

# Recommended Books for Young, Talented Readers



Dear Teacher or Parent,

In this packet you will find a short list of some of the best children's books for young, talented readers. The grade level recommendations are based, therefore, on what would be appropriate reading material for talented readers in that grade. There are several **caveats**, however, that I feel that I must mention in relation to this list.

It is difficult to compose a "comprehensive" list because the **interests** of gifted kids are often **specific and diverse**. They may only want to read science fiction or poetry or biographies on Jimmy Carter. In these cases, you are not likely to find a great deal of books that are specific enough to the reading preferences of your students on this list. My recommendation is always to administer a reading preferences survey at the beginning of each school year to see what kinds of books that children like. If they enjoy general fiction topics and good stories, there are many examples on this list. If, however, they are looking for very specific types of books, I would encourage you to search some websites and enlist the help of your librarian to keep these kids in good books.

Educators worry about finding books that will **sufficiently challenge** talented readers. Remember that challenge in reading is twofold: it comes from the complexity of the language and grammatical structure, but it also comes from the complexity and richness of the ideas. Therefore it is possible to have a book with a fairly easy readability and a complex theme (see Island of the Skog). Likewise, there are books with difficult grammatical structures and advanced vocabulary with simplistic themes. Often the subject matter becomes too mature for an audience even though they are *able* to read the words. This is the inherent difficulty in finding "challenging" books for young, talented readers. Which type of challenge do talented readers need? Actually, they need both. What is most important, however, is that when students are reading books that are thematically complex, they should have instruction that provides complex questioning and they should be able to discuss the material with an adult. Conferences and guided discussion groups provide the opportunity for students and teachers to discuss books.

The books selected for this list were selected to meet the readers on that grade level encompassing the following blend: readability, complexity of ideas, and appropriate content. Sometimes the book was placed at the 2-3 grade level because the content is too mature for the K-1 grade group, even if they may be able to read the words. Therefore, it is the interplay of those three qualities that were taken into consideration when choosing and leveling the books for this list.

The final challenge in creating a list like this is that talented readers differ. What might be challenging for one is not challenging for another. What might interest one student, will not interest another. This list is meant to be a starting place for teachers when looking for books for talented readers. Some books on this list are classics, others are just good books on topics that gifted kids typically enjoy such as: justice, morality, discrimination, and independence. My plan is to continue to search for the best books for talented readers and continue to add to this list.

Sincerely,

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	Appropriate for Grades		Gifted characters or people are present in the book	Genre	Topics or Theme(s)
	K-1	2-3			
<p><u>Bad Beginning, The</u> (Lemony Snicket, 1999-2006) This 13 book series manages to entertain and teach advanced vocabulary in the context of 3 orphans' adventure to save their fortune and evade the evil Count Olaf.</p>		•	•	Fiction	Vocabulary development, Good vs. Evil, Humor
<p>*<u>Best-Loved Doll, The</u> (Rebecca Caudill, 1965, 1997) This sweet story of a girl's love for her doll is reminiscent of <u>The Velveteen Rabbit</u>. Both stories show readers the meaning of sacrifice in understandable terms.</p>	•	•		Fiction	Love, Sacrifice
<p><u>Black Beauty</u> (Anna Sewell, 1997) This Eyewitness Classic is just one in an entire series including <u>Little Women</u>, <u>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</u>, and <u>Oliver Twist</u>. The text of the original classic is abridged in this series and is accompanied by pictures and informational text that explains details about the context of the story's setting and time period thus bridging fiction and non-fiction.</p>		•		Classic fiction	Love, Sacrifice
<p><u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> (Katherine Paterson, 1977) A boy and girl find friendship despite their differences. Through his friendship, Jess is encouraged to be himself and must also learn to cope with the loss of his friend. Newbery Medal Winner - 1978</p>		•	•	Fiction	Friendship, Individuality
<p>*<u>Clementine</u> (Sara Pennypacker, 2006) The book is the first in a new series about Clementine, an amusing heroine reminiscent of Ramona Quimby who also gets into her fair share of trouble at school. (See also <u>The Talented Clementine</u>)</p>	•	•	•	Fiction	Humor, Sense of identity
<p><u>Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs</u> (Judi Barrett, 1978) This book is excellent for very young readers who may struggle to think abstractly. This book provides one great "What if...?" question that could lead to</p>	•			Fiction	Imagination

