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The Ultimate Teen Book Guide

Leonie Flynn, Daniel Hahn & Susan Reuben

A & C Black

Extract

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Introduction

by David Almond



Books. There they are lined up on shelves or stacked on a table. There they are wrapped in their jackets, lines of neat print on nicely bound pages. They look like such orderly, static things. Then you, the reader, come along. You open the book jacket, and it can be like opening the gates into an unknown city, or opening the lid on a treasure chest. You read the first word and you're off on a journey of exploration and discovery. When you find your own best books, which might be nothing like the best books for other readers, a kind of magic occurs. The language and the story and your own imagination blend and react and fizz with life and possibility. Sometimes it's like the book was written just for you, as if it's been waiting just for you, its perfect reader. It doesn't always happen, of course. Sometimes a book will fall flat for you. What's all the fuss about? you'll ask. But then you'll find another one that excites you, that speaks clearly to you, that sets up weird resonances in you. It goes on happening all through your life. It's happening to me now, this week, as I read Yukio Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea.* Why have I waited till now to read this wonderful book? Because I've been reading other books, of course.

Reading is a lifelong adventure. Mishima's is just the latest in a long line of books that have gripped me. Other recent highlights include Sarah Waters' hypnotic narratives, and the novels of Ha Jin. In my teenage years? Two out-of-print books: *The Grey Pilot* by Angus MacVicar that took me from my Tyneside home to flee through the Western Isles with Bonny Prince Charlie;

and *The Adventures of Turkey* by Ray Harris that allowed me to share the adventures of a Huckleberry Finn-ish Australian lad. Then John Wyndham's marvellous *The Day of the Triffids* (UTBG 96) followed quickly by his *The Chrysalids* (UTBG 77), *The Midwich Cuckoos, The Kraken Wakes*, as I discovered the excitement of exploring an author's whole oeuvre for the first time. Next an astonishing book called *The Third Eye* by the ex-Tibetan monk T. Lobsang Rampa. For a time I felt that I was Lobsang in some weird way. Then he turned out to be a bloke from Essex. Did I care? Not a bit. His book had worked its magic on me. The 'hoax' was just another part of that magic. Then Hemingway came along. I remember pulling out a collection of his short stories from the library shelf, opening the book, reading the first line of a story called 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place', a story in which hardly anything seems to happen, but which set up resonances inside me that have never stopped. Then Stevie Smith's poems, and Sylvia Plath's, and Kafka, and so it went on and so it goes on.

The wonderful book that you're holding in your hands now is a kind of traveller's guide. It points you to many sidetracks and highlights and landmarks that other travellers have found worth visiting. Many of them will be as exciting to you as they were to the folk who recommend them. Others might not be. The world of books is almost limitless. As you travel, you'll hit upon your own best books, the books that have a particular fascination and excitement for you. You'll keep moving on, free to roam and explore and discover at will...

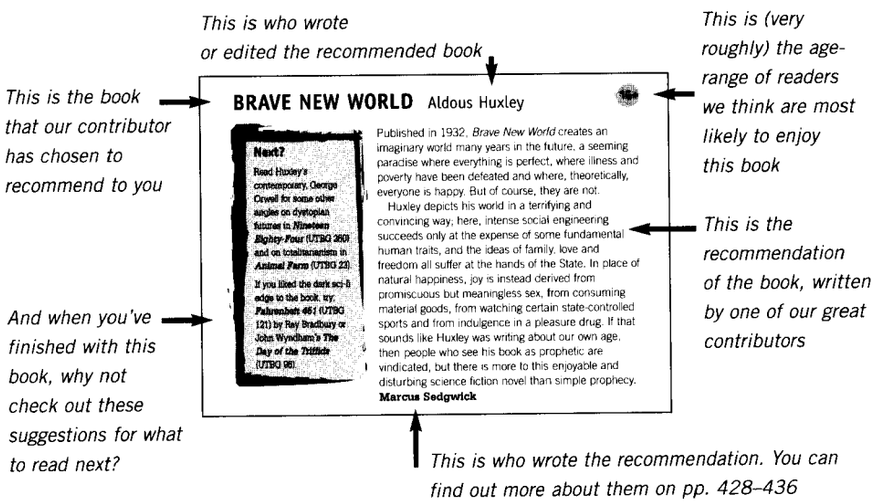


David Almond

How to Use This Book

You'll find that the majority of this book is self-explanatory, and we hope you'll find it easy to use. But here's a bit of help just in case...

Most of *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* is made up of book recommendations. Our team of contributors has recommended over 700 books for you, so there's bound to be stuff you'll like, whatever your tastes. The book recommendations are listed alphabetically by title, and they work like this:



The Next? box gives you ideas of what you might like to read once you've finished the recommended book. It might include other books by the same author, or books which are funny / exciting / inspiring / terrifying in the same way as the book you've just finished, or which deal with a similar subject in a different way. The letters UTBG mean the book to read next has a recommendation in *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* too, which you can find on the page indicated. For example, if you see...

> For another powerful tale of fighting racial prejudice in the American South, read Harper Lee's classic ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** (UTBG 375).

...then you can turn to p. 375 to read about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and decide whether it might be just the book for you.

There are also 13 short features on particular types of book – on fantasy, on historical fiction, on books about love and sex, on horror stories, on sci-fi, etc. If you have a favourite genre of book, you'll find lots of good suggestions about what to read here. Or if you fancy trying something in a genre you don't know much about ('Hmm, I've never really read much fantasy...') the features will give you a good idea of where to start. You'll find a list of these features on p. 3.

The features are all written by experts in the field – usually people who write that kind of book themselves (Catherine Fisher on fantasy, Bali Rai on race, Kevin Brooks on stories about characters going off the rails, K.K. Beck on detective stories). If you want a short and snappy title to start off with – something not too challenging, that will grip you from the first line – Pete Johnson has some great suggestions for you on p. 418. And next to them you'll find lists of relevant titles, most of which you can read about elsewhere in *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide*.

