

# Recommended Books for Talented Readers



Dear Teacher,

In this packet you will find a short list of some of the best children's books for 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 of the websites below 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 [The Giver](#) and [The Green Book](#)). 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. 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 6-8 grade level because the content is too mature for the 4-5 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,

Liz Fogarty  
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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	4-5	6-8			
<u>Adventures of Tom Sawyer</u> (Mark Twain, 1876) Students should leave middle school knowing the tale of Twain's adventuresome hero.			•	•	•	Historical Fiction	Discrimination, Friendship, Adventure
<u>Among the Hidden</u> (Margaret Peterson Haddix, 2000) This is the story of Luke who was born during a time when having more than three children was illegal, forcing him to live a life in hiding. He must decide to what degree he will disobey in order to have freedom.		•	•			Science Fiction	Justice, Free will, Totalitarianism
<u>Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl</u> (Anne Frank, 1953) This is a must-read book for any adolescent wanting to understand the holocaust from the perspective of the victims. Anne's story, however, will show readers that love and fear are experienced by all humans.			•	•	•	Biography	Discrimination
<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.		•	•		•	Fiction	Vocabulary development, Good vs. Evil, Humor
<u>Belle Prater's Boy</u> (Ruth White, 1996) Cousins Gypsy and Woodrow experience the difficulties of small town life in Virginia as a shroud of mystery envelopes their family after the disappearance of Woodrow's mother.			•		•	Fiction	Justice, morality
<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.	•	•				Fiction	Love, Sacrifice

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<p><u>Big Wave, The</u> (Pearl S. Buck, 1947) After a tidal wave claims the lives of those around him, a Japanese boy learns to endure sorrow and move on with his life.</p>			•			Fiction	Bravery, Loss
<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>Bud, Not Buddy</u> (Christopher Paul Curtis, 1999) Bud is an orphan with the will and skills for survival, even when the odds are against him. Set in the great depression and the 1930s, the historical backdrop of this novel provides an education, the writing will evoke compassion. Newbery Medal Winner - 2000</p>		•	•			Fiction	Prejudice, Discrimination
<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 endless others promoting both critical and creative thinking.</p>	•					Fiction	Imagination
<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>		•			Gifted pig? Read to find out	Fiction	Friendship, Commitment, Mortality

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<u>Chocolate War, The</u> (Robert Cormier, 1974) Jerry Renault battles evil and struggles with his identity in a high school full of students of privilege.				•	•	Fiction	Justice, Friendships, Peer Pressure, Evil
<u>Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini</u> (Sid Fleischman, 2006) This book is the biography of Houdini, a man of magic. It is set at the turn of the century and readers will see how the life of this famous man coincided with important historical events.		•	•		•	Biography	Magic, Science investigation, History
<u>Flowers for Algernon</u> (Daniel Keyes, 1959) A young boy with an IQ of 68 is given the gift of intelligence – a mixed blessing when he finds out that friends have been making fun of him. Hugo Award for Science Fiction – 1959				•		Science Fiction	Mortality, Limitations
<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.		•			•	Fiction	Power of speech, Perseverance
<u>From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler</u> E. L. Konigsburg Two children run away from home to live at the Metropolitan Art Museum in New York City and discover an artistic mystery. Newbery Medal Winner - 1968		•	•		•	Fiction	Independence
<u>Girl Called AI, A</u> (Constance Greene) A bond is formed between three unlikely candidates to provide mutual support and friendship during times of need.			•			Fiction	Friendship, Support
<u>Giver, The</u> (Lois Lowry, 1993) This Newbery Award winning book takes readers to a Utopian society where only the main character experiences emotion.			•		•	Science Fiction	