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endless others promoting both critical and creative thinking.					
<p><u>Charlotte's Web</u> (E.B. White, 1952) Pigs and spiders and humans – we are all mortal. Some day we will all die. Therefore, we must spend our time on this earth carefully and cherish friendships. Wilbur and Charlotte teach the reader this lesson in a book on friendship and the preciousness of life.</p>		•	A gifted pig? Read to find out	Fiction	Friendship, Commitment, Mortality
<p><u>Diary of a Spider</u> (Doreen Cronin, 2005) The reader gets a spider's eye view of the world from these journal entries. As in the 2003 book by Cronin, <u>Diary of a Worm</u>, the humorousness of the story may even convert non-readers. Also, see <u>Diary of a Fly</u>.</p>		•		Fiction picture book	Adventure, friendship
<p><u>Eats, Shoots &amp; Leaves</u> (Lynne Truss, 2006) The author gives us her version of the adult novel in this hilarious picture book where the students learn the importance of the comma.</p>	•	•	•	Fiction picture book	Grammar and Mechanics of writing, Humor
<p><u>Eleanor Roosevelt</u> (Kem Knapp Sawyer, 2006) Published by DK publishing, this book brings the life of one of America's greatest first ladies alive. Truly a gifted individual, Mrs. Roosevelt's actions will inspire young readers.</p>			•	Non-fiction	Human Rights, Women's Suffrage
<p><u>Frindle</u> (Andrew Clements, 1998) Several students learn the importance of words and of perseverance when they get their own made up word printed in the dictionary.</p>		•	•	Fiction	Power of speech, Perseverance
<p><u>Genetically Modified Food</u> (Nigel Hawkes, 2000) This book shows how food can be created rather than grown and explores the controversy surrounding the topic. Perhaps too controversial for some youngsters, this helps others think about some of the tough subjects in our times and explore the science behind the solutions.</p>		•		Non-fiction picture book	Health, Sustainability

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* <u>Girl Wonder: A Baseball Story in Nine Innings</u> (Deborah Hopkinson, 2003) This Parents' Choice Award winner tells the story of Alta Weiss who proved that girls can play too. (Based on true story)	•		•	Historical fiction picture book	Equity, Women's rights
<u>Girl's Like Spaghetti, The</u> (Lynne Truss, 2007) In this humorous follow-up to her 2006 picture book <u>Eats, Shoots &amp; Leaves</u> , the author again shows the difference a small punctuation mark can make as she juxtaposes it being used correctly and incorrectly.	•	•		Non-fiction picture book	Correct writing mechanics, Puns
<u>Helen Keller</u> (Leslie Garrett, 2004) Published by DK publishing, this book brings the life of one of America's greatest first ladies alive. Truly a gifted individual, Mrs. Roosevelt's actions will inspire young readers. The entire series by DK is recommended.		•	•	Non-fiction	Courage, Perseverance
* <u>Hundred Dresses, The</u> (Eleanor Estes, 1944) A class of girls learn compassion when they learn that their classmate did have 100 dresses in her closet – each of which beautifully drawn.	•	•		Fiction	Kindness, Compassion, Poverty
** <u>I, Freddy</u> (Dietlof Reiche, 1998) Freddy, a golden hamster, writes the humorous autobiography of his brave life.		•		Fiction	Fantasy, Adventure
<u>Island of the Skog</u> (Steven Kellogg, 1973) When mice friends leave the city, they have to deal with the only island inhabitant – the skog! The mice must pull together to solve their problem and stay safe. Critical and creative thinking are shown throughout this book.	•			Fiction	Cooperation, Compromise
<u>Ivy and Bean</u> (Annie Barrows, 2006) Students are likely to identify with the wild imaginations of the two girls in this		•		Fiction	Friendship