Finally, you'll come across reviews by winners of our schools' competition, the results of our nationwide teen readers' poll (for which, full details of every book can be found on our website: www.ultimatebookguide.com), and all sorts of other bits and pieces...

About the Editors

Since editing *The Ultimate Book Guide* in 2004, **DANIEL HAHN** has curated two exhibitions, lived in Germany, edited a book about the Globe Theatre, translated quite a lot and started writing a new book (as well as putting together this second *UBG*). He's also done little bits of teaching, organised a couple of charity fund-raisers, and, you know, other things like that. As you can see, he's still got no intention of getting a proper job.

LEONIE FLYNN lives surrounded by boxes. Usually she lives surrounded by books, but moving has put paid to that. When not writing, staring at boxes or being heartlessly cruel to young boys (she's a librarian at a school) she attempts to read every book she reads about and to write every story she imagines. Actually, she fails at both, but still manages to remain remarkably cheerful.

SUSAN REUBEN is senior publisher at Egmont Books. Four days before *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide* was due to be delivered to the publishers she delivered her first child: Isaac Harry. Any errors and omissions in this volume may be blamed on that. When not feeding her baby, Susan enjoys sleeping.

1066 AND ALL THAT

12+

W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman

This wickedly funny skit on British history, written by a teacher and an ad man in 1930, is every bit as effective today. It's not just the puns on names, so bad they're positively brilliant (the Egberts, Ethelwulfs and Ethelbalds become Eggberd, Eggbreth and Eggfroth). It's not just the wry recognition that the grand old tales are mostly bunk, and the great old triumphs (a.k.a. the massacre of other civilisations) look a little different now. It's not even the fake test papers ('Why do you picture John of Gaunt as a rather emaciated grandee?'). No – it's the fact that truth really is stranger than fiction, and that this is the kind of 'nonsense' that actually makes more and more sense, the more you know about history.

Sarah Gristwood

Next?

For the same off-beat humour, try the classic school story ***Down With Skool!*** (UTBG 110).

Or George Mikes' guide to being British, ***How to Be an Alien***.

Watch ***Blackadder*** on TV, especially series two and three – and read the scripts; they're hilarious, too.

THE 13½ LIVES OF CAPTAIN BLUEBEAR

14+

Walter Moers

Next?

Someone else who writes extraordinary fantasy is Terry Pratchett; try ***The Colour of Magic***.

Life of Pi (UTBG 218) is a strange story involving a lifeboat, a hyena, a monkey, a tiger and a boy.

A whole life encapsulated in one book? Try Raymond Briggs' ***Ethel and Ernest*** (UTBG 118).

'People usually start life by being born. Not me, though.'

From the first page you are catapulted into a world that is just so refreshingly *different*: full of Hobgoblins, Minipirates, a headless Bollogg, a Bolloggless head, Nocturnomaths and many other weird and wonderful creatures (including, of course, blue bears).

This book covers Bluebear's adventures starting with his rescue from a dreaded whirlpool, as a baby floating in a nutshell, through 12 eventful lives, to his final half-life 'at peace', and holds you entranced throughout.

Not only does this book cater for many genres, from sci-fi to romance, but it also travels at such a fast-moving pace that you will sail through it like a jet-propelled sponge through a sea of information.

Samuel Mortimer (aged 11)

52 PICK-UP Elmore Leonard

14+

The difficulty with an author like Elmore Leonard is he's written so many books – all, by and large, never less than very good – that it's almost too hard to choose which one to point to and say '*that*'s the one you should read!'. In the end I plumped for *52 Pick-up* for no particular reason except that I read it ages ago and still clearly remember it. Like every Leonard book, this one is tightly plotted, has razor-sharp dialogue and comes with a real sting in the tail; it's a thriller, it's about blackmail and revenge and it's very cool.

People often look down on crime fiction as being somehow less than literature, but this book has style, class and a great story. What more could you want?

Graham Marks

Next?

The films ***Get Shorty*** and ***Jackie Brown*** were both based on books by Elmore Leonard – why not read the originals?

Lots of films have been made of Raymond Chandler's books too; try ***The Big Sleep*** (UTBG 40) or ***Farewell, My Lovely***.

Carl Hiaasen's books are also set in Florida; try ***Hoot*** (UTBG 175) or ***Tourist Season*** (UTBG 377).

And have a look at our feature on detective fiction on pp. 104–105.

84 CHARING CROSS ROAD Helene Hanff

12+

Next?

Helene Hanff's ***The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*** is a sequel to ***84 Charing Cross Road***. ***Apple of My Eye*** is about her native New York and ***Q's Legacy*** is about her education in English literature.

Anne Fadiman's ***Ex Libris*** charts a lifelong love affair with books.

A Particular Friendship by Dirk Bogarde charts another friendship between two people who never met.

84 Charing Cross Road is a collection of letters exchanged between down-to-earth New York writer Helene Hanff and London bookseller Frank Doel between 1949 and 1969. Miss Hanff, who had a passion for obscure and out-of-print books, initially wrote to Marks & Co, a bookshop at 84 Charing Cross Road, with a list of second-hand books she would like, if they could supply them, so long as they didn't cost more than $5 each. Mr Doel replied, saying that they had managed to find some of the items on her list and were sending them on, with an invoice.

Thus a wonderful correspondence and a 20-year association began. Rereading a few of the letters today I was captivated all over again – this is one of the most delightful books ever published.

Michael Lawrence

87th PRECINCT series Ed McBain

14+

Next?

Start the series with the early ones: ***Cop Hater*** or ***The Mugger.***

More detective stories? Try a British version with the **Inspector Morse** books (UTBG 191) by Colin Dexter, starting with ***Last Bus to Woodstock*** or the great Agatha Christie; try ***Murder on the Orient Express.***

One of the great classic detective writers is Dashiel Hammett; try ***The Maltese Falcon*** or ***The Glass Key***, both of which are tautly plotted and totally brilliant.

I wish I'd known Ed McBain's **87th Precinct** series of police procedural mysteries when I was a teenager. They're short and beautifully written with tight plots, sharp social detail and vivid characters. There are more than 50 of them, written over as many years. The quality dipped a little halfway through, but the late ones show him back on top form, which is unusual for a long-running series.

