

## Weekly Recommended Reads for Different Key Stages

### Key Stage 3:

***The Super Miraculous Journey of Freddie Yates* by Jenny Pearson.** Freddie and his two mates set off to find Freddie's biological father in Wales -- and get themselves involved in one set of crazy adventures after another, from an onion-eating contest, to an exploding toilet in a church leading people to believe there has been a miracle, to accidentally setting fire to a boat, to a series of ridiculous outfits. Freddie is a delightful character with his love of facts and his no-nonsense approach to life, and there are important themes exploring grief, family and friendship. Highly recommended for reluctant or keen readers who like to laugh.

***Sawbones* by Catherine Johnson.** Dissection, grave-robbing, amputations with bone-saws, espionage, corpses galore, body-switching: this book has everything you might want in a forensic murder mystery, with the added bonus of learning about 18<sup>th</sup> century London as this is superb historical fiction. Ezra is 16 years old, a freed Jamaican slave and an apprentice to a London surgeon; he meets a magician's daughter, Loveday, who believes her father was murdered and is willing to do whatever it takes to find out what happened to him. Together they embark on a series of adventures that keep the reader constantly on edge. This book has just the right amount of gruesomeness for Key Stage 3 students who enjoy a bit of blood and gore – nothing excessive or too detailed, but enough to keep you turning the pages. The diverse (and historically accurate) cast makes this thriller even more appealing. And there is a sequel called *Blade and Bone* set in revolutionary France!

***A Kind of Spark* by Elle McNicoll.** Addie, age 11, is neurodivergent and she is targeted – by students and a teacher – for being different. She and her older sister Keedie, who is also autistic, use 'masking' strategies to cope in public situations; Addie feels safe in the library when she is reading about sharks, but everywhere else she feels vulnerable to bullies and she feels that no one sees her for who she really is. On a local school trip in Scotland, Addie learns about women who were executed as 'witches'. She feels a bond with these women as they were killed only because they were different – and she decides to campaign for a memorial. What can an 11 year old girl do when faced with intransigence and disregard for others' lived experiences? Addie is a truly inspirational and important character, and Elle McNicoll is an #ownvoices neurodivergent author.

***The Bone Sparrow* by Zana Fraillon.** Subhi was born into a harsh, bleak detention centre for refugees in Australia, including Rohingya who escaped from Burma like Subhi's family; all he knows are fences, tents, 'jackets' (guards) and deprivations. He is spirited, resilient and resourceful but vulnerable and sometimes petrified – as is Jimmie, who lives 'outside' in the local village and is neglected and illiterate. All she has left of her mother is necklace of a bone sparrow that she wears – and a notebook of stories. Subhi meets Jimmie and begins to read her stories for her. There are some brutal developments in the narrative, but as it is told from Subhi's 9-year-old point of view, there is innocence and optimism too. It is a book to make you think and walk in another's shoes.

***A Street Dog Named Pup* by Gill Lewis.** This recently published book tells the extraordinary story of Pup, a dog who loved and lost, again and again. Pup has an unbreakable bond with his Boy, but the adults don't want Pup and he is abandoned in 'Dead Dog Alley'. Frenchie, a street dog, finds and adopts him into the 'crew' where Pup learns to survive, avoiding the vicious Sewer dogs and the Snatchers who take street dogs to 'Dogsdoom'. Pup experiences moments of joy and forges close bonds with the unusual dogs in his pack, each with their own heart-breaking story. This is an

absolutely engrossing book and will appeal to all dog-lovers. It would be brilliant as a shared read aloud as well!

***Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes.** Twelve-year-old Jerome has just been shot dead by a police officer, and he wants to tell his story. He sees the effects of his death on his family and the family of the policeman – and he learns from other ‘ghost boys’ Emmett Till and Tamir Rice, who have also been the victims of systematic racism. This is a poignant and powerful read delving into racism, grief, justice and redemption, and it is suitable for younger readers (Year 5-8) with this central message: ‘Can’t undo wrong. Can only do our best to make things right’ – Jerome’s Grandma.