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book who become friends and have wonderful adventures together. This is the first in a series of <u>Ivy and Bean</u> books.					
<u>John, Paul, George, &amp; Ben</u> (Lane Smith, 2006) Young readers meet in this humorously told picture book about the personalities of five founding fathers of the U.S.					
		•		Non-fiction picture book	American Leaders, Democracy
<u>Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices</u> (Paul Fleischman, 1988) This nature poetry was created for two readers. These poems are wonderful tools for introducing young students to the beauty of language and poetry. Newbery Medal Winner - 1989					
	•	•		Poetry	Nature
<u>King Who Rained, The</u> (Fred Gwynne, 1970) This nature poetry was created for two readers. These poems are wonderful tools for introducing young students to the beauty of language and poetry. Newbery Medal Winner - 1989					
	•	•		Fiction	Puns
* <u>Little House Series</u> (Laura Ingalls Wilder) These are classic tales of pioneer life told from the point of view of young heroine, Laura.					
	•	•	•	Historical Fiction	Family, Perseverance
** <u>Love That Dog</u> (Sharon Creech, 2001) Inspired by his teacher and author Walter Dean Myers, Jack learns to enjoy reading and writing poetry. This one is often a favorite of boys.					
		•		Poetry	Learning to love poetry, Gender roles
Magic Tree House Series (Mary Pope Osborne, 1992-present) This series of books is good for the younger reader because although they are repetitive, they encourage hypothetical thinking which is usually not yet strongly developed in children of this age.					
	•			Fiction, Non-fiction	Adventure, Cooperation
<u>Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane</u> (Kate DiCamillo, 2006) Reminiscent of <u>The Velveteen Rabbit</u> , the china rabbit in this tale shows					
		•		Fiction	Friendship, Love, Growing up

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courage as he braves the adventures that he finds himself in. At times this is a rather sad and slow moving tale, but is beautifully written.					
<u>Mysterious Benedict Society, The</u> (Trenton Lee Stewart, 2007) This story follows four gifted youngsters at the <i>Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened</i> as they must face the ultimate test; one of bravery.					
		•	•	Fiction	Friendship, Giftedness, Being Different
<b>**Mysterious Tadpole, The</b> (Steven Kellogg, 1977) A gift gets out of hand when the tadpole that his uncle sent him grows too big for Louis' bathtub and he must really get creative if he wants to keep his pet.					
	•			Fiction	Mystery, Problem-solving
<b>**Nicholas Again</b> (René Goscinny, 2006) This is the second book in a series about Nicholas, a French school boy. The reader will enjoy the adventures of him and his friends.					
		•		Fiction	Adventure, Friendship
<u>Prehistoric Actual Size</u> (Steve Jenkins, 2005) Though short on text, this book is certainly larger than life. The idea: help children realize the enormity of prehistoric creatures by creating them at their actual size. This does present a challenge when working with dinosaurs. See more in <u>Actual Size</u> also by Jenkins.					
	•	•		Non-fiction picture book	Prehistoric world, Scale and size
<u>Quest for the Tree Kangaroo: An Expedition to the Cloud Forest of New Guinea</u> (Sy Montgomery, 2006) This book won the 2006 Sibert Honor award and is sure to fascinate young readers who enjoy non-fiction or animals.					
		•		Non-fiction	Preservation, Ecology
<u>Science Verse</u> (Jon Scieszka & Lane Smith, 2004) These poems will seem familiar to some readers as they have been modeled after poetic styles of famous poets. All of the poems are about scientific concepts. The book comes with a CD of the authors reading the poems.					
	•	•		Poetry	Scientific concepts, Humor

