

DIVE INTO BOOKS

FALLING in love with reading is the best thing in the world. It's mind growing and helps with all subjects in school. Even maths!

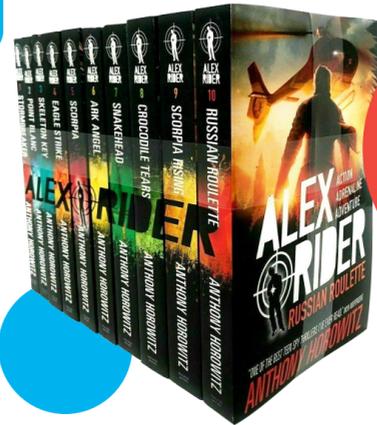
Finding favourite story books is a crucial part of helping us learn and absorb new information, so it was brilliant to see your suggestions for our Best Books Poll! Over the last few months, loads of you shared your favourite stories with us on First News Live – the ones that set your imaginations alight.

As they've been at the top of the best-seller charts for a long time, there were a lot of votes for Harry Potter. And books by Enid Blyton, especially *The Faraway Tree*, were popular with you all, as were all of the Tom Gates series and the Alex Rider books.

Here at Little Box of Books we love so many of the same books as you, but we exist to make sure that all children have access to brilliant books that reflect the diversity of our population. The dream bookshelf is one that features a diverse cast of characters. We're talking about books that show characters of different races, cultures, family set-ups, backgrounds, relationships, books that challenge gender stereotypes and feature disabled characters.

So it was really good to see favourite book votes for *The Christmasaurus* and *the Winter Witch*, which features a disabled main character.

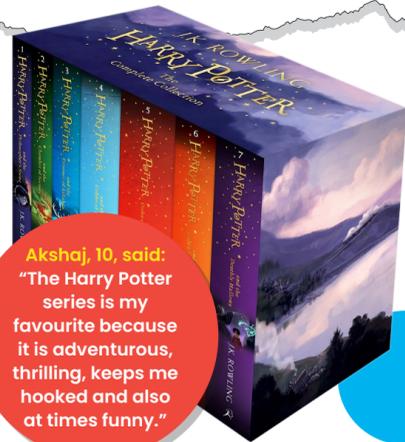
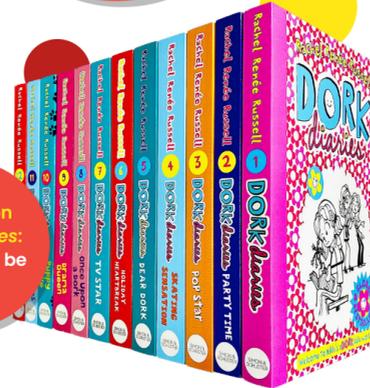
Books are windows and mirrors; windows that help you to see into the lives of people who are in some way different from you, helping you to develop understanding and empathy for those in different situations or with different perspectives. Or they can be mirrors, where you see yourself, your family situation or something familiar in the story that you're reading. This can make you feel less alone and can offer the reassurance that you're as normal as anyone else.



Pup369, 10, said: "The Alex Rider series is probably my favourite because I love books with spies, adrenaline and action. It just makes me feel highly courageous and excited."

Alice, 9, said: "I love the characters [in *The Christmasaurus*] and I like dinosaurs. I think the story is intense and I'm like: 'What's going to happen next?' Please read this book, it is awesome."

Tara, 8, on *Dork Diaries*: "It lets you be you..."



Akshaj, 10, said: "The Harry Potter series is my favourite because it is adventurous, thrilling, keeps me hooked and also at times funny."

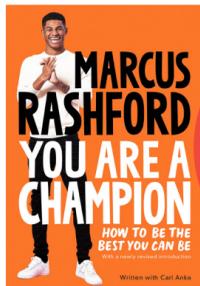
Shahana, 10, said: "Wonder shows you that everyone is different in their own way. It doesn't matter how you look, it matters if you believe in yourself."



The magical tale from bestselling author TOM FLETCHER



Kenzie, 13 on *The Primrose Railway Children*: "Jacqueline Wilson is one of my favourite authors. Most of my favourite books are written by her!"



