

**Foreword by Michael Morpurgo**

# **Good Books for Tough Times**



**Books for children aged 9-12**

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Books selected and reviewed by Caroline Egar and Chris Bale  
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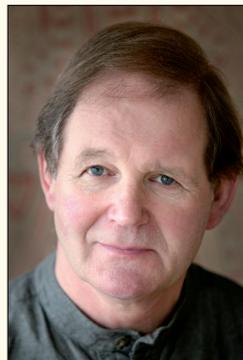
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# Foreword

by Michael Morpurgo

Children's Laureate 2003-2005



Many years ago I was a school teacher with a class of 35 children, all very different, all with their own likes and dislikes. The one thing they all enjoyed was the time at the end of the day when they sat on the floor and I told them a story. Within ten seconds, every one of them was interested and paying attention.

Today when I visit schools, talking to children and giving readings, I see that nothing has changed. Children love a good story.

All my books are based on something true – something I have seen or heard, a new fact I have learned, someone I have met. Of course, I invent most of the story, but it always starts with a truth. Sometimes a good story can help you to feel something or understand a truth in a way that a simple factual account cannot.

The worst thing to do is to treat children as if they're stupid or don't understand; they do understand, they know what the deal is, and books can help them to deal with anxiety and give them a sense of perspective.

That is why Good Books for Tough Times is such an important and useful idea, because it will help parents, teachers and librarians to find the right books to help children who are dealing with difficult situations or feelings. Reading is probably the best therapy there is, other than talking to mum or dad.

I hope that you will find this guide useful and, more importantly, that children will enjoy and be helped by reading the books it recommends.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Morpurgo". The signature is stylized, with a large, flowing flourish at the end.



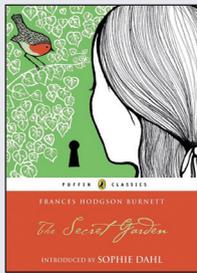
## Give Me Shelter

**Editor** Tony Bradman  
**Reading age** 8+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** This is a collection of stories by different authors, all getting under the skin of children forced to seek asylum in London or elsewhere. The stories of refugees from the Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Kurdistan, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Zimbabwe, Somalia and Sudan are poignant, shocking and heartwarming.

These stories will appeal both to those who may have undergone a similar journey, and those who want to understand the experience of children forced to find safety in a foreign land.

**Publisher** Frances Lincoln Children's Books  
**Published** 2009  
**ISBN** 9781847800022



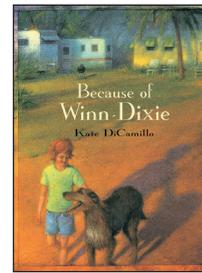
## The Secret Garden

**Author** Frances Hodgson Burnett  
**Reading age** 8+  
**Interest level** 8+

**Review** First published in 1911, this children's classic recounts a tale that may seem far from the lives of today's youngsters, with its grand manor house with over 100 rooms, and small children attended by a large cast of servants. However, many will identify with the loneliness of 'a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed he was going to die'.

This is both a gripping story, full of mystery and suspense, and an optimistic tale of how children, damaged both physically and mentally, can be healed by the power of nature and human goodness.

**Publisher** Puffin Classics  
**Published** 2008  
**ISBN** 9780141321066



## Because of Winn-Dixie

**Author** Kate DiCamillo  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** India Opal Buloni is lonely. She and her dad (the preacher) have moved to a new town, where she doesn't know anyone, and it makes her miss her mum (who left when Opal was three) even more. But all that changes the day that Opal goes to the grocery store and comes back with a stray dog.

Winn-Dixie is big and smelly, but he has a very appealing smile. His winning ways help Opal to make friends, and bring Opal and her dad – and a surprising group of people – together.

**Publisher** Walker Books  
**Published** 2001  
**ISBN** 9780744578294



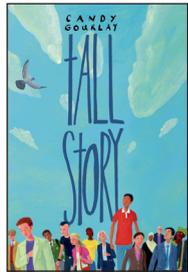
## Abela

**Author** Berlie Doherty  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Abela and Rosa have very different lives. Abela lives in a village in Tanzania where disease and death are part of life, Rosa enjoys a cosy life with her Mum in Sheffield, with trips to the skating rink the highlight of her week.

But both girls face the shock of change – Rosa's mum wants to adopt another child, and Abela is uprooted from everything she's ever known and sent to England by her unscrupulous Uncle Thomas. Both girls face disruption and disappointment until their lives finally come together. This is a highly readable and ultimately uplifting story.

**Publisher** Andersen Press  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9781842707258



## Tall Story

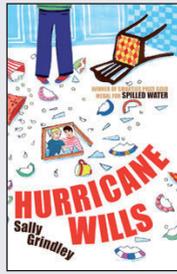
**Author** Candy Gourlay  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Andi gets a giant shock when her half-brother Bernardo steps off a plane from the Philippines – he's eight feet tall!

Other children mock him as a clumsy giant who can speak only broken English. But Andi gradually learns that Bernardo has a remarkable story to tell – and some people even think he has magic powers.

This is a story of how family, friendship and a shared love of basketball can overcome prejudice, and a reminder that people are not always what they seem.