Each title is set in a fictionalised version of New York with multiple storylines and recurring characters like detectives Steve Carella, Meyer Meyer and Fat Ollie Weeks. They're carefully researched and shot through with world-weary attitude. Many crime writers have borrowed from McBain (as have loads of TV cop shows), but nobody did it better.

David Belbin

ABARAT Clive Barker

13+

Candy Quackenbush lives in Chickentown, USA, the most boring place in the world. But Candy has a destiny. Fate is leading her to an extraordinary land: the Abarat, a great archipelago where each island sits at a different hour of the day. There she must fight the evil that is overtaking the islands, helped and hindered by a cast of bizarre allies and enemies.

Barker's imagination is astonishing, and he leaves most other writers in the dust. *Abarat* is a dizzying ride for children and adults alike. It is sometimes scary, sometimes funny, but always enthralling. If you thought fantasy was all about wizards and elves and fairies, read *Abarat* and find out what real fantasy feels like.

Chris Wooding

Next?

If you liked this, read the sequel: ***Abarat: Days Of Magic, Nights Of War.***

If you're fond of tales about children escaping the boring, everyday world try C.S. Lewis' ***The Chronicles of Narnia.***

Or for a creepier take on the same theme, check out Neil Gaiman's ***Coraline*** (UTBG 83). Brrr.

THE ABORTION

16+

Richard Brautigan

Next?

Brautigan's first few books are his best. Try ***In Watermelon Sugar*** or ***A Confederate General From Big Sur***. Save ***Trout Fishing In America*** until you've got the idea.

Jack Kerouac's ***On the Road*** (UTBG 270) also came out of the American beatnik movement.

More of the surreal in everyday life? Try ***A Wild Sheep Chase*** (UTBG 413).

Brautigan's writing looks simple. It isn't. His novels can be sad, funny, wise, silly, innocent and strange. He was a big literary success for a decade or so. Then he wasn't. He killed himself in 1984. Recently his books are being brought back into print. As they should be.

The Abortion starts out as a piece about a library where people deposit their unpublished books. Vida brings one that is about why she hates her body. She and the unworldly librarian fall in love. Vida gets pregnant and has an illegal abortion. Might not sound like a lot goes on, but this is one of Brautigan's more heavily plotted books. It's a good introduction to his work, which is as much about moments as it is about story.

David Belbin

ABOUT A BOY Nick Hornby

14+

This should really be called *About Two Boys*: it tells of 36-year-old big-kid Will whose independent income means he doesn't have to work and he owns all the latest state-of-the-art gadgets; his main ambition is to sleep with as many women as possible, with no ties. Into this emotionally barren existence stumbles Marcus (12), a vegetarian hippy with the dress sense of a middle-aged geography teacher, thanks to his depressive mother. Bullied at school, he craves a father figure and imagines Will ideal for the role. Unfortunately, Will disagrees and resents this geeky kid impinging on his life and (God forbid!) feelings.

Somehow, though, their lives become intertwined, and each learns something important from the other: Will teaches Marcus about popular culture and how to be hip, and in turn learns from Marcus how to be grown-up.

Witty, cynical and touching – seriously cool stuff!

Catherine Robinson

Next?

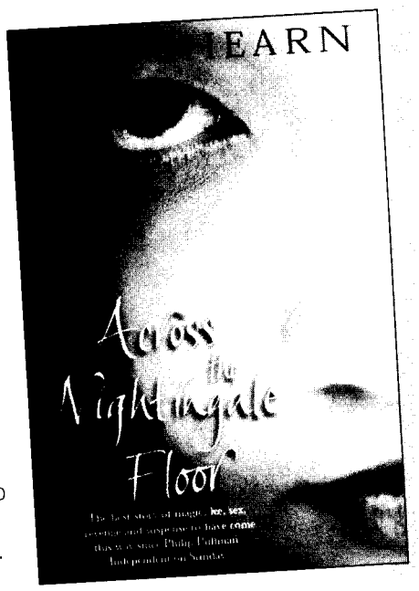
All Nick Hornby's books are worth reading. Try ***High Fidelity*** (UTBG 167) or ***Fever Pitch*** (UTBG 128).

Man and Boy (UTBG 234) also deals with a grown man facing up to his emotional responsibilities – sounds heavy, but it's oh so readable!

ACROSS THE NIGHTINGALE FLOOR

14+

Lian Hearn



Across the Nightingale Floor is the first book in the **Tales of the Otori** trilogy, which interweaves two gripping plots. The first is about a boy torn between three great powers: the Tribe, a clan of highly disciplined, mercenary assassins who are equipped with mystical gifts; the Otori, the honourable warrior clan of his adopted father Shigeru; and the Hidden, a group of highly persecuted pacifists (his mother being one) who believe that their one God will guide them through life. Then there is the tale of Kaede, whose mythical beauty and power mean she is used as a pawn by her captors, who keep her as a political prisoner.

This captivating book is fantastic from cover to cover, combining an incredible plot with intense descriptions and fantastically crafted characters.
Oscar Dub (aged 13)

Next?

There are two sequels: ***Grass for His Pillow*** and ***Brilliance of the Moon***, which continue the story of Takeo and Kaede.

If this makes you wonder about Japanese society, try Katherine Paterson's ***Puppet Master***.

Another gripping adventure starts with Mary Renault's ***The King Must Die*** (UTBG 208).

Catherine Jinks' ***Pagan's Crusade*** (UTBG 283), set in the 12th century at the time of the Crusades, is just as exciting – and gory!

Or try a classic adventure such as Alexandre Dumas' ***The Count of Monte Cristo***.