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<p><u>Golden Compass, The</u> (Philip Pullman, 1995) This myth-like book is one part of a trilogy featuring struggle for love and loyalty in a world that is both like and unlike our own. Though the main character grows up at Oxford, she does so with a daemon (animal that embodies the spirit) and witches and terrifying creatures.</p>			•	•	•	Fiction	Loyalty, Morality
<p><u>Green Book, The</u> (Jill Paton Walsh, 1982) This book is an environmental novel – it gives us a look at the direction in which our planet is headed and in the end it is the young people who save the society.</p>			•			Fiction	Environmentalism
<p><u>Hobbit, The</u> (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1973) Enter Tolkien's fantasy world and learn about good and evil from elves, hobbits, and dwarves.</p>			•	•		Fiction	Fantasy, Courage, Good vs. evil
<p><u>House of the Scorpion, The</u> (Nancy Farmer, 2002) In a society of "eejits," or people whose brains have been replaced by computer chips, Matt is special. He is pampered and taken care of. He soon learns that he is a slave of a different sort – he is a clone.</p>			•	•		Science Fiction	Courage, Free will
<p><u>House on Mango Street, The</u> (Sandra Cisneros, 1991 ) Cisneros' lyrical and moving vignettes show the life of a Latina girl growing up in Chicago. At times the topics are mature (pregnancy, language) but these give a fuller picture to the life described within.</p>				•		Fictional Short Stories	Family, Culture
<p><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.</p>	•	•				Fiction	Kindness, Compassion, Poverty

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<p><u>I Am the Cheese</u> (Robert Cormier, 1985) Adam Farmer's whole life is turned upside down when he finds out that his whole life is a lie. Lack of self-identity may be a theme that adolescents can identify with as they read about Adam's experiences.</p>				•		Fiction	Loss, Courage, Self-identity
<p><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.</p>	•					Fiction	Cooperation, Compromise
<p><u>Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices</u> (Paul Fleischman, ) 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</p>	•					Poetry	Nature
<p>Little House Series (Laura Ingalls Wilder) These are classic tales of pioneer life told from the point of view of young heroine, Laura.</p>	•	•			•	Historical Fiction	Family, Perseverance
<p><u>Little Women</u> (Louisa May Alcott, 1868) The story of the triumphs and hardships of Josephine March and her family as she struggles to find her place in the world.</p>			•		•	Historical Fiction	Family, Independence, Civil War, Overcoming hardships
<p><u>Long Way From Chicago, A</u> (Richard Peck, 1998) Peck tells the stories of Grandma Dowdel through the eyes of her two grandchildren, Joey and Mary Alice. Set in the</p>			•			Historical Fiction	Family

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depression, the reader will see the wit and humor of Peck in every Grandma Dowdel action, as well as the strength and character of the people of that time period.							
<u>Magic Tree House Series</u> (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>Maniac Magee</u> (Jerry Spinelli, 1990) A young boy unites a racially divided town after running away from home. Newbery Medal Winner – 1991		•	•			Fiction	Racism, Poverty, Friendship
<u>Mr. Popper's Penguins</u> (Richard and Florence Alwater, 1938) Mr. Popper is a naturally inquisitive man who begins an adventure the day a penguin arrives on his doorstep.	•	•				Fiction	Humor
<u>Nothing But the Truth</u> (Avi, 1991) A student perceives that his teacher is stifling his right to free speech and the two enter into a very public showdown. This book illustrates democratic principles and will have the reader empathizing with the teacher by the end.			•	•		Fiction	Justice, Free speech
<u>Number the Stars</u> (Lois Lowry, 1989) A young girl's quest to save her best friend during the holocaust. Newbery Medal Winner - 1990			•			Historical Fiction	Holocaust, World War II, Friendship, Courage, Tolerance
<u>Outsiders, The</u> (S.E. Hinton, 1967) In a coming of age novel, Hinton depicts the complicated				•	•	Fiction	Peer pressure