**Publisher** David Fickling Books  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9781849920391



## Hurricane Wills

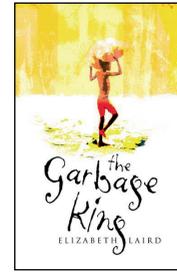
**Author** Sally Grindley  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Chris's older brother Wills has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and crash, bang, wallops through the house like a hurricane.

When Dad moves out, things get even worse, and Chris retreats to the public library for some privacy – until Wills's nasty friends track him down and events spiral out of control.

This is a good insight into the tensions of living with someone who has ADD, as Chris tries to be himself, support his Mum, spend time with his Dad, and still be the supportive brother that Wills needs.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2006  
**ISBN** 9780747590958



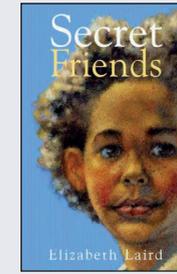
## The Garbage King

**Author** Elizabeth Laird  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** This excellent novel, shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and winner of the Scottish Arts Council Book of the Year Award, is set in Ethiopia. It follows the story of two boys from opposite ends of the social spectrum, who both end up on the streets of the capital, Addis Ababa. Wealthy, spoiled Dani is running away from a tyrannical father, while plucky orphan Mamo is escaping a life of slave labour.

The author doesn't shrink from describing some of the harsh realities of Ethiopian poverty, but this is ultimately a positive and inspiring read.

**Publisher** Macmillan  
 Children's Books  
**Published** 2003  
**ISBN** 9780330415026



## Secret Friends

**Author** Elizabeth Laird  
**Illustrator** Jason Cockcroft  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Rafaella comes from another country, has big ears and seems quiet and aloof.

The girls at her new school make her life pretty miserable – all except Lucy. She is Rafaella's secret friend, ignoring her at school, but visiting her at home and getting to know her family. Lucy buys her a Christmas present, but when school resumes after the holiday Rafaella is not there. The secret friendship has ended in tragedy.

This deceptively short and simple story is beautifully written and illustrated, and infused with warmth and honesty.

**Publisher** Hodder Children's Books  
**Published** 1997  
**ISBN** 9780340664735



## Shadow

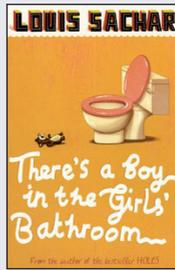
**Author** Michael Morpurgo  
**Illustrator** Christian Birmingham  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Aman and his mother escape from Taliban brutality in Afghanistan, build a new life for themselves in Manchester, and are then seized in a dawn raid by immigration officials and told they'll be sent back to Afghanistan.

Shadow is an army sniffer dog, a faithful spaniel who accompanies (or leads?) them on the first stage of their journey.

This is a story of injustice, friendship and the importance of standing up for what you believe in, even when all seems lost. It's an enthralling read and the illustrations are few but beautiful.

**Publisher** HarperCollins  
 Children's Books  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9780007339594



## There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom

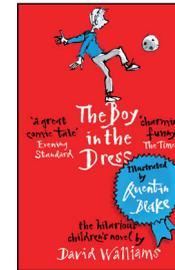
**Author** Louis Sachar  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Bradley Chalkers is the only boy in the class who has never been given a gold star. He doesn't do his homework, tells outrageous lies and is rude to just about everyone. No wonder his classmates poke fun and bully him.

Things go from bad to worse, until a new school counsellor appreciates Bradley and gives him the confidence to change.

Ignore the misleading title – this is a funny, touching story that will resonate with younger children who may be feeling isolated.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780747589525



## The Boy in the Dress

**Author** David Walliams  
**Illustrator** Quentin Blake  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** In most respects, Dennis is like many other boys. He lives in a boring house in a boring town with his Dad and brother, and plays football for the school team. But Dennis has another secret passion – he loves reading *Vogue*. When Lisa, the cool girl at school, suggests he try on one of her dresses, it sets off a hilarious chain of events that culminates in a school football match like no other...

This appealing comic tale will have the reader laughing out loud, while it celebrates the right of everyone to be themselves.

**Publisher** HarperCollins  
 Children's Books  
**Published** 2008  
**ISBN** 9780007279043



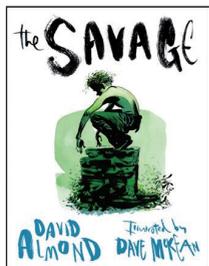
## Refugee Boy

**Author** Benjamin Zephaniah  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Alem's father is Ethiopian and his mother Eritrean, and they're caught between both sides while the countries are at war. The gripping narrative follows Alem as he becomes a refugee in England, is taken into foster care and starts school. However, even while he adjusts to his new way of life, he cannot escape the conflict and tragedy of his divided country.

This is a touching and thought-provoking book; as the author himself says, 'I would like to know that anyone who reads the book would think before they accuse refugees of looking for a free ride.'