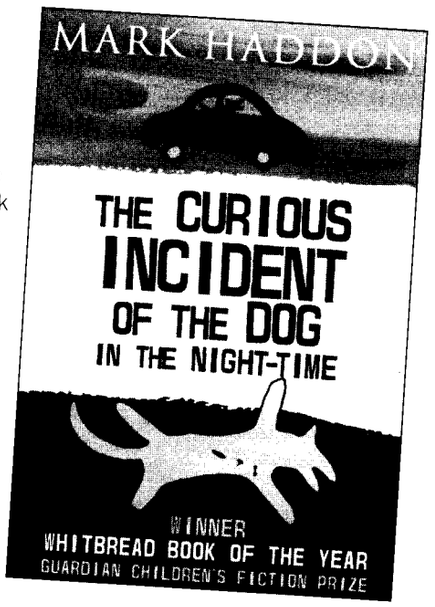
From its opening, in which a young boy wanders back from a carefree afternoon spent picking mushrooms to find a massacre going on in his village, this story grips the reader and refuses to let go until the very last word. It's an extraordinarily powerful and highly original fantasy packed with scenes of haunting beauty and horrifying violence. In a world where warring clans vie for supremacy while hidden strings are pulled by the mysterious Tribe, the boy Takeo must make a painful choice between power, love and revenge.

This is fantasy at its most sophisticated – but it's not for the squeamish.
Brian Keaney

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME

14+

Mark Haddon



One of the most amazing things about a good book is that it can take you inside the mind of a completely different person. Mark Haddon does exactly that in this utterly gripping mystery story. The main character of this book is a 14-year-old autistic boy whose 'voice' rang utterly true to me. Christopher loves the mysteries of Sherlock Holmes, because he often has to rely on clues to know how the people around him are feeling. When he discovers a murdered dog on his neighbour's lawn, he decides to solve the mystery using the deductive methods of his idol.

Caroline Lawrence

Next?

Try other stories of people who see the world in a different way, like those collected by Oliver Sacks in ***The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat***.

In ***Mondays Are Red*** (UTBG 248) Luke's senses are scrambled after he wakes from a coma.

To find out where Christopher gets his methods – and where Haddon got his title – read the **Sherlock Holmes** stories (UTBG 336).

Al Capone Does My Shirts (UTBG 15) charts life growing up with an autistic sister on Alcatraz at the time of Al Capone.

It's always great to read exciting books about magic and faraway lands filled with mystical creatures, but every now and then a great book comes along which despite the absence of all things fantastical still has the power to amaze you. This is one of them. It follows teenager Christopher Boone as he grows up with a condition called Asperger's; we are introduced to his strange world and how he copes within it. You see, Christopher is brilliant at maths but can't understand simple human emotions such as fear and confusion. One night Christopher finds his neighbour's dog Wellington brutally murdered in the garden, and so begins his quest to find the killer.

Despite dealing with some serious issues, this story is told in a light and witty style, and as it progresses the characters really feel alive.

Gareth Smith (aged 14)

CUT Patricia McCormick

14+

Next?

Famous novels about teenagers suffering breakdowns? Try ***The Catcher in the Rye*** (UTBG 66) by J.D. Salinger or ***The Bell Jar*** (UTBG 37) by Sylvia Plath, both complex and challenging – but worth it!

Disconnected (UTBG 103) by Sherry Ashworth is about a girl who suffers burn-out and stops working at school.

Massive (UTBG 237) by Julia Bell treats the subject of eating disorders with care and compassion.

Cut is a sensitive treatment of the subject of self-harm. The heroine, Callie, who tells the story, has been cutting herself and is admitted to Sea Pines – or Sick Minds as she calls it. Callie used to be a keen runner until her obsession led her to withdraw from the world completely, to the point where she chooses not to talk anymore – not even to the people who are trying to help her. But as she gets to know the other girls at Sick Minds – anorexics, drug addicts, other self-harmers – she begins to come out of her self-imposed isolation. Reading about Callie's struggle to want to get better is moving, absorbing – and realistic, too.

Sherry Ashworth

THE DA VINCI CODE Dan Brown

14+

This book has topped the bestseller lists for ages. Why? Well, the story revolves around a truly astonishing secret that challenges the very basis of the world's most deeply held Christian beliefs. This secret has been protected for centuries by a hidden society which is still active today. It's wildly controversial and stirs up ferocious, even muderous, passions...

This is a real blockbuster page-turner, with an endless series of cliff-hangers that catapult you through chapter after chapter.

The book begins with a murder, and the body is weirdly arranged to resemble a famous drawing by the old master Leonardo da Vinci. Perhaps da Vinci actually belonged to one of those secret societies. Maybe more of his paintings contain hidden signs and symbols, messages we must try to decode...

You get the picture. I don't normally read thrillers, but this one's like a movie in your head: dark, mysterious and compelling.

Sue Limb

Next?

The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail by Michel Baigent (et al) is a real-life investigation into the same mysteries.

Another novel to explore the 'did Jesus really die on the cross?' theory is Nikos Kazantzakis' ***Last Temptation***.

Pompeii by Robert Harris is a fast-paced thriller that will leave you gasping for breath! As will more Dan Brown. Start with ***Deception Point***.

DAISY MILLER Henry James

14+

Next?

For another Henry James, this time with more substance, move on to his ***Portrait of a Lady***.

For more turn-of-the-century innocent young ladies travelling around Europe, try E.M. Forster – ***A Room with a View*** (UTBG 312) or ***Where Angels Fear to Tread***. After James' prose you'll find him an easy read!

Or for another dark sort of love story, read ***Ethan Frome*** (UTBG 117), by James' close friend Edith Wharton.

Winterbourne is a good-natured but rather idle young American man, with not much to do with his life but drift from one European town to another, visiting friends and enjoying 'Society'. But at Vevey he meets Daisy Miller, and he is quite changed.

He's never met anyone like Daisy. She's both so smart and so naïve, totally innocent and yet an incorrigible flirt. And she's tremendously pretty. Winterbourne can't stop thinking about her.

I think Henry James is one of the greatest of all novelists, and *Daisy Miller* is just the way to meet him first. This is only the slimmest of novels – a novella, really – but in the hundred or so pages, James creates a portrait of a character (and a society she can't help being at odds with) that is perfectly poised and thoroughly enchanting.