Jake, 11, on Marcus Rashford's book, *You Are A Champion: How To Be The Best You Can Be*: "It makes me feel confident in myself and it is a really fascinating book."

It's crucial for us all to read from diverse bookshelves. It stops us believing limiting things about whole groups of people and gives us all a basic understanding of why we're all equally important. But you have to look hard to find these stories. They're often not the ones that are in the supermarkets, on the adverts and the ones you see in magazines.

Only 8% of children's books published last year featured a character of Black, Asian or minority ethnic origin, despite 33.5% of our schoolchildren being of Black, Asian or minority ethnic origin.

And in 2017, research showed that male characters are twice as likely to take leading roles in children's books than females and then 70% of book characters who aren't human are often referred to as 'he'.

If you haven't found your favourite book yet, keep looking, you will. Perhaps you'll find inspiration from our top ten books on the next page.

Remember, you don't have to finish every book you read, and you don't have to like a book because everybody else likes it. It can be a picture book, even if others think you're too old for them. It can be a graphic novel, and it can be non-fiction or fiction.

Find what you love and read more of it. And try and incorporate as much diversity into your reading selection as you can!

CHALLENGE: DIVERSIFY YOUR BOOKSHELF!

First, grab all your books, even if you have thousands, and divide them up.

Five quick tips:

1. Check out who the writer/illustrator is. Your bookshelves need to be full of stories created by authors and illustrators from a range of backgrounds. This gives you access to a wider variety of stories.
2. Check out who the main character is. We need to see stories where the main character is Black, Brown, gay, hearing impaired or physically disabled, to show that everybody deserves stories about their adventures. Find books where points of diversity aren't the focus of the story.
3. Check the illustrations. In picture books, the illustrations do half the work of telling the story, so we want to make sure that diversity goes beyond the use of a different-coloured pen and is obvious throughout.
4. Look out for books that feature lots of diversity that isn't a major part of the storyline. We want to see more books that feature single-parent families, mixed-heritage families, blended families, Black families, Asian families, women who aren't mums, and working mums. Basically, more books that reflect everyone.
5. Sign up for one of our brilliant subscriptions or order a one-off box. That way, you will be reading books that reflect the full diversity of society, learning that everybody matters and everyone is equally important - without even noticing.

You can buy a subscription from Little Box of Books at littleboxofbooks.co.uk/product/book-subscription-for-8-11-year-olds
Or a book bundle could make a great Christmas present for your teacher: littleboxofbooks.co.uk/product/christmas-presents-for-teachers



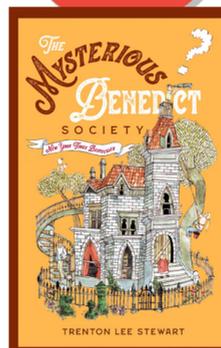
Sophie, 12, on *After Love*: "It spreads awareness of LGBTQIAP+ [people] and it has beautiful descriptions."



YOUR top ten reads!

- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling
- The Magic Faraway Tree* by Enid Blyton
- Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz
- Tom Gates series by Liz Pichon
- The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart
- You Are A Champion: How To Be The Best You Can Be* by Marcus Rashford
- The Christmasaurus* by Tom Fletcher
- Robin Stevens' books
- Afterlove* by Tanya Byrne

Florence, 11, on *The Mysterious Benedict Society*: "I love the way it is full of twists and turns in the plot!"



OUR top ten reads!

- Boy, Everywhere* by AM Dassu
- A Kind of Spark* by Elle McNicoll
- The Gauntlet* by Karuna Riazi
- The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh* by Helen Rutter
- The Land of Roar* by Jenny McLachlan
- Amari and the Night Brothers* by BB Alston
- Me, My Dad and the End of the Rainbow* by Benjamin Dean
- An Alien in the Jam Factory* by Chrissie Sains
- Black and British* by David Olusoga
- The Accidental Diary of BUG* by Jen Carney

Emma, 11, on *Asha & the Spirit Bird*: "It is full of mystery and adventure. I honestly can't get enough of it!"



TO READ ALL THE BOOKS VOTED FOR BY FIRST NEWS READERS, HEAD TO FIRST.NEWS/YOURBESTBOOKS