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2001  
**ISBN** 9780747550860



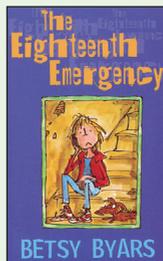
## The Savage

**Author** David Almond  
**Illustrator** Dave McKean  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** This is a fascinating and unusual book, a mixture of straight narrative and story within a story, written by the protagonist, Blue. His father has recently died and his fury at the taunts of the school bully prompts his increasingly imaginative writings.

Some teachers might be concerned that the spelling mistakes in Blue's story would confuse hesitant readers, but that aside, this is a brilliant and memorable evocation of the emotional effects of bereavement and the power of the imagination.

**Publisher** Walker Books  
**Published** 2009  
**ISBN** 9781406319859



## The Eighteenth Emergency

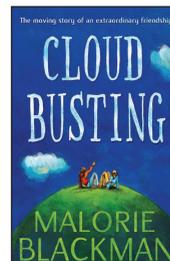
**Author** Betsy Byars  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Benjie Flowers – known to everyone as Mouse – has done a very silly thing.

He wrote on a wall that Marv Hammerman, the biggest boy in the school, is Neanderthal. Now Marv is about to take his revenge – and it's going to be painful, possibly fatal.

This is the story of how one small boy confronts and eventually overcomes his worst fear.

**Publisher** Red Fox  
**Published** 2000  
**ISBN** 9780099408673



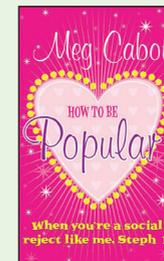
## Cloud Busting

**Author** Malorie Blackman  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Narrated in a variety of playful verse forms, Cloud Busting is an exploration of an unlikely friendship between two very different boys. Sam is the Class Bully and he makes Davey, who is imaginative, instinctive – a born poet, in fact – the Class Idiot. But gradually a close relationship develops between them, and the boys become Best Friends – but only in secret.

Sam's reluctance to acknowledge Davey and to protect him ends badly for both of them. But in the bittersweet conclusion Sam realises that he has also gained something very precious through knowing Davey.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780440866152



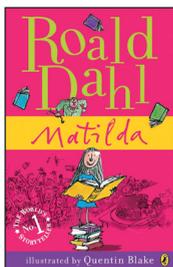
## How to be Popular

**Author** Meg Cabot  
**Reading age** 11+  
**Interest level** 11+

**Review** "Doing a Steph Landry" is a byword for being uncool, ever since Steph spilled the red Super Big Gulp over Lauren's white D&G miniskirt five entire years ago. So Steph, desperate to be liked, starts fighting back with the help of an old manual: 'How to be Popular'.

Meg Cabot gets right to the heart of girls' need to be accepted, and she doesn't shy away from tackling real family and friendship dilemmas, from embarrassing parents to first love with an old friend. This is a warm, witty and cleverly written book that will appeal to girls of 11 and over.

**Publisher** Macmillan Children's Books  
**Published** 2006  
**ISBN** 9780330444064



## Matilda

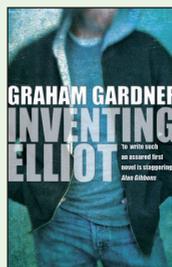
**Author** Roald Dahl  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Diminutive Matilda is being bullied by her crooked father, her stupid mother and her ghastly and terrifying headmistress Miss Trunchbull.

Matilda decides to get her own back. Her tactics can't be recommended – Superglueing dad's hat to his head, stuffing a parrot up the chimney and invoking supernatural powers – but her story will hearten any child who is being bullied. It's also guaranteed to make readers of any age laugh out loud.

A marvellous book.

**Publisher** Puffin Books  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780141322667



## Inventing Elliot

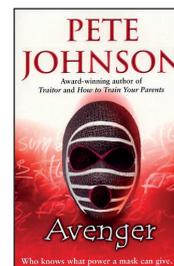
**Author** Graham Gardner  
**Reading age** 12+  
**Interest level** 12+

**Review** Elliot hopes that a new school will mean a new start – but there are bullies here too, the mysterious and all-powerful Guardians.

This is not a comfortable read and is recommended only for older readers, but many boys will identify with Elliot's struggle to survive in a world of adolescent brutality while remaining true to himself.

A compelling, affirmative, well-written story, exploring issues of identity, courage and morality.

**Publisher** Orion Children's Books  
**Published** 2003  
**ISBN** 9781842552087



## Avenger

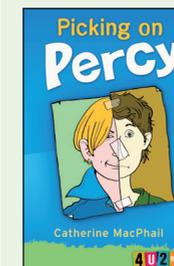
**Author** Pete Johnson  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Gareth's world falls apart when new boy Jake turns the whole class against him.

He faces weeks of bullying and rejection, until the memory of his beloved Grandad and his Avenger mask give him new strength. He overcomes and exposes Jake – but then faces an even tougher challenge.

This is a highly readable and moving story of friendship, revenge and forgiveness.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2004  
**ISBN** 9780440864585



## Picking on Percy

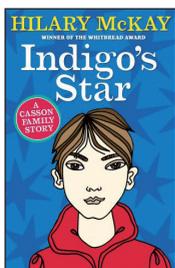
**Author** Catherine MacPhail  
**Illustrator** Karen Donnelly  
**Reading age** 7+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Shawn is cool. He's the best football player in the school and is chased by (almost) all the girls.

