

Reading Level Grades 3-4

Inkheart

(Cornelia Funke)

Meggie's father, Mo, has the incredible ability to read book characters into life! Confronted by their arch nemesis, Capricorn, Eleanor (Meg's great aunt), Meg, and Mo go through many adventures, twists, and turns to end Capricorn's reign of terror. Cornelia Funke has been an important children's author in Germany for many years, and she's written some impressive stories. See *Thief Lord* below. Grades 3+

Inside Out and Back Again

(Thanhha Lai)

Escaping Vietnam during the fall of Saigon, Ha finds herself in Alabama after a harrowing journey. Written in short, free verse poems, this is the story of an immigrant outcast and foreigner and her sense of alienation. She finds ways – through humor and perseverance – not only to survive but to thrive.

Grade 3

Fablehaven

(Brandon Mull)

Fablehaven is not only a country estate, it's a haven for trolls, satyrs, imps, fairies, and other mythological and magical creatures. Everyone lives in harmony until Kenra and Seth come to visit their grandfather. He's the caretaker of Fablehaven, but the kids don't know that. Seth, unwittingly, breaks the rules of Fablehaven, and a mighty power is released. (Don't count on your prior knowledge of the behavior of these creatures, especially the fairies!) Now, it's up to the kids to rescue grandpa, the housekeeper and Fablehaven itself.

Grade 4+

Love That Dog

(Sharon Creech)

Stepping into the world of free verse, Sharon Creech tells the tale of Jack who thinks poetry is for girls. As we watch, Jack gets "hooked," and he finds his poetic voice. Jack invites his idol Walter Dean Myers (*Hoops* and *Game*) to his class, and his muse actually shows up! Grade 3

A Mutiny in Time

Book #1 of *Infinity Ring* series
(James Dashner)

The time travel device is called an Infinity Ring, and 5th graders Dak and Sera have discovered it. Their task is to fix “Great Breaks” in history that have gone awry. By joining a group called the Hysterians, the kids battle the SQ, an evil group trying to run the world. Evocative of **39 Clues**, including clues and a mobile app from Scholastic, this is a trifle commercial for the publisher, but what kid doesn’t know Scholastic?

Grade 4+

Niagara Falls or Does It?

Book #1 from the *Hank Zipper* series
(Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver)

This is real life in the 4th grade with a demanding teacher and a propensity for getting into trouble. Hank is charming. Henry Winkler’s “the Fonz” voice can be heard through Hank. At last count there were 17 books in the series. There is another series by the same authors: *Ghost*.

Grades 3-4

The One and Only Ivan

(Katherine Applegate)

This book is the 2012 Newbery Award winner.

Ivan is a captive silverback gorilla living in a cage at Exit 8 at the Big Top Mall. Ivan narrates his own story: about TV shows, his friendships, his art, and his domain. When a baby elephant enters the picture, life changes for all the animals. Sad, funny, poignant, thoughtful – a very good story worthy of the Newbery!

Grade 4

The Shadows

Book #1 of the *Elsewhere* series
(Jacqueline West)

With her parents, Olive moves into an ancient, crumbling Victorian house. Putting on a pair of old spectacles she discovers, she can enter paintings on the wall (somewhat reminiscent of a *Twilight Zone* episode) where shadows dominate and time has changed. To top this off, there are three talking cats! A GOR (Good Old Read)

Grade 3

Splendors and Glooms

(Laura Amy Schlitz)

Considered Victorian gothic, this 2012 Newbery honor has all the elements: the missing wealthy child is sad and lonely, the street urchins are plucky, the puppeteer and the landlady are Dickensian. It's a mystery, historical fiction, magical with well-rounded characters, and perfect prose that elicits all the sights and smells of Victorian England.

Grades 4+

Theodore Boone Kid Lawyer

(John Grisham)

John Grisham has long had a great talent for adult legal thrillers. Now, that skill has been translated into a 13-year-old's voice, but at a reading level of about fourth grade. Complicated legal concepts aren't so mysterious when they are explained by an eighth grader. Think Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys for the 21st Century.

Grade 4

The Thief Lord

(Cornelia Funke)

Best known for the *Inkheart* trilogy, Cornelia Funke has written another winner. Two orphans (Prospero and Bo) run away to Venice, Italy, where they join a street gang of thieving children and their leader, Scipio. Hear hoof beats of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*? The salvation here is a plethora of wacky and charming characters – a great read.

Grade 4

Wonderstruck

(Brian Selznick)

From the author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* comes another unique read. Ben's story is told in prose; Rose's in pictures. The two stories are told simultaneously, weaving in and out of one another creating a complex and compelling tale. If you liked *Hugo*, you will probably like this, too.

