tudor derring-do.

The Sword in the Stone, by TH White

(HarperCollins, £6.99)

The trials of Arthur have never been more amusingly described. Merlin is the archetype for all dotty wizards.

A Wizard of Earthsea, by Ursula K LeGuin

(Puffin, £5.99)

LeGuin's fantasy lands are scrupulously realised, but it is emotional complexity that makes her books so engrossing. Here a young wizard has to come to terms with the destructive power of his magic.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, by JK Rowling

(Bloomsbury, £5.99)

The third book may be the best in JK Rowling's series. All the usual Potter tricks are here, but the highlight is the Dementors, the terrifying guards of Azkaban prison.

The Chronicles of Narnia Box Set, by CS Lewis

(Collins, £49.99)

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe isn't the only Narnia story worth reading. The Silver Chair is a powerful allegory of mental slavery; and Voyage of the Dawn Treader sees a talking mouse paddle over the edge of the world.

His Dark Materials Box Set, by Philip Pullman

(Scholastic, £22)

Pullman's riposte to CS Lewis is a trumpet-blast against dogma - but, above all else, a gripping adventure.

The BFG, by Roald Dahl

(Puffin, £5.99)

At the witching hour, a giant blows sweet dreams into children's bedrooms. When orphan Sophie sees him one night, he takes her to his cave. Beware whizzpoppers!

Swallows and Amazons, by Arthur Ransome

(Red Fox, £7.99)

Childcare used to be a bit less hands on ("Better drowned than duffers. If not duffers won't drown") and one cannot read the adventures of these four children in a lost Eden without a lump in the throat.

Clarice Bean, Don't Look Now, by Lauren Child

(Orchard Books, £7.99)

At first glance one for the girls, but boys should read it too. Over the series Clarice has matured from an infant with a quirky vocabulary into a complex, engaging teenager.

The Railway Children, by E Nesbit

(Oxford, £8)

When their father is accused of treason, Bobbie, Peter, Phyllis and their mother move to the country. They pass the time watching trains go by and proving their father innocent, which is nice.

The Selfish Giant, by Oscar Wilde

(Puffin, £5.99)

Wilde's giant wants to keep children out of his garden so that he can have it to himself. But it stays shrouded in snow until one day, when the giant's hard heart is softened by one of the boys...

Black Beauty, by Anna Sewell

(Puffin Classics, £4.99)

One of the greatest books ever narrated by a horse, with a fine message: be kind to animals, and they'll be kind to you.

Just William, by Richmal Crompton

(Macmillan, £5.99)

The classic naughty schoolboy, William wages a gentle war of attrition against parental and teacherly authority.

Jennings Goes to School, by Anthony Buckeridge

(House of Stratus, £6.99)

Catapults, grazed knees, and mischief of the best sort. Hogwarts may have revived our appetite for boys-school stories, but Jennings was there first.

Comet in Moominland, by Tove Jansson

(Puffin, £4.99)

Moomin is a peculiar fellow, but through him and his equally peculiar friends the Finnish author Tove Jansson explores the big issues: friendship, alienation, fear, loss and meteors from outer space.

The Bad Beginning, by Lemony Snicket

(Egmont Books, £6.99)

This magnificently black-hearted book introduced us to the Baudelaire children, orphaned in a fire and trying to keep one step ahead of the predatory Count Olaf, who is after their inherited fortune.

Year 6 – Early Teens

Call of the Wild, by Jack London

(Puffin, £4.99)

Jack London introduced some dark themes into this story of Buck, a sled dog in the Yukon who rediscovers his wild nature when put to the test.

Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, by Lewis Carroll

(Penguin Classics, £5.99)

Never was mathematical and philosophical playfulness given such entertaining shape. Tenniel's line-drawings crown these classics.

The Outsiders, by SE Hinton

(Puffin Classics, £6.99)

This powerful novel about school gangs was published when SE Hinton was just 18. The Greasers and the Socs clash in typical teenage fashion - but then someone dies.

I Capture the Castle, by Dodie Smith

(Vintage, £6.99)

Smith is better known for A Hundred and One Dalmatians, but although this, her first novel, is quieter, it shines brighter. Narrated in diary form by 17-year-old Cassandra, it documents the lives of her eccentric family.

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase, by Joan Aiken

(Red Fox, £4.99)

1832, and wolves have over-run a fictional kingdom of England. Orphans Sylvia and Bonnie fall into the hands of an evil Miss Slycarp and must use all their wits to escape. A mercilessly shadowy thriller.

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee

(Arrow Books, £6.99)

A classic story of America's Deep South. Scout and Jem see their father, Atticus, defend Tom Robinson - an innocent black man - from the charge of rape. Atticus is inspiring without being priggish.

Great Expectations, by Charles Dickens

(Penguin, £7.99)

The rousing story of Pip's rise, fall and rise pips Oliver Twist as the best book with which to start reading Dickens, purely on account of his description of being in love.

The Owl Service, by Alan Garner

(Collins, £5.99)

Welsh myths, a portrait hidden behind a plaster skim, adolescent yearnings...read this extraordinary confection at the right age and it will never leave you.

The Hound of the Baskervilles, by Arthur Conan Doyle

(Penguin classics, £5.99)

Holmes in fine Gothic form: rackety aristocrats, the Grimpen Mire, and a glow-in-the-dark hellhound conspire to chill the blood and thrill the deductive organs.

Wuthering Heights, by Emily Bronte

(Penguin, £7.99)

A novel that embeds itself in the memory, and set feminism back 150 years. The human genome has yet to produce a teenage girl who isn't a sucker for Heathcliff.