Percy is the smallest boy in the class, wears cheap plastic trainers and has baby food splattered over his blazer. No wonder Shawn says 'Picking on Percy is the best fun you can have without a football.' But then a magic machine makes the boys swap lives, and Shawn discovers what Percy's life is like.

This is a story for younger or less able readers, as helpful for bullies as for children who have been bullied.

**Publisher** Barrington Stoke  
**Published** 2009  
**ISBN** 9781842997956



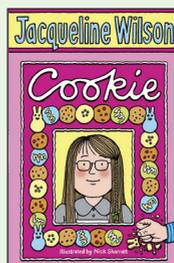
## Indigo's Star

**Author** Hilary McKay  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** When Indigo returns to school after a long bout of illness he must face up to the bullies he knows will be waiting for him. He teams up with new boy Tom, who helps him to challenge his own fears, and in turn, Tom finds the warmth in Indigo's family that he has been missing in his own.

Despite the misleading cover, this is as much a boys' book as a girls', with an appealing cast of characters, and it tackles the issue of bullying with warmth and humour.

**Publisher** Hodder Children's Books  
**Published** 2004  
**ISBN** 9780340875797



## Cookie

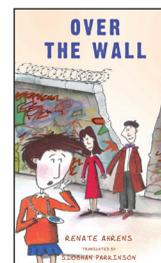
**Author** Jacqueline Wilson  
**Reading age** 9-11  
**Interest level** 9-11

**Review** Beauty thinks her name is silly. The girls at her posh school call her Ugly, and she and her mother live in constant fear of her irascible and violent father.

When her lavish birthday party goes horribly wrong, Beauty and her mum leave home. But where can they go? And how will they cope on their own?

Like so many of Jacqueline Wilson's heroines, Beauty is immensely likeable, and younger girls will identify with her struggles and enjoy her quiet triumphs.

**Publisher** Corgi Children's  
**Published** 2009  
**ISBN** 9780552558310



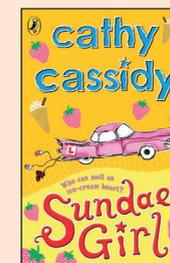
## Over the Wall

**Author** Renate Ahrens  
**Translator** Siobhan Parkinson  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Eleven year-old Karo lives with her mum – it's always just been the two of them together, and that's how she likes it. But one day a strangely-dressed man turns up at the front door, saying he's her father. Where has he been all her life, and why did her mum say her father was dead? And how dare he come and intrude on her happy life with mum?

Against the background of the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany, this gripping story follows Karo as she struggles to come to terms with a huge change in family life.

**Publisher** Little Island  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9781848409446



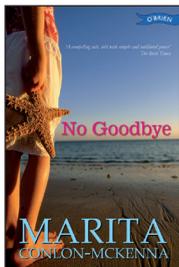
## Sundae Girl

**Author** Cathy Cassidy  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Cathy Cassidy succeeds brilliantly in covering a lot of serious issues in a funny, easy-to-read story about Jude, her embarrassing family, and Kevin on rollerblades who fancies her.

Inside this apparently frothy novel about a girl and her life at school and home, the story tackles Jude's worries: about her dad and his new partner, her gran's increasing frailty, and especially her mum, who keeps promising to give up smoking and drinking, but never quite manages it...

**Publisher** Puffin Books  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780141322100



## No Goodbye

**Author** Marita Conlon-McKenna

**Reading age** 9+

**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** 'She's gone!' When Mum walks out, Greg, Lucy, Grace and Conor are left with Dad to try and deal with the practical and emotional effects of sudden abandonment by a mum they adore. Each chapter is related by a different child in turn, as each in their own way struggles with the shock and bewilderment of their situation.

As they learn that mum has gone away to 'be herself again', they start to plan how to bring her home. The book ends on a hopeful note, but doesn't gloss over the difficulties and turmoil that parental separation brings.

**Publisher** The O'Brien Press

**Published** 1994

**ISBN** 9780862783624



## Fire Mask

**Author** Franzeska G. Ewart

**Illustrator** Dylan Gibson

**Reading age** 9-12

**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** Josh's dad returns from serving in Iraq, badly injured after stepping on a land mine. His disfigured face is hidden behind a white mask as surgeons work to treat his burns.

Two of Josh's classmates make fun of his dad's situation, but when he takes revenge the consequences are almost tragic.

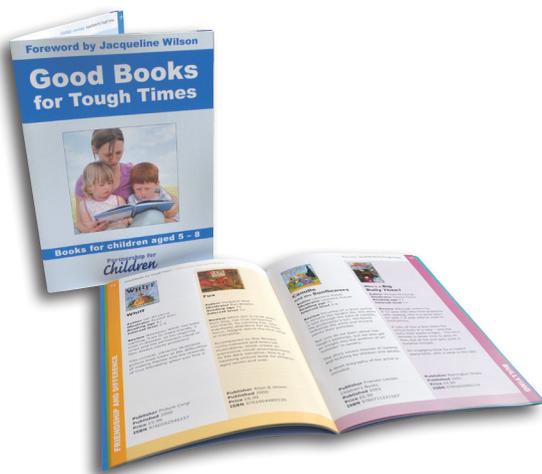
This is a short, easy to read story about coping with anger and fear, and the true nature of friendship.