Daniel Hahn

DANCE ON MY GRAVE Aidan Chambers

14+

In my opinion, this is the best novel from one of the most provocative authors writing for teenagers today. 16-year-old Hal Robinson is caught 'interfering' with the grave of the recently deceased Barry Gorman. In his own words, and with the aid of extracts from diaries, newspaper clippings and even homework essays, Hal unravels the sweet-sour roller coaster of events leading to his peculiar behaviour and subsequent arrest. The story of an unforgettable summer, packed with lust, obsession and death, told in a remarkably clever and unusual way. Chambers writes it like it is, and his characters are real and raw. This book will challenge your ideas about love, life, sex and literature...

Noga Applebaum

Next?

This is one of six novels for teenagers called the **Dance** sequence. If you liked it, try ***Postcards from No Man's Land*** (UTBG 292) next.

Johnny My Friend by Peter Pohl is admittedly a little hard to find, but if you come across a copy – grab it! It's a beautifully written novel about a relationship revolving around a dark secret.

For a quite different story of teen sexuality, read David Levithan's lovely ***Boy Meets Boy*** (UTBG 52).

DANDELION WINE Ray Bradbury

14+

Ray Bradbury is a master of short stories. Whether they're about ghosts, Martians, his childhood, Mexico, Ireland, or a thousand other subjects, he can tell a great story using a minimum of words. For this book, he wove several tales together to create arguably his best novel. It's the tale of a young boy and his adventures one magical, mysterious summer. Funny, scary, but above all *warm*. This is a book that leaves you with a smile on your face; a book that you're truly sorry to put down. Bradbury has been one of my biggest influences, and if you read this book, then one of mine, you'll find shades of the master in just about everything I write.

Darren Shan

Next?

Try some of Bradbury's sci-fi: ***The Martian Chronicles*** or ***Fahrenheit 451*** (UTBG 121).

Or the short-story collections of Clive Barker, ***The Books of Blood***, which are just as scary and gory as they sound.

Or something by Darren Shan – the horrifically gruesome ***Lord Loss*** (UTBG 223) or ***Cirque du Freak*** in which the hero's name is... Darren Shan!

THE DARK BENEATH

14+

Alan Gibbons

Next?

Anything by Alan Gibbons is worth a read. Try ***The Edge*** or ***Caught in the Crossfire*** (UTBG 68).

Boy Kills Man (UTBG 51) by Matt Whyman is a brutal book about child assassins.

Or read ***Fugitives*** by Alex Shearer, in which a prank goes seriously wrong.

Or try something by Bali Rai. Most of his novels are about fitting (and not fitting) in, like ***(Un)arranged Marriage*** (UTBG 388).

Issue novels, when they're done well, are worth their weight in gold. Authors who get them right are worth even more. Alan Gibbons is one such author. Imogen, 16 and having finished school, is looking forward to summer. But when her path crosses those of three very different refugees, things start to go wrong.

This is a very dark, tension-packed read, with strong characters. You are drawn in from the first page and the story never lets you go. Prepare to think differently about what a refugee actually is, as the author takes you on an often-harrowing journey beneath the fabric of normality. A brilliant book by a brilliant author.

Bali Rai

KISS THE DUST

12+

Elizabeth Laird

Tara's father is involved with the Kurdish rebels under the terrifying regime of Saddam Hussein. The family are forced to flee their home, and eventually they arrive in London as refugees. They have lost everything: their friends and neighbours, their possessions and the community who spoke their language and understood their ways. Set in the time of the first Gulf War in the 1990s, this is the book to read if you want to try and understand what life must be like for refugees and asylum-seekers in our country today.

Yvonne Coppard

Next?

Elizabeth Laird also wrote ***Red Sky in the Morning***, about a girl living with the prejudices surrounding her family life with a disabled brother.

Refugee Boy (UTBG 308) describes what it's like to be a refugee in Britain today.

Mud City by Deborah Ellis is about an Afghan girl's life in a Pakistan refugee camp.

KISSING THE RAIN

12+

Kevin Brooks

Next?

If you enjoyed this, try some more Kevin Brooks – the gripping ***Martyn Pig*** (UTBG 236), the gentler ***Lucas*** (UTBG 228) or the shocking ***Candy*** (UTBG 62).

For another story about a boy who's bullied for being overweight, read ***Fat Boy Swim*** (UTBG 125) by Catherine Forde.

Grass by C.Z. Nightingale is the story of a girl who witnesses a racist attack, and the subsequent decisions she is forced to make.

'I shoulda kept my big mouth shut. I DIN'T SEE *NOTHING*, ALL RIGHT?'

Moo Nelson has it really tough. Bullied at school for being fat, his greatest pleasure is standing on a road bridge, staring, staring at the traffic and letting it shut him into a world of his own... Until the day he witnesses a murder from the bridge, and gets deeply involved in another, far more seedy and sinister world where he's forced to make some impossible choices.

Moo narrates his own story at breakneck speed, in a tone that's aggressive and defensive at the same time, so you can just feel what it's like to be inside his head. And it's not a comfortable place to be, I can tell you.

Susan Reuben

THE KITE RIDER

12+

Geraldine McCaughrean

Next?

All Geraldine McCaughrean's books are great. Try ***Plundering Paradise*** for a brilliant, fast-paced story about pirates, or ***The White Darkness*** for obsession and loneliness.

Try ***Lost Horizon*** by James Hilton, about finding paradise hidden in the Himalayas.

Tulku (UTBG 385) by Peter Dickinson is an extraordinary adventure set in China and Tibet.

Haoyou's father flies up into the clouds and comes back without a soul, his heart having burst with fear 'like a sack of grain'. Now Di Chou, the man who sent his father to his death, wants to marry Haoyou's mother. While escaping from both his grasping uncle Bo and Di Chou, Haoyou is taken on by the Great Miao Je, owner of an exotic circus, and becomes a virtuoso kite rider, seeking his father's spirit in the sky. But Miao Je is on a dark quest of his own.

This is a stunning story of revenge and restoration that will keep you hooked to the final page.