***Mortal Chaos* by Matt Dickinson.** This thriller starts with a butterfly startling a race horse in training in Wiltshire – and this tiny action eventually affects dozens of events and lives across continents in this novelised version of chaos theory! Chapters are short and pacy, and include seemingly unconnected people and places from a commercial pilot in Wiltshire to a climber on Mount Everest to a boy in Malawi protecting his crops from baboons to an American psycho setting off to bomb his wife. This is complex book with many narratives – but it is easy to read as it is so exciting.

***Booked* by Kwame Alexander.** In this powerful verse novel, 12 year old Nick loves football and hates books – despite (or because) his father wrote a dictionary of unusual words. This book features travails of teenage life like bullies, separating parents, injuries, and developing love – but it also has a rapping librarian, fascinating vocabulary and plenty of football. This is a brilliant book for both reluctant and enthusiastic readers. Audible Stories has made the audio version of the book available for free.

***I am the Minotaur* by Anthony McGowan** is a newly published book in the 'Super Readable' OUP series; these books are short, accessible -- and beautifully written. *I am the Minotaur* is about ‘Stinky Mog’, a cruel nickname that Matthew was given at primary school because his clothes were unclean; his mum suffers from depression meaning that Matthew has had to largely fend for himself. Now in secondary school, Matthew suffers from a deep sense of shame and tries to be invisible. He mostly succeeds, but then ‘golden girl’ Ari’s bike is stolen, and Matthew is determined to steal it back. This book features Greek myths, a superb librarian and a courageous group of geeks. It is perfect for both reluctant and keen readers.

***Boy, Everywhere* by A.M. Dassu.** Sami is a middle-class Syrian boy with a perfectly normal life – until the bombs hit Damascus. After a traumatic experience leaving his sister unable to speak, Sami and his family escape and experience a distressing journey as they travel through Turkey and Greece. When they arrive in the UK claiming refugee status, their troubles have only just begun. This is a gripping read based on extensive research, and it challenges stereotypes of refugees. It is on the 2021 ‘Read for Empathy’ list produced by Empathy Lab UK.

***The Island at the End of Everything* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave.** Twelve-year-old Ami lives on a beautiful, remote island that no one ever visits because many of the inhabitants have leprosy -- including Ami's mother. They make the most of the life they have, but then the government official Mr Zamora arrives and wrenches Ami -- and all children who don't have leprosy -- away from everything they know and love, forcing them into an orphanage. Can a beautiful colony of butterflies help Ami find her way back? This is heart-breaking and heart-warming story from one of the best young adult/children's writers.

***Here in the Real World* by Sara Pennypacker.** In this heart-warming story, eleven-year-old Ware is an introvert, which worries his parents as they feel he needs 'Meaningful Social Interactions'. He is sent to 'Rec camp' but secretly absconds to play in an abandoned churchyard -- where he meets Jolene, who is an 'outcast' for different reasons. They argue, but also band together when their local environment is under threat. This is a story of friendship, making a difference, acceptance and being true to who you are. It's a fast-paced novel and absolutely lovely.

***The Dog Runner* by Bren Macdibble.** In this fast-paced adventure novel, environmental disaster has destroyed all wheat, oat, sugar and grass leading to catastrophe in Australia and around the world. Ella needs to find a way to survive, and her 'doggos' are ready to help. This is a wonderful story that will make you bite your nails, laugh and cry -- and it will remind you of what might happen if we don't take care of our environment.

#### **Key Stage 4:**

***And the Stars Were Burning Brightly* by Danielle Jawando.** Nathan discovers that his talented brother Al has taken his own life, and in his pain he will do anything to find out why Al made this choice. Megan was Al's classmate, sharing a love of art with Al, and she is determined to keep his memory alive. This extraordinary novel (set in Manchester) is told from the point of view of both Nathan and Megan, with a vignette from Al's perspective at the start of each chapter. It is a compelling read exploring anger, guilt and grief; it is raw but sensitively-written with a dynamic plot that sometimes feels like an unfolding mystery. This book was on the inaugural Jhalak Prize children's shortlist, but we believe it is more suitable for Key Stage 4 students than for younger students. This is a poignant, powerful, empathetic novel that addresses stigmas, and at the end provides information and resources about mental health, bullying and suicide-prevention -- but note that it can be triggering for some.