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coexistence of love, jealousy, and friendship in the teenage characters.							
<u>Phineas Gage: A Gruesome But True Story About Brain Science</u> (John Fleischman, 2002) This book tells the story of Phineas Gage who was either a lucky or unlucky man who didn't die when a railroad stake went through his skull. We continue to learn about the brain from Phineas even though he has been gone for many years.							
			•	•		Non-fiction	Human body, Amazing events
<u>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</u> (Mildred Taylor, 1976) Set in during the Great Depression, this book portrays the horror of slavery through out history. Newbery Medal Winner – 1977							
			•				Slavery, Family, Hope
<u>Running Out of Time</u> (Margaret Peterson Haddix, 1995) When a cholera epidemic breaks out, her mother is forced to tell Jessie that the family has been living in an 1840 preservation village unbeknownst to the children. Slipping out of the settlement and into modern times, Jessie learns of a devastating plot to kill the members of the village. This is an excellent book for talented readers due to the historical references and need for hypothetical thinking while reading.							
		•	•			Fiction	Justice, Equality
<u>Secret Garden, The</u> (Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1911) Sullen children Mary and Colin find a secret garden and their dispositions changes 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.							
		•	•			Fiction	Love
<u>Surviving the Applewhites</u> (Tolan, 2002) When Jake is kicked out of his last school, he comes to live							
		•	•		•	Fiction	Adapting, Misfits

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with a family of artists and E.D., the only member of the family that is not artistic. Together, the two struggle to adapt to the family and each other.							
<u>Voice that Challenged the Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights</u> (Russell Freedman, 2004) Freedman chronicles the life of singer Marian Anderson who became a crusader for civil rights the day she sang an outdoor concert from which she had been banned.			•			Biography	Courage, Civil rights
<u>Watson's Go to Birmingham, 1963</u> (Christopher Paul Curtis, )		•	•			Historical Fiction	Prejudice, Family
<u>Way Things Work, The and 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>When Zachary Beaver Came to Town</u> (Kimberly Willis Holt, 2001) Toby befriends Zachary whose mother earns money by charging people admission to their trailer to see the overweight boy. Toby's experiences with Zachary allow him to put his own life into perspective and realize that things aren't so bad.			•	•		Fiction	Empathy, Obesity, Social justice, morality
<u>Wrinkle in Time, A</u> (Madeline L'Engle, 1962) Meg, her brother, and her best friend go on an adventure full of wonder when they met an extraordinary creature during their search for her father. Newbery Medal Winner - 1963		•	•		•	Science Fiction	Mythology, Courage, Honor, Fantasy
<u>Year Down Yonder, A</u> (Richard Peck, 2000)			•			Historical Fiction	Family,

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<p>This Newbery Medal Winner of 2001 continues the story of Joey, Mary Alice and Grandma Dowdel from <u><a href="#">A Long Way From Chicago</a></u>. Peck manages to expand Grandma's character so that she is more crazy than ever – hysterically funny!</p>							

### Resources for Reading Teachers

#### Biographies for Talented Readers, A Bibliography

[http://www.ualr.edu/giftedctr/talentedreaders/Biographies\\_for\\_Children.pdf#search=%22talented%20readers%22](http://www.ualr.edu/giftedctr/talentedreaders/Biographies_for_Children.pdf#search=%22talented%20readers%22)

Ann Robinson (Center for Gifted Education at Little Rock, Arkansas) has developed an excellent list of biographies for talented readers. These range in difficulty and are perfect for getting kids hooked on a new genre.

#### Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site

<http://www.carolhurst.com/>

This site is one of the best for information about children's literature. Hurst provides in-depth descriptions of books and has lists by subject matter and grade level. Stay informed about great new books by signing up for the periodic e-newsletter.

#### International Reading Association

[http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/positions\\_excellent.html](http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/positions_excellent.html)

What do good reading teachers do differently? A pdf version of the answer can be found at this site. Then navigate around the site for more information on creating good readers.

#### SEM-R – Schoolwide Enrichment Model Reading Program

<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/SEMR/Talented%20Readers.htm>

This site explores the SEM-R model developed at the University of Connecticut intended to use enrichment pedagogy with all students. I was involved with the study over the past 3 years and have seen the positive influences of conferencing and student's excitement about reading self-selected material. For more information on this study, read an abstract of a monograph at: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/reisgubb.html>.