**Publisher** Barrington Stoke

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781842997628

## Also available from Partnership for Children:



### Good Books for Tough Times Books for children aged 5-8

*'Very informative, easy to read and precise. Set out in colour sections, so you can easily find what you're looking for. This is a good and sensitive guide for modern family life.'* – Parent, Surrey

*'The suggestions are very useful and it is a great bank of ideas.'*  
– Head Teacher, Derbyshire

*'It will be very useful in dealing with enquiries, especially from parents. What a great choice of books!'* – Librarian, Rutland

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[www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk](http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk)



### Helicopter Man

**Author** Elizabeth Fensham  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Ever since Mum died, Pete and his Dad have been on the move. Now they're living in an abandoned shed at the bottom of a garden, taking care to cover their tracks and hiding whenever helicopters appear. Dad says they're being pursued by a secret organisation, but Pete is beginning to have his doubts.

Set in Australia, this is a warm and compelling story of a young boy coming to terms with his father's schizophrenia – or, as Pete says, 'Skiz-whatever-you-call-it disease.'

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780747575498



### The Runner

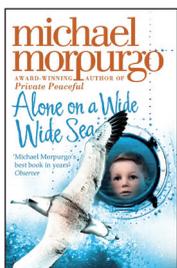
**Author** Keith Gray  
**Illustrator** Jessica Meserve  
**Reading age** 9-12  
**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** Jason is on an Intercity train, bound for Liverpool. Tired of his parents' endless arguments, he's left home, skipped school and is going to stay with his older brother.

On the train, he meets another boy, Jam, who claims to travel all over the country, avoiding ticket inspectors and stealing food. Jason is attracted by Jam's independence – but the world of the Runner is not what it seems.

This short and beautifully illustrated story will resonate with children who feel the need to escape from a difficult situation.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780440866565



## Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea

**Author** Michael Morpurgo  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** This wonderful story will inspire children who are growing up apart from their birth parents.

Arthur Hobhouse was shipped to Australia with other orphans at the age of six and raised in terrible conditions. Now, sixty years later and approaching the end of his life, he recalls good times as well as bad, and wonders about the sister whom he left behind in England. He builds a boat and his daughter, Allie, sails off to find Auntie Kitty.

Beautifully written, harrowing and heartwarming, this is a gripping read.

**Publisher** HarperCollins  
 Children's Books  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780007230587



## Hetty Feather

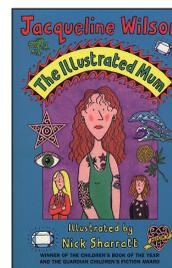
**Author** Jacqueline Wilson  
**Reading age** 10-12  
**Interest level** 10-12

**Review** Hetty Feather is another of Jacqueline Wilson's redoubtable and very appealing young heroines.

Abandoned at birth in 1876, she is raised firstly by a family in the country, but is then returned to the harsh regime of the Foundling Hospital in London, to be prepared for life as a servant. But Hetty, whose temperament is as fiery as her red hair, has other ideas.

This is an engaging, uncompromising but ultimately heartwarming story of a young girl's struggle to find her mother – and to find herself.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9780440868354



## The Illustrated Mum

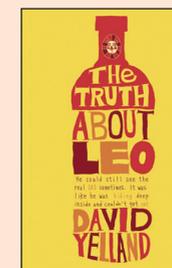
**Author** Jacqueline Wilson  
**Reading age** 11+  
**Interest level** 11+

**Review** This book has won many awards, including Children's Book of the Year, and rightly so.

It's the story of Dolphin, her sister Star and their heavily tattooed single mum, Marigold, who seems at first to be merely unconventional but is gradually revealed to be manic depressive. The two girls have to cope with their mother's mental illness at the same time as coming to terms with the discoveries of their own fathers.

This is a bold, perceptive and sometimes shocking story, brought to a satisfying, un sentimental conclusion.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780440867814



## The Truth About Leo

**Author** David Yelland  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Leo has a secret – his dad is an alcoholic. Even before Mum died it was never spoken about and since she went things have got much worse. Just occasionally he catches a glimpse of the old Dad, the one who used to play pyjama football before breakfast, but mostly he sees a stranger who shouts, yells and smashes things up.

What could have been a truly disheartening tale turns out to be surprisingly uplifting as Leo finally shares his burden and opens the door to a more positive future. Skilful writing makes this difficult issue accessible to children.

**Publisher** Puffin Books  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9780141330037



## How Kirsty Jenkins Stole the Elephant

**Author** Elen Caldecott  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 8-12

**Review** Just before Kirsty's beloved Grandad dies she makes him a promise - that she will look after his allotment. Unfortunately, Mr Thomas from the council has other ideas. Finding herself up against official opposition, Kirsty is determined to keep her promise, and she formulates an ingenious, intricate and almost believable plan to steal an elephant from the local museum and hold it to ransom.