Livi Michael

THE KITE RUNNER

14+

Khaled Hosseini

I couldn't put this book down once I'd started reading it. There are three things I like in a book: 1) a good story that keeps me gripped; 2) that it's well written / a pleasure to read; and 3) that it gives an insight into another way of life. This book does all three. It is about the value of friendship and family with 1970s Afghanistan as the background and starting point. It is written with such warmth and I came away feeling that I knew more about what had happened over there than I could have gained from watching a hundred in-your-face documentaries. Everyone (and I mean everyone) I have recommended this to has loved it as much as I did!

Cathy Hopkins

Next?

Memoirs of a Geisha (UTBG 241) by Arthur Golden also gives a glimpse into another culture and time.

My Forbidden Face by Latifa is a searing account of life under the Taliban.

The Bookseller of Kabul is Asne Seierstad's story of her time living with a family in Kabul.

KIT'S WILDERNESS David Almond

12+

Next?

Among David Almond's other books, ***The Fire-Eaters*** (UTBG 130) is my favourite. It has the same quality of looking at the real, everyday world and seeing something mysterious.

Red Shift (UTBG 307) and ***The Owl Service*** (UTBG 281) do this, too.

If you like David Almond's ability to describe real places, linking past and present, you might enjoy ***Sea Room*** by Adam Nicolson. It's a non-fiction book about the little islands that his father gave him when he was 21, and I think it's magic.

Kit's Wilderness explores 'the desire we have to be terrified, to look into the darkness'. When Kit Watson makes friends with John Askew and Allie Keenan, they play the game called Death, and Kit finds himself drawn into a strange place where the darkness of the past links somehow with the darkness inside his own head and the dark tunnels of the disused mines.

There is danger and cruelty and, in the end, a real death, but the book is full of warmth, too. In Kit's stories and Askew's drawings, in the acting of Allie, 'the good-bad ice girl', and in the character of Kit's grandfather, the darkness becomes a source of strength and beauty. It's an extraordinary book. But don't take my word for it. Read it yourself.

Gillian Cross

THE L-SHAPED ROOM Lynne Reid Banks

16+

The L-shaped room is at the top of a run-down boarding house in Fulham run by a tyrannical landlady and full of colourful characters – not to mention bedbugs! 27-year-old Jane runs here when her father throws her out after discovering she is pregnant. Jane feels numb, like her life has ended, but gradually she discovers that her life is just beginning. This is one of the most unflinchingly honest and self-aware books I have ever read: it tells you a lot about what it means to grow up, however old you are. Bear in mind that this book was written in 1960 and some of its attitudes towards race, religion, class and sexuality seem to come from another planet; but it's a fascinating look at London two generations ago: how much has changed, how little.

Abigail Anderson

Next?

Two is Lonely and ***The Backward Shadow*** by Lynne Reid Banks complete the trilogy.

The Dud Avocado (UTBG 112) and ***The Greengage Summer*** (UTBG 157) are both about girls coming of age in the mid-20th century.

The Bell Jar (UTBG 37) by Sylvia Plath is another honest first-person narrative about a young woman in a crisis.

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER D.H. Lawrence

16+

Chatterley is arguably the most controversial book of the 20th century. What shocked its readers (and those who didn't read it but followed the famous obscenity trial in the newspapers) wasn't the boundary-breaking story of a married aristocratic lady having an affair with a working-class man, a gamekeeper on her estate, but the way the book was written – or more particularly the way the sex scenes were written. The rough, honest, earthiness of the language was unlike anything any respectable person had ever read before. Or at least would admit to having read before. Such language! In print! Outrageous!

And it's great. The whole book – not just those few famous and controversial scenes – is energetic and rough and unfussy, and the characters live and breathe from the first page to the very last. Read it and see what all the fuss was about.

Daniel Hahn

Next?

Another D.H. Lawrence? ***Sons and Lovers*** is probably the best known; I've always rather liked his short stories, too.

A Clockwork Orange (UTBG 79) is in no way like ***Lady Chatterley***, except that it too was scandalous when it was first published. See if you're shocked, too.

For another exploration of the tensions in the British class system, read ***The Go-Between*** (UTBG 150) or E.M. Forster's ***Howard's End***.

THE LAND Mildred D. Taylor

12+

Next?

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (UTBG 311), ***Let the Circle be Unbroken*** and ***The Road to Memphis*** are three more instalments in the saga of the Logan family.

A book about slavery – and about what constitutes freedom – is ***Nightjohn*** by Gary Paulsen, about an escapee who returns to slavery in order to teach reading and writing to his fellow slaves.

Here is a compelling prequel to Mildred D. Taylor's great *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Remember Cassie Logan? This coming-of-age story is told by her grandfather, Paul-Edward, who is born into slavery shortly before the end of the Civil War. His father is a wealthy white landowner. Paul-Edward looks almost white. That complicates relationships with both his white family and black peers. Although he is the son with the greatest feeling for his father's land and horses, he will never inherit them. Injustice, humiliation and betrayal lead him to run away at 14. His determination to make his own way, and realise his dream of acquiring his own land, drives the novel and the reader.

Beverley Naidoo

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

14+

Ernest Hemingway

Next?

If you liked this Hemingway, you could try his novel based around his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, ***For Whom the Bell Tolls***, or his account of life as a poor writer in Paris in the twenties in ***A Moveable Feast*** (UTBG 252).

Another epic battle between a man and a fish? ***Moby-Dick*** by Herman Melville (OK, not technically a fish, but you know what we mean).

The Old Man and the Sea is really just a long short story, but part of Hemingway's attraction is his ability to convey an emotional world with spare and simple prose.

Santiago is an old fisherman down on his luck. He hasn't caught a fish for 84 days and the other fishermen think he's all washed up. But far out to sea he finally hooks a huge marlin – the largest he has ever hooked – and so ensues a battle between the old man and the fish that lasts not hours, but days.

It may not sound much to build a story on, but this is a powerful book about the hopes and fears that life is founded on, played out through the tired but noble figure of the old man.

Marcus Sedgwick

OLIVIA JOULES AND THE OVERACTIVE IMAGINATION

14+

Helen Fielding

Olivia Joules, a sassy, independent and *beautiful* journalist, is desperate for excitement. She's convinced that there's something very dodgy indeed about the suave and sexy Pierre Ferramo whom she meets at a face-cream launch. But is he really as sinister as he appears, or is it just Olivia's overactive imagination at play?