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<p><u>*Secret Garden, The</u> (Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1911) Sullen children Mary and Colin find a secret garden and their dispositions change as they begin to care for the garden. They begin to live more fully as they learn that life is full of ups and downs, but that the one constant is love.</p>		•		Fiction	Love
<p><u>Seen Art?</u> (Jon Scieszka &amp; Lane Smith, 2005) A young boy is on a journey to find his friend Art and looks for him throughout the entire Museum of Modern Art. At the end, the reader will find descriptions of the paintings featured in the book.</p>		•		Fiction	Art
<p><u>*Smithsonian Visual Timeline of Inventions</u> (DK, 1994) This book chronicles inventions from 600,000 BC to nearly present day. Young historians and inventors alike will enjoy this book and may find it an excellent resource for developing other fascinations as well.</p>		•		Non-fiction	Inventions, Creativity
<p><u>**Stink the Incredible Shrinking Kid</u> (Megan McDonald, 2005) Life must be crazy in the Moody household. In this book we meet Judy's younger brother, Stink. His main goal in life is to ... grow! Students will enjoy the comics interwoven with text.</p>	•		Gifted artist	Fiction	Adapting, Misfits
<p><u>*Talented Clementine, The</u> (Sara Pennypacker, 2007) In Pennypacker's second novel about the hilarious third-grader Clementine must think of an act that she can do on stage at the school talent show. Math-genius Clementine cannot think of a stage-worthy talent. (See also <u>Clementine</u>)</p>	•	•	•	Fiction	Adventure, Sense of identity
<p><u>Team Moon</u> (Catherine Thimmesh, 2006) The author used NASA documents to create this account of the Apollo 11 moon landing and dangerous return to Earth. This book is the 2007 Sibert Medal Winner and will likely prove to be a very challenging read.</p>		•		Non-fiction	Courage, Space Travel
<p><u>To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel</u> (Siena Cherson Siegel, 2006) In a graphic novel, readers are introduced to the world of ballet as they follow</p>		•	•	Non-fiction	Dance, Perseverance

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the story of a young ballerina born in Puerto Rico who comes to New York to learn to dance. This book is a 2007 Sibert Honor award winner.					
<u>Toys Go Out</u> (Emily Jenkins, 2006) In this fantasy novel reminiscent of the <u>Toy Story</u> movies, three toys share adventures and friendship. The book is written mostly in dialog, which may make it more difficult for young readers.		•		Fiction	Adventure
* <u>Utterly Me, Clarice Bean</u> (Lauren Child, 2002) First written for British readers, Clarice (who is probably a bit of a gifted underachiever) has traveled across the pond to delight a new audience. The author uses different sized texts and words swirled across the pages of this “diary” to illustrate Clarice’s short attention span.		•	•	Fiction	Humor, Creativity
<u>Vinnie and Abraham</u> (Dawn FitzGerald, 2005) Readers of this picture book will learn about Vinnie Ream, sculptor of the statue of Abraham Lincoln that sits in the Capitol Rotunda.	•	•	•	Historical fiction picture book	Prehistoric world, Scale and size
<u>Way Things Work, The</u> and <u>New Way Things Work, The</u> (David Macaulay, 1988, 1998) These books are for the curious. The author explains the workings of gadgets and technology complete with rich descriptions, interesting comparisons, and clear illustrations.	•	•		Non-fiction	Engineering
<u>Weslandia</u> (Paul Fleischman, 1999) This one is a can’t miss for young gifted kids! Wesley is different from all of the other students in his class and so it follows that his summer plans will also be different. As he creates his very own land, Weslandia, his family and friends begin to see the value in his differences.	•	•	•	Fiction picture book	Giftedness, Imagination, Being different
<u>What a Great Idea! Inventions that Changed the World</u> (Stephen Tomecek, 2003)		•		Non-fiction	Engineering, Inventions, Problem-



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45 great inventions are described in this book, along with the problem that made the invention necessary. There are also lists of websites where young inventors can go for contests and discussion.					Solving
<u>Woman for President, A</u> (Kathleen Krull, 2004) This book tells the story of Victoria Woodhull. Her amazing story begins when she is born into poverty as one of ten children. Creator of the Equal Rights Party, she later becomes the first woman to run for president.			•	•	Historical Fiction Perseverance, Gender issues

\* These titles are especially appropriate for girls.

\*\* These titles are especially appropriate for boys.