This is a beautifully written story which has warmth, humour, excitement and an underlying poignancy, and also explores bereavement and the nature of grieving in an accessible and sensitive way.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2009  
**ISBN** 9780747599197



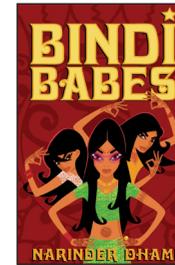
## Wenny Has Wings

**Author** Janet Lee Carey  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** When seven year-old Wenny and her 11 year-old brother Will are hit by a truck, the little girl is killed and her older brother hospitalised. Will has a near-death experience and, afraid to tell anyone about it, records his feelings about the accident and its aftermath in letters to his younger sister. While the letters explore the effects of grief on his family, he also writes with humour about everyday life and the scrapes and conflicts he gets embroiled with.

Carey keeps the tone matter-of-fact in this moving, yet never mawkish, account of the effect of bereavement on a family.

**Publisher** Faber Children's Books  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780571223534



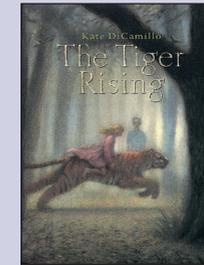
## Bindi Babes

**Author** Narinder Dhama  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** The Bindi sisters seem to be coping very well following the death of their mother. They are popular at school and manage the housekeeping; their father buys them anything they want.

When their aunt comes over from India to look after them, they resent the intrusion and resolve to get rid of her. This, however, proves to be difficult, and they begin to realise that in fact their lives are not so perfect. Although these are serious themes, Narinder Dhama has a light touch which girls in particular will enjoy.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2003  
**ISBN** 9780440865124



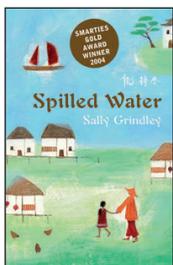
## The Tiger Rising

**Author** Kate DiCamillo  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10-12

**Review** For Rob, finding the tiger in the woods is miraculous. After his mother's funeral he has become master of the art of not thinking about things - especially at school where he is horribly bullied. Things start to change when Rob meets Sistine: eccentric, stubborn, and very angry, Sistine doesn't believe in keeping quiet.

As Rob and Sistine become friends, he finds himself opening up to feelings that he had kept locked up - like the tiger in its cage. Should he open the cage and set the tiger free?

**Publisher** Walker Books  
**Published** 2001  
**ISBN** 9780744589641



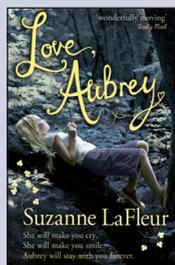
## Spilled Water

**Author** Sally Grindley  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9-11

**Review** Spilled Water is the story of Lu Si-Yan, a young Chinese girl whose happy home life is bluntly terminated by her father's sudden death, followed by the illness of her mother and the family's descent into poverty. To her horror, she is sold by her uncle to be an unpaid domestic servant and bride-to-be.

Lu Si-Yan is determined to escape and get back to her mother and brother, but she must go through worse trials before things can get better. This powerful novel is a sad but utterly compelling read, and a worthy winner of the Nestlé Children's Book Prize Gold Award.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780747571469



## Love, Aubrey

**Author** Suzanne LaFleur  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Something terrible has happened, and Aubrey finds herself left alone. Rather than face the truth, she'd rather just hide away and fend for herself. But Gram won't let that happen, and insists in taking Aubrey to stay with her. Gradually, with the help of Gram, new friends and the letters she writes to say how she feels, Aubrey starts to come to terms with all that she's lost and what she might regain.

This is a beautifully written novel about loss, understanding and forgiveness, and ultimately, hope for the future.

**Publisher** Puffin Books  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9780141327044



## The Thing with Finn

**Author** Tom Kelly  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** Tom Kelly's debut novel combines humour with heartbreak, and keeps readers guessing until the final pages. We know that the cause of Danny's distress is Finn, and gradually we discover what lies behind it. Written in a quirky, comic style, the author acutely understands and portrays both the turmoil driving Danny and the irreverent fascination ten year-olds have with bodily functions.

Chapters are short (sometimes just a list), and the style direct, making this an easy-to-read but profound novel about loss.

**Publisher** Macmillan Children's Books  
**Published** 2008  
**ISBN** 9780330444552



## Goodnight Mister Tom

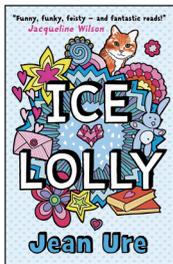
**Author** Michelle Magorian  
**Reading age** 11+  
**Interest level** 11+

**Review** Willie has been badly abused by his mother, but at the start of World War II he is evacuated from London, to lodge with an old countryman, Tom.

They're an unlikely pair, but Willie gradually grows in confidence, discovering new talents and learning to accept the deaths of both his mother and his best friend. Tom, whose wife and newborn son died 40 years ago, finds new purpose in caring for Willie.

This heartwarming story is about turning past sadness into future hope.