***The Supreme Lie* by Geraldine McCaughrean.** The country of Afaia has been hit by relentless rain leading to dangerous flooding. Gloria is a 15 year old maid to Madame Suprema, the secretive and dictatorial ruler of Afaia. When Madame Suprema runs away from the crisis, her world-weary husband Timor has to cover up her disappearance – and asks Gloria to pretend to be Madame Suprema. Much hilarity is the result, but with dark undercurrents of corruption, desperation, and most of all lies – which are supported and encouraged by the newspaper 'The Voice'. Meanwhile, in the countryside, Heinz is a dog trying to find his Boy Clem, who has been flooded out of his home and is heading south as a refugee. Heinz is desperate to avoid 'Hound Death' who because of the flooding is busy collecting souls of humans and animals. These two narratives eventually weave together in this imaginative book. Gloria is a worthy heroine struggling to make the right decisions in her new position of power; Heinz is everything a dog should be and more. A thought-provoking and compelling read.

***Kick the Moon* by Muhammed Khan.** Ilyas hopes to be a comic book artist – but he is under huge pressure from his school (about to sit GCSEs), his friends (who engage in some gang activity and toxic masculinity) and from his parents (who expect him to 'be a man' and to join the family business). He meets Kelly in detention, and they develop a strong friendship – but Imran, a member of the gang, has made a bet that he can seduce Kelly. Ilyas's worst fears are confirmed when Kelly becomes the victim of social media bullying. He needs to be like the superheroes he draws and 'kick the moon'. The author, Muhammed Khan, is a secondary school Maths teacher and speaks eloquently on why he started writing fiction and on themes in his books:

<https://www.hayfestival.com/p-16726-muhammad-khan.aspx?skinid=16;>  
<https://www.worldbookday.com/online-masterclasses/walk-in-someone-elses-shoes/>

**Clap When You Land by Elizabeth Acevedo.** In this extraordinary dual narrative novel told in accessible (and beautiful) verse, Camino in the Dominican Republic and Yahaira in New York City each learn that their father has been killed in plane crash. They have lived completely different lives – Camino is a swimmer and an assistant midwife to her aunt, while Yahaira is a chess champion and has a girlfriend. They had never heard of each other. As they try to cope with their grief, they begin to learn about the double-life Papi had led, experiencing confusion, anger and a sense of betrayal – but also a burgeoning sense of the possibility of new relationships. Acevedo has written several brilliant young adult verse novels, and is also well-known for her Afro-Latina slam poetry. <http://www.acevedowrites.com/poetics>

**The Bunker Diary by Kevin Brooks.** In this Carnegie-medal-winning novel, sixteen-year-old Linus has been kidnapped and wakes up in a windowless bunker; he has no further direct contact with his captor, though at every moment he is being manipulated. Linus begins a journal. Then the lift, which is the only way out or in, opens, and a 9-year-old girl steps out, later followed by other prisoners: a junkie, a wealthy woman, a businessman and a dying philosopher. They are utterly dependent on the abductor, who seems to be watching their every movement. This is a disturbing and powerful thriller – students who haven't voluntarily picked up a book in years are said to be gripped by this novel.

**The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak.** This novel, narrated by Death and set in Nazi Germany, is one of the best young adult novels there are. Liesel is nine years old. Her parents have been sent to a concentration camp and her brother is dead; she arrives distraught to Himmel Street where she is fostered by an accordionist and his wife. She learns to read – and begins to steal books from Nazis. And when her family hides a Jewish fist-fighter, things get even more complex. This is a heartbreaking book set in desperate times but somehow it feels hopeful. Highly recommended.

**Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line by Deepa Anappara.** Children are disappearing in a 'basti', a slum near the railway line in India. After his friend Bahudar goes missing, nine-year-old Jai is on the case, together with smart Pari and hard-working Faiz. Have the children been kidnapped, or have they been stolen by a djinn? The corrupt police and the 'hi-fi' rich people don't care, but crime-show obsessed Jai and his mates are investigating. This sometimes funny, sometimes heart-breaking mystery told from the 'naïve' perspective of nine-year-old detective portrays poverty without romanticising or judging, and the rich details and imagery create a vivid sense of place.

**All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque.** This is a powerful and poignant classic, first published in 1929 in German and based on the author's wartime experiences. It tells the story of Paul Baumer, who signed up with his classmates on the encouragement of his patriotic teacher. The novel's realistic and gritty depictions of trench warfare, gas attacks, hospitals, comradeship and pointless fighting and dying show that the war consumed everything and everyone. It is disturbing, engrossing, and incredibly informative. There is a shortened 'Real Reads' version of the book with illustrations that is perfect for young people interested in war but intimidated by long books.

**The Fountains of Silence by Ruta Sepetys.** Spain in 1957 is firmly under the dictatorial control of Franco with fear and secrets ruling and ruining people's lives. Daniel Matheson is an 18 years old Texan visiting Spain with his oil tycoon father. Daniel is a talented photographer and wants to study photo journalism in university, against his father's wishes; he also wants to understand the

real Madrid, not just the version shown to American tourists. Ana is the hotel maid in charge of looking after the Matheson family at their posh Madrid hotel. She and her siblings had a traumatic youth because of the continuing Fascist persecution of Republicans; she lives with her brother Rafa, who works in a slaughterhouse and a graveyard, and her sister Julia and her family. Together they try to eke out an existence. But there are secrets which the family needs to keep hidden. This is well-researched historical fiction, and it is mesmerising with several twists.

***Ink* by Alice Broadway.** In Leora's world, every significant moment of a person's life is inked onto their skin. After death, the skin is flayed, and if a life has been well-lived, a 'skin book' is created for relatives and friends to remember their loved ones by; the 'unworthy' people's skin is burnt. Leora wants to become an inker – a professional tattoo artist – but when her father dies, she discovers that a mark has been removed from his skin. Why? And do the 'Blanks' – those without tattoos who have been banished from society – have anything to do with her father? This is the first book in the gripping dystopian 'Skin' trilogy.

***Scythe* by Neal Shusterman.** In this thriller, it is impossible to die from disease, accidents, suicide or violence – 'deadish' people are brought back to life with the help of the Thunderhead, an Artificial Intelligence being. The only way to die is to be killed by a 'Scythe' who are supposed to kill ('glean') individuals in a humane way in order to keep population growth under control. Scythes are trained in the art of killing but are not supposed to take joy in the process – some Scythes, especially those who use mass gleaning – seem to disregard this rule. Teenagers Citra and Rowan have been recruited as potential apprentices because they are compassionate and strong – but only one will be selected. This is a corker of a read and the first in an addictive trilogy about an imagined future world.

***No Fixed Address* by Susin Nielsen.** Felix has an amazing mind for trivia and loves the TV game show *Who, What, Where, When*. But his mum Astrid can't keep a job and they are evicted from their most recent (rubbish) apartment. They move into a van, and Astrid makes Felix promise not to tell. This is a painful story of hidden homelessness, and an inspirational story of the difference a community can make -- it will make you laugh and cry. *No Fixed Address* won the UKLA prize for the best book written for young people in 2020.

***Run, Rebel* by Majeet Mann.** Amber is the daughter of immigrant parents who don't speak English and are illiterate. The subject is tough -- domestic abuse and bullying -- but this is an inspirational story focussing on Amber's developing strength of character and her passion for running. It is a 'verse novel', meaning that packs an emotional punch and is a very quick read; this type of novel is especially popular with students who have previously been less enthusiastic about reading.

***Rose, Interrupted* by Patrice Lawrence.** Siblings Rose and Rudder have been raised in a strict religious cult but are now learning how to live in the 'Worldly World' in London. They are naive about the teen 'online world' and much more -- and they are traumatised by their life-experiences. Should they go back to the cult? This is a heart-wrenching and powerful story of family and strength of character.