Grades 3+

Reading Level Grades 5-6

The Case of the Missing Marquess

Book #1 of the *Enola Holmes Mysteries*

(Nancy Springer)

Enola is Sherlock and Mycroft's sister. On the hunt for her missing mother, 14-year-old Enola solves not only her disappearance, but also that of the Marquess. The author provides the clues and ciphers to help readers solve along with Enola. These novels follow the same format as all the Arthur Conon Doyle Sherlock Holmes short stories. Irene Cooper (ALA reviewer) recommends Philip Pullman's thrillers: *The Sally Lockhart* trilogy beginning with *The Ruby in the Smoke* as other Victorian mysteries.

The Cheshire Cheese Cat: A Dickens of a Tale

(Carmen Deedy and Randall Wright)

Skilley is an alley cat looking for a warm home in Victorian London when he chances on the innkeeper of the Cheshire Cheese Inn, a local pub. The innkeeper needs a mouser, and Skilley fits the bill, except for one small problem: he hates eating mice; he loves cheese. The mice and Skilley form a perfect partnership. Who habitually comes to the inn? None other than Charles Dickens who has writer's block, and he's looking for inspiration. Charles sees Skilley and thinks, "It's the best of Toms; it's the worst of Toms." The references are marvelous, but the story's so good, you don't have to know them to enjoy it.

Darwin Arkwright and the Peregrine Pact

(A. J. Hartley)

Darwin, an 11-year-old from northern England, moves to Atlanta, Georgia. Sent to a posh, private school, Darwin is bullied for his accent and his lack of understanding of American culture. But Mr. Peregrine recognizes Darwin as a "mirroccultist," one who can travel through a special mirror to the land of Silbrica – a world of human-based creatures. With Rich and Alexandra, Darwin makes the Peregrine Pact to save this unique world. This is a yummy dark fantasy and mystery combined.

Freak the Mighty

(Rodman Philbrick)

Two boys – one a slow learner in a huge body and the other a genius in leg braces – form a solid and formidable friendship. Panned by the critics for clichés and stereotyping, it has outlasted its nay-sayers to become a favorite of 5th and 6th grader ... and this critic, too.

The Ghost's Grave

(Peg Kehret)

Josh is not prepared for meeting a miner's ghost – although having to live with his Aunt Ethel was a weird surprise, too. Trapped in Carbon City, Washington, while his parents are off to India, Josh meets Willie's ghost, the wraith of a coal miner killed in 1903. The ghost wants Josh to reunite his body with the leg he lost in the accident. Digging up the leg, Josh finds a box of cash that the owner demands back at gun-point. This is Kehret's 17th novel.

The Lost Years of Merlin

(T. A. Barron)

This 12- volume series begins with Merlin as a young boy cast up on the coast of ancient Wales with no memory of an earlier life. The tale is filled with druids, Celtic folklore, adventures, and magic. This is a wonderful addition to the Arthurian legend.

Outcasts

Book #1 of the ***Brotherhood Chronicles*** series

(John Flanagan)

This new series is mainly about sailing ships (think Vikings), pirates, and Hal, the 16-year-old Outcast and his band of misfits who crew the *Wolfship*. A companion to the ***Ranger's Apprentice*** series (see below), this is a GOR: a Good Old Read!

Peter and the Shadow Thieves

(Dave Berry and Ridley Pearson)

This sequel to ***Peter and the Starcatchers*** tells a new tale of Peter Pan before he meets Wendy ... it's a prequel, if you will. Packed solid with multiple adventures, fast-paced action, and wonderful characters, Peter, Tinker Bell, and Molly fight the evil shadow stealer, Ombra. Here come the pirates, the wolf pack, and the evil villain!

The Ruins of Gorlan

Book #1 of the ***Ranger's Apprentice*** series

(John Flanagan)

A wildly successful series, this is a fantasy in a recognizable society. Consider it a 10-year-old's version of George R. R. Martin's ***A Song of Fire and Ice*** series.

There are 11 books in this series. Flanagan has also begun a new series: ***Brotherhood Chronicles***: Book #1 is ***The Outcasts*** (see above).

Three Times Lucky

(Sheila Turnage)

Mo LoBeau is a winner, full of grit, gumption, and humor. It's a mystery about a murder, but that's almost incidental. One reviewer called it a collision of "***Because of Winn-Dixie***'s heart and the action of ***Holes***." Tupelo Landing is a small town (population 148 minus 1 murder) in North Carolina where Mo, as an infant, literally washed up on the beach during a hurricane. Taken in by the owner of the café, she's one pistol of a girl.

Warning to parents: Read this book before you recommend to your child. It does have a brief scene of Dale's drunken father slapping his wife. It is not gratuitous violence; it's a part of Mo's friend Dale's life. This book won the 2013 Newbery Honor.

Wonder

(R. J. Palacio)

Physically deformed – "I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse." – Auggie enters school for the first time as a 10-year-old. Auggie begins the narrative, but soon others with different points of view speak their observations and feelings. This is an emotional, funny, tear-provoking, memorable, root-for-the-characters story. A+