**Publisher** Puffin Classics  
**Published** 1998  
**ISBN** 9780141329703



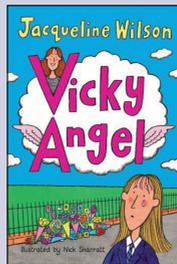
## Ice Lolly

**Author** Jean Ure  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** When Lauren's mum dies, she has to go and live with Uncle Mark and Auntie Ellen, and her cousins Michael and Holly. All she has to take with her from her old life are Mr Pooter, her beloved old cat, and the books that she and her mum used to read together.

But Auntie Ellen doesn't like pets, and Lauren feels desperately out of place in her new home. So she freezes, like an ice lolly, so that no one will know what she's feeling. A poignant and touching story about a young girl struggling to cope with the shock of bereavement and change.

**Publisher** HarperCollins  
 Children's Books  
**Published** 2010  
**ISBN** 9780007281732



## Vicky Angel

**Author** Jacqueline Wilson  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** This is a bold and imaginative story about a girl coming to terms with the death of her best friend, Vicky, who is hit by a car as they walk home from school.

As Jade mourns and tries to move on, Vicky keeps appearing beside her – but is she a guardian angel or an unhelpful ghost?

Many books tackle bereavement, but this one is particularly helpful for girls who have lost friends of their own age.

**Publisher** Corgi Yearling  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9780440867807



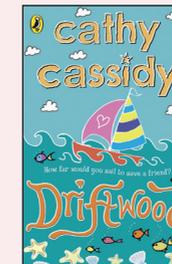
## Saskia's Journey

**Author** Theresa Breslin  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 11+

**Review** When Saskia goes to visit her great-aunt Alessandra, far away on the north-east coast of Scotland, memories return of time spent there as a child, and Saskia realises that her domineering father has been keeping things from her. As the truth is gradually revealed, Saskia helps her great-aunt come to terms with her unhappy past and begins to make her own decisions about the future.

This is a gripping story in which the powerful imagery and lyrical prose bring the sea and its effect on the whole community vividly to life.

**Publisher** Corgi Children's  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780552548656



## Driftwood

**Author** Cathy Cassidy  
**Reading age** 9+  
**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Hannah has been best friends with Joey forever. When Joey acquires a foster brother, Paul, and then falls in love with Hannah's big brother, the dynamics of their relationship begin to change and Hannah finds it hard to adjust. At the same time, she discovers that her own brother is involved in bullying Paul at school because he is 'different'.

When Paul goes missing, the police become involved and everyone's secrets come out into the open. Despite a rather incongruous cover, this touching and funny story would be enjoyed by both boys and girls.

**Publisher** Puffin Books  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780141320212



## Heartbeat

**Author** Sharon Creech  
**Reading age** 10+  
**Interest level** 10+

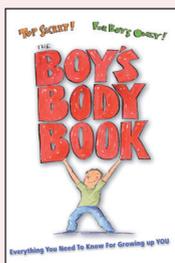
**Review** At 12, Annie is being confronted by a lot of changes.

Mum is expecting a baby. Grandpa is dying. Her school wants her to join the running team, even though she is not interested in winning. Other girls think Max is cute, but to her he's just her moody friend and running partner.

This short story, written in blank verse with footnotes, addresses some big issues – life, death, family, friends and love – and tackles them all with sensitivity.

A heartwarming, delightful book.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury  
**Published** 2005  
**ISBN** 9780747571476



## The Boy's Body Book

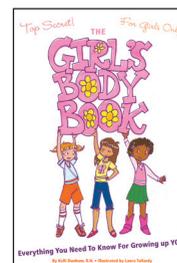
**Everything you need to know for growing up YOU**

**Author** Kelli Dunham  
**Reading age** 9-12  
**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** An ideal book for 9-12 year-old boys who are getting ready to deal with changes in bodies and emotions. It's well laid out in short, readable sections, and is easy to read without being patronising.

It gives clear, factual information on bodily changes and staying healthy, and also looks at emotional changes and relationships with family members and friends, all presented in a friendly and reassuring way.

**Publisher** Cider Mill Press  
**Published** 2007  
**ISBN** 9781933662749



## The Girl's Body Book

**Everything you need to know for growing up YOU**

**Author** Kelli Dunham  
**Reading age** 9-12  
**Interest level** 9-12

**Review** This excellent book is full of wise advice without being too serious. It's a readable, reassuring illustrated guide covering all aspects of puberty, explaining both physical and emotional changes.

It also covers academic pressures, dealing with out-of-control feelings, family relations, 'mean girls', and stressful situations such as parents getting divorced. It's laid out in short, clear sections, making it accessible and easy to read.

**Publisher** Cider Mill Press  
**Published** 2008  
**ISBN** 9781604330045



## Girls Only!

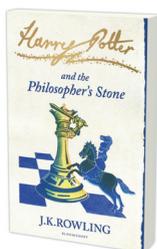
**All about periods and growing-up stuff**

**Author** Vic Parker  
**Reading age** 8+  
**Interest level** 9+

**Review** An excellent book that young girls will find very 'user-friendly', and tackles the main worries around their physical development that they are likely to have at this age. Half of this 100-page book is about periods, and the remainder is about having 'a beautiful bod', and good, sensible advice about losing and keeping friends, having a first boyfriend, and getting on with one's family.

It is written in language that a young girl will find accessible and friendly without being patronising.