Either way, Olivia is determined to find out what lies behind Pierre's immaculate exterior – in more ways than one! And her trail leads her on an adventure to some of the most glamorous spots in the world.

This is an extremely silly, very entertaining and very fast read for all fans of Bridget Jones, and anyone who fancies the idea of a light, girly thriller.

Susan Reuben

Next?

If you haven't already read ***Bridget Jones's Diary*** (UTBG 57), it's an absolute must. Or try Helen Fielding's earlier ***Cause Celeb*** (UTBG 68).

For another chick-lit-meets-detective story, try ***One for the Money*** (UTBG 272).

Or the massively successful ***The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency*** (UTBG 268).

ON THE ROAD Jack Kerouac

16+

Next?

Heart of Darkness (UTBG 164) by Joseph Conrad is a quest into the heart of the African jungle and the human heart.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey is about an outsider who takes on the authorities in a mental institution.

Huckleberry Finn (UTBG 181) is the original, hilarious road trip, following Huck's adventures with escaped slave Jim.

Join Sal Paradise for the journey of a lifetime across the US in search of love, music, and inspiration. In *On the Road*, Kerouac recasts his own experiences in the company of madman, prophet and con-man Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty in the novel). They don't know where they're going, only that they have to go, and the faster, the better, in search of the ultimate high, until they cross the border into magical Mexico. Kerouac captures the intense joys and sorrows along the way, in a book that opens the wide spaces of America on the page until you can almost smell them. Once you've read this book, no journey you make will ever be the same.

Ariel Kahn

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING T.H. White

12+

From the magic-infused good humour of the opening chapters, this vivid retelling of the Arthurian legends gradually moves into darker territory. The plot sweeps from the Welsh borders to the Orkneys and to Cornwall, covering the length of the land.

But the drama is painfully human in scale. Witness the Orkney brothers, desperately seeking their mother's attention through a horrifying unicorn hunt, or Lancelot running mad in the forest, or Arthur, alone in his pavilion before the final battle, contemplating the collapse of all his hopes.

This is less a story of good versus evil, more a depiction of idealism set against mankind's innate destructiveness. Though grounded in an alternative medieval Britain, this is still very much a parable for our times.

Thomas Bloor

Next?

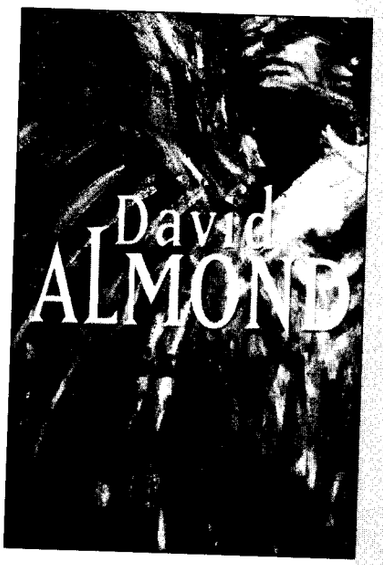
More King Arthur? Try the historically accurate ***Sword At Sunset*** by Rosemary Sutcliff, or her younger trilogy: ***The Sword and the Circle***,***The Light Beyond the Forest*** and ***The Road to Canmlann***. Like most of her books, they are powerful and engrossing.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's ***Mists of Avalon*** tells the Arthur story through the eyes of the women involved.

Rick Yancey's ***The Extraordinary Adventures of Alfred Kropp*** is about a plot to steal Excalibur.

SKELLIG David Almond

12+



This is one of my favourite books of all time! It's about a boy called Michael, who has just moved to a rather derelict house and whose baby sister is so seriously ill we don't know whether she's going to survive. It's about fear, and sadness, and loss, but also about healing and recovery and love, and tenderness. At the heart of the story is the extraordinary figure of Skellig, whom Michael discovers in the tumbledown garage. At first he seems like a disgusting old man, covered in cobwebs, but bit by bit Michael's (and the reader's) view is transformed.

Michael, his friends Leaky and Coot, Mina (a home-educated girl with a special way of seeing things) and Michael's family are all real and totally believable, but this story is also magical and extraordinary. Reading it felt to me like going on an intense, moving journey. I couldn't put it down!
Julia Green

With a new house and a new school, Michael has a lot to cope with even without his baby sister falling dangerously ill. With his parents preoccupied with the baby and the doctor always in the house, Michael is left to his own devices, and one day finds a mysterious man – or is it a bird? – or maybe an angel? – in the ramshackle garage at the bottom of the garden. Together with his new friend Mina they take the strange being, with wings and a peculiar liking for flies and Chinese takeaways, to her grandfather's house, and Michael's life changes forever...

Words aren't enough to describe the magic of this book. It's a story about faith and hope, life, love and death – big serious issues – but there's humour too, and it's so well-written you feel you're there with them. Imaginative, inspired, original, full of poetry and emotion, you'll not be able to put it down when you're reading it or put it out of your head when you've finished.
David Gardner (aged 16)

Next?

A Kestrel for a Knave (UTBG 206) – a powerful story about the relationship between a boy and a wild bird.

Coraline (UTBG 83) is a magic / reality mix with a far darker and more sinister edge, based on a backwards reality, not unlike a creepier version of Lewis Carroll's ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland***.

Other David Almonds to look for include his disturbing look at good and evil, ***Clay*** (UTBG 78).

Another slightly surreal story about reality not quite being what it seems is Alan Garner's ***Elidor***.

SKINNY B, SKAZ AND ME John Singleton

12+

Next?

More John Singleton? Check out his other novel, ***Star***.

Another author with a talent for making the everyday world sound special is David Almond. ***Kit's Wilderness*** (UTBG 211) is particularly unsettling...

For an author who can capture the grim reality of life without losing his sense of humour, try Alan Gibbons' book ***The Lost Boys' Appreciation Society***.