The Diary of a Young Girl, by Anne Frank

(Penguin, £7.99)

On June 12, 1942, Annelies Marie Frank started writing a diary. It was her 13th birthday. She died three years later in Belsen. An ordinary teenage life, made poignant by the knowledge of how it ended.

Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry, by Mildred D Taylor

(Puffin, £5.99)

A tale of oppression in the American South, this tells the story of the Logans, a black family living in rural Mississippi during the 1930s.

A Kestrel for a Knave, by Barry Hines

(Penguin, £7.99)

Filmed by Ken Loach as Kes, this snapshot of deprivation in 1960s Yorkshire describes a troubled boy's relationship with his pet kestrel. Bittersweet and grimly artful.

The Hobbit, by JRR Tolkien

(HarperCollins, £6.99)

A wonderful curtain-raiser for The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit finds Tolkein in a playful mood. The adventures of Bilbo Baggins, while never less than exciting, are spiked with gentle humour.

War Horse, by Michael Morpurgo

(Egmont, £4.99)

Michael Morpurgo's moving story plunges into the horror of the First World War by following the story of Joey, a cavalry officer's horse on the Western Front.

Beowulf, by Michael Morpurgo

(Walker Books, £7.99)

Beowulf is a great story: scary monsters, fearsome matriarchs, boasting, singing, feasting, fighting and booty. Michael Morpurgo's rendition brings it to a new generation.

King Solomon's Mines, by H Rider Haggard

(Penguin Classics, £7.99)

Hunter Allan Quatermain searches the African jungle. Its attitudes might be outdated but this is still terrifically exciting.

Kim, by Rudyard Kipling

(Penguin Classics, £7.99)

Kimball O'Hara, the orphaned son of an Irish soldier, wanders Lahore cadging, playing and living a carefree life - until he's forced into espionage.

The Road of Bones, by Anne Fine

(Corgi Children's, £5.99)

Anne Fine weaves a disturbing parable of life in a totalitarian state, as young Yuri learns the cost of speaking the truth.

Frenchman's Creek, by Daphne Du Maurier

(Virago Press, £7.99)

A swashbuckling love affair between a lady and a pirate on the Cornish coast. Romantic adventure at its overblown best.

Treasure Island, by RL Stevenson

(Penguin Classics, £7.99)

The riddles of Stevenson's tale endure. Why does X mark the spot? What is it with parrots? And why did Pugh go blind?

Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott

(Oxford Children's Classic, £6.99)

The tale of four sisters - Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy - growing up in the US Civil War, this is a charming and insightful story of childhood and family.

Anne of Green Gables, by L M Montgomery

(Puffin Classics, £4.99)

Spirited ginger-nut, adopted in error for a boy, comes of age on a remote island off the Canadian coast.

Junk, by Melvin Burgess

(Puffin, £4.99)

Burgess's refusal to patronise teenagers has earned much praise. This tough, clear-eyed story of heroin addiction is among his best.

Cider With Rosie, by Laurie Lee

(Vintage Classics, £7.99)

A lyrical description of a childhood spent in rural bliss in the Cotswolds. This is a homage to England as it was, filled with light, joy, and fun.

The Go-Between by LP Hartley

(Penguin Modern Classics, £8.99)

More than a famous first line. When 60-year-old Leo Colston looks back on his youth in 1900, the nostalgia is stifling. But as the story develops, it takes a darker turn.

The Rattle Bag, ed by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes

(Faber, £14.99)

This rich anthology of poetry - whose name aptly describes the higgledy-piggledy mix of glories within - is something no teen's bookshelf should lack.

The Song of Hiawatha, by H W Longfellow

(Dover, £3)

Just say something in this rhythm. It will sound like Hiawatha. Read it to your horrid children. Hear them chant the verses loudly. On it goes ad infinitum. Heaven help the hapless parent.

Watership Down, by Richard Adams

(Puffin, £6.99)

Fiver and his brother Hazel know that something terrible will happen to the warren, and set off for safety. Their story has implications beyond the usual concerns of rabbits.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain

(Oxford, £6.99)

Less ambitious than 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' but just as exciting. The language is hard to begin with but the hero is one of the most endearing in literature.

True Grit, by Charles Portis

(Bloomsbury, £6.99)

Mattie Ross - spirited, witty, probably beautiful - is out to avenge her "father's blood" in this slim Western. It should be given to every girl turning 16.

Holes, by Louis Sachar

(Collins, 7.99)

Sentenced to dig holes in the desert for stealing trainers, the wrongly convicted Stanley discovers that the holes are not so pointless as at first thought. Wit dry as a salt flat.

Lord of the Flies, by William Golding

(Faber & Faber, £7.99)

When a gang of boys are marooned on an island they try to set up a community based on cooperation. Some hope.

My Family and Other Animals, by Gerald Durrell

(Puffin, £5.99)

When the Durrell family takes a villa in Corfu one summer they do not imagine staying five years, but so they do. In that time Gerald, a boy of 10, discovers the joys of the local flora and fauna, and describes it with a delightful wit.

Coraline, by Neil Gaiman

(Bloomsbury, £6.99)

This spooky story won't soon be forgotten. Coraline is a girl who finds her way down a corridor to a flat just like her own - but slightly different. And where her doting "other mother" has buttons for eyes...

Carrie's War, by Nina Bawden

(Puffin, £6.99) Carrie and her brother are wartime evacuees billeted on a bullying Welsh grocer. A wonderfully crafted novel full of memorable characters.

The Story of Tracy Beaker, by Jacqueline Wilson

(Corgi, £5.99)

A slice of life in a children's home narrated by 10-year-old Tracy, through whose eyes we confront tough dilemmas. Required reading.

The Lantern Bearers, by Rosemary Sutcliffe

(Oxford, £6.99)

As the Roman army prepares to leave for home, Aquila is forced to desert to protect his family.