**Publisher** Hodder Children's Books  
**Published** 2004  
**ISBN** 9780340878286



## Harry Potter series

**Author** JK Rowling

**Reading age** 9+

**Interest level** 9+

**Publisher** Bloomsbury Publishing

**Review** These best-selling books about a young wizard at Hogwarts School of Wizardry are full of fun, quirky inventiveness, suspense and excitement. They also deal brilliantly with issues of friendship, growing up, bereavement and loneliness, as Harry matures and his adventures take him into deeper and darker challenges. A wonderful series, ideal for getting 9-12 year-olds into reading, but appealing to much older readers too.

### Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810545

### Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810552

### Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810569

### Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810576

### Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810590

### Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810583

### Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2010

**ISBN** 9781408810606

## Also recommended but not currently in print

### FAMILY ISSUES

#### My Mum's from Planet Pluto

**Author** Gwyneth Rees

**Reading age** 11+

**Interest level** 11+

**Review** Daniel's mother is manic depressive. Most of the time, she is fine, but when Dad has to go overseas, she starts to behave very strangely indeed. This sensitive, sympathetic story can help children to understand mental illness and how it can affect a happy middle-class family.

**Publisher** Macmillan Children's Books

**Published** 2004

**ISBN** 9780330437288

#### Hit the Road, Jack

**Author** Mimi Thebo

**Reading age** 11+

**Interest level** 11+

**Review** When Jack goes looking for his father, he is disillusioned by the cold, alcoholic, manipulative man he finds. Long buried memories of domestic violence gradually resurface. There is a lot going on here, but this is a gripping tale about the sad fact that not all Dads are heroes.

**Publisher** HarperCollins Children's Books

**Published** 2004

**ISBN** 9780007142798

### COMING OF AGE

#### Replay

**Author** Sharon Creech

**Reading age** 10+

**Interest level** 10+

**Review** Leo finds refuge from a big family and teenage reality by playing at being someone else, through acting and his fantasy life as a hero. A funny and moving book which will strike a chord with anyone who has been part of a busy family, with squabbling relatives and sneering cousins.

**Publisher** Bloomsbury

**Published** 2007

**ISBN** 9780439862035

#### Mark Two

**Author** Jeanne Willis

**Illustrator** Tony Ross

**Reading age** 10+

**Interest level** 10+

**Review** This easy, funny read will appeal to boys approaching puberty. Mark's mum despairs of her son – until Mark 2 appears, keeping his room tidy and studying hard. Which is the real Mark? This will get boys thinking not just about who they are but about daring to change.

**Publisher** Andersen Press

**Published** 2002

**ISBN** 9781842701102

## Thanks

The development of this booklet was made possible by a generous grant from a charitable foundation. The foundation prefers to remain anonymous, but we publicly record our thanks for its support.

We also acknowledge The Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation, which supported both this edition and an earlier one that recommended books for younger children.

We particularly thank the many family and friends who have given donations in memory of Howard Mak. Howard died in late 2009, aged just 22. His dream was to run a bookshop, and so this booklet which encourages young children to read is a particularly fitting way to celebrate his life.

Our selection of books was informed by Booktrust, an independent national charity that encourages people of all ages and cultures to discover and enjoy reading.

Booktrust's website contains thousands of children's book reviews, along with author interviews and teachers' resources. Visit [www.booktrust.org.uk](http://www.booktrust.org.uk) to find out more.

## Partnership for Children

Partnership for Children is an independent charity that works to promote the emotional wellbeing of children and young people around the world. It provides resources, advice and training to teachers and parents. It manages the Zippy's Friends programme, which teaches coping and social skills to young children, and provides information online on a variety of topics related to children's wellbeing.

You can find articles, activities and links to help with the issues covered by this booklet at [www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk](http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk).

## Zippy's Friends



Zippy's Friends is a programme taught in schools to 5-7 year-old children. It teaches them how to cope with everyday difficulties: expressing feelings, communicating with others, friendship and conflict, change and loss. It has been rigorously evaluated and recognised by both the World Health Organisation and OFSTED.

Zippy's Friends is running in schools in England and in many other countries, and has already helped over half a million children. Training and teaching materials are provided by Partnership for Children.

For more information, visit [www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk](http://www.partnershipforchildren.org.uk).

# Good Books for Tough Times

## Books for children aged 9-12

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Children read for all sorts of reasons – to be entertained, to be informed, to be thrilled and surprised. And if they're worried about something – a friendship issue, change in the family, growing up – books can be a great comfort as well. It's good to read a story about someone who has gone through a similar experience and come through it.

This booklet is an independent guide to excellent books for 9-12 year-olds who may be having a tough time. We have arranged our reviews under the following topics:

- Friendship and Difference
- Bullying
- Family Issues
- Bereavement
- Coming of Age

Whether the books are read to a child by an adult, or read by the children themselves, these are books to be enjoyed because they are a great read – and they might really help a child who's having a hard time at home or at school.

The books have been chosen by Partnership for Children, an international charity which promotes children's emotional wellbeing. This is a companion booklet to 'Good Books for Tough Times: Books for children aged 5-8'.

This booklet is also available on our website, where all the books can be ordered online.