14-year-old Lee doesn't like his sister, Skinny. After all, in their house the first rule is: what Skinny wants, Skinny gets. But then Skinny gets sick, and whilst Lee is trying to show that he does care (after all, nothing says I love you so much as hair glitter, right?) life takes a turn for the worse.

Just how Lee gets on the wrong side of the Hoodz5 boys, ends up climbing a death-trap water tower with his best 'friend' Skaz – who literally leaves him hanging – and finds out that the girl he fancies is the daughter of the local crime boss, makes a fast-paced, enjoyable read.

This is a book that tells it how it is and leaves you wishing for more.

Laura Hutchings

SLAKE'S LIMBO Felice Holman

14+

A great American novel that deserves far greater fame in Britain. Artemis Slake is 'born an orphan at the age of thirteen, small, near-sighted, dreaming, bruised, an outlander in the city of his birth'. Fleeing from constant bullying, he goes underground, literally. He finds a cave in New York's subway system and doesn't go home again. From his hideout, cautiously, he builds a new, almost-independent life, forming delicate relationships with subterranean people who, to his surprise, do not want to hurt him.

The story is free of sentimentality, even of pity, and Holman's writing is wonderful. Somehow it manages to be dense and rich but laid-back at the same time; sometimes it jolts and sparks like a speeding underground train. And it's miraculously compact – a mere 90 pages in my edition. An unmissable masterpiece.

Mal Peet

Next?

More books about running away and the problems it brings? Try Keith Gray's ***Runner*** and ***Warehouse*** (UTBG 399) or Steven Herrick's ***The Simple Gift*** (UTBG 340).

Underworld (UTBG 389) is about a group of kids trapped underground and how they survive.

Fake (UTBG 122) by K.K. Beck is about two boys running away from a centre for juvenile rehabilitation.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE 5 Kurt Vonnegut

16+

Kurt Vonnegut lived through the fire-bombing of Dresden in World War II and then spent 20 years trying to find a way to write about it. He finally came up with this – one of the most famous anti-war novels of all time. Billy Pilgrim, with his blue and ivory feet, stumbles through time and space. Billy becomes an optometrist, a private in the US army, a specimen on show in an alien zoo, an innocent, a father, a son, a husband – quite often all at once. People die. A lot of people die. So it goes.

Absurd, tragic and very funny, this is Vonnegut's masterpiece. As a plea for less butchery and less blind obedience to authority, it sears.

Leonie Flynn

Next?

For another war book – that makes you see just how horrible it is – try ***Catch-22*** (UTBG 65) by Joseph Heller, one of the funniest books written about this subject – and the scariest.

Or for a vision of the future that'll chill you, where knowledge and ideas are forbidden and books are burned, try Ray Bradbury's ***Fahrenheit 451*** (UTBG 121).

Or maybe you fancy something else by Mr Vonnegut? Try ***Breakfast of Champions***, a hilarious, cynical rollercoaster of a novel (in which Kilgore Trout himself appears!).

SLEEPWALKING Nicola Morgan

14+

Next?

Nicola's other brilliant books include ***Fleshmarket*** (UTBG 131), a gory story about early experiments in surgery, and ***Mondays Are Red*** (UTBG 248), an interesting insight into synaesthesia.

Blinded by the Light (UTBG 45) by Sherry Ashworth looks at people being controlled, this time by brainwashing cults. Or try her intriguing exploration of the world of dreams, ***The Dream Travellers***.

Wouldn't it be great if everything was just perfect – or would it? Would it really be that good never to have to worry about anything? Is that living? Isn't life all about overcoming problems? Surely if we didn't have to, we'd all be robotic. Or are we already? Are we all really robotic, not in a mechanical sense, but in that from the moment we are born a computer has our lives mapped out for us?

This is the story of four chosen teenagers, the Outsiders, who lie outside a world that is 'perfect' in just this way, and who set off on an adventure to infiltrate the government building that is controlling the minds of the Citizens. This book sounds like sci-fi but also screams adventure thriller with a small dose of real life mixed in. The balance between emotion and adventure is spot on, and the climax is fantastic!

David Gardner (aged 16)

THE SLIGHTLY TRUE STORY OF CEDAR B. HARTLEY

12+

Martine Murray

What can I say about this book, other than that it's extraordinary? It reads like an Australian Margaret Atwood with an added layer of quirkiness. For starters, Cedar B. Hartley's real name isn't Cedar B. Hartley at all, but Lana Monroe, who as well as telling the story draws weird little pictures with captions such as 'terrapin inside a sock' and 'Oscar in cone shape'. This is a story about being an outsider, growing up and growing friendships with a big dose of acrobatics thrown in for good measure. And then there's Oscar with his brain injury, Kite (who's a bird person) and Stinky the dog. If there's only one book you read from this guide, make it this one!

Philip Ardagh

Next?

Hilary McKay's ***Dog Friday*** is another story of friendship brought about by a lost dog.

Martine Murray is also an illustrator, so why not check out her drawings in ***Henrietta*** or ***A Moose Called Mouse***?

More quirky characters? try ***Stargirl*** (UTBG 352).

SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS

16+

David Guterson

Next?

More Guterson? Try ***Our Lady of the Forest***, about a girl who has visions or his collection of stories, ***The Country Ahead of Us, the Country Behind***.

For another portrait of a small fishing town, try E. Annie Proulx's ***The Shipping News***.

A book that tells of Japan just after the war is ***Memoirs of a Geisha*** (UTBG 241).

The book is set in 1954 on the island of San Piedro off the coast of Washington. The death of a local white fisherman in suspicious circumstances leads to the arrest of Japanese-American Kabuo Miyamoto, who is charged with his murder. The narration is by the local newspaper editor and one-time boyfriend of the accused's wife. The story then twists and turns and we're treated to flashbacks to the 1940s, following the bombing of Pearl Harbour, when the island's Japanese-Americans were sent to internment camps. The imagery is beautiful and vivid, and the characters rich. The book becomes a courtroom drama, a romance, a murder mystery and an account of the war seen from the side of the 'enemy'. If you've seen the movie don't be put off. This book is priceless.

Ileana Antonopoulou