

Suggested reading list for Y5 students, plus 10 top tips for boosting their reading

If you do just one thing at home, make it reading.

In general, reading all sorts of books is good for your child's education. If they are reading and enjoy reading, this is the main thing. But it is also important to give your child access to traditional, higher-order vocabulary and styles of writing. When they take their reading comprehension, it is likely that both the vocabulary and style will be advanced.

To help your children prepare, you may want to use some books from this list. You can read the books to them and chat to them about the words, or give them the books to read themselves. If you let your child read some of the traditional books by themselves, you may want to get them to read some of it out loud to you from time to time to check that they can make sense of it. If you choose some of the more modern fiction books, you'll find lots of very good and accessible stories that both you and they are likely to enjoy. Aim for 20 minutes a day. Though it may sound like a lot, it really is one of the best things you can do at home to boost your child's educational development. If 20 minutes is too long, even 10 minutes will help. For example, if they read 20 minutes a day, they will read about 20,000 words a week (average speed of reading). It will give them access to lots of new words, develop their fluency and stamina and help them with their inference skills.

Your local library is likely to stock many of these and can probably order them in if you request them. You may also be able to find them online in second-hand bookshops to keep the costs down. Choose which ones you would like and, if your child does not like one, try another. There is a selection of different genres below.

If your child is a reluctant reader:

- Start with shorter, high-interest books (e.g., *The Wild Robot*, *The Last Bear*, *Survivors*).
- Try reading the first chapter aloud to "hook" them.
- Build up in small steps: 5 minutes → 8 minutes → 10 minutes.
- Celebrate progress, not perfection.
- Choose books based on *their* interests, not yours.

10 tips for helping your child improve their reading at home

1. A short "How to Support Reading at Home" section

- Encourage your child to read aloud for 5 minutes so you can check understanding.
- Pause occasionally and ask: “What does that word mean?” or “What do you think will happen next?”
- Let them choose books from the list—but don’t worry if they don’t like one. Swap it.
- Mix reading alone with reading together.
- Praise effort and stamina, not just accuracy.

2. A simple guide to spotting new vocabulary

When reading, look out for:

- Words your child has *never seen*.
- Words they *can decode but don’t fully understand*.
- Words that describe feelings, settings, or character traits.
- Old-fashioned vocabulary that appears in the 11+.

E.g., “intricate”, “furious”, “melancholy”, “peculiar”, “astonished”.

3. A 3-step method for learning new words

When your child finds an unfamiliar word:

1. Say it aloud (many words make more sense when spoken).
2. Try to work it out from the sentence.
3. Check using a child-friendly dictionary.

4. When to move up or down a reading level

A book is too difficult if:

- They cannot understand 1 in 12 words.
- They lose the plot or can’t tell you what happened after a page.
- They avoid reading it.

A book is too easy if:

- They fly through it with no new vocabulary.
- They never pause or ask questions.

5. A reading routine

- Aim for 20 minutes, 5 days a week OR
- 10 minutes reading + 5 minutes discussing
- Same time each day (after dinner, before bed, etc.)

6. What to do if your child struggles with classics

- It's perfectly fine to read classics together.
- Children do not need to understand *every* word.
- The goal is *exposure* to formal language, not mastery.

7. How libraries can help

- Ask librarians for “11+ style books”
- Use reservations for free
- Try audiobooks for long car journeys
- Pair audiobook + physical book to boost fluency

8. Vocabulary examples from the list

Books with especially strong vocabulary:

- *The Secret Garden*
- *Skellig*
- *Howl's Moving Castle*
- *Northern Lights*
- *Treasure Island*

Books with very accessible vocabulary:

- *The Boy at the Back of the Class*
- *The Wild Robot*
- *The Last Bear*

9. Why reading supports 11+ success

- Reading increases vocabulary (the biggest predictor of 11+ English success).
- Children develop stamina for long comprehension passages.
- They become more confident with figurative language, inference, and tone.

10. A “Where to start” guide

If your child enjoys adventure: *The Explorer, Brightstorm, Percy Jackson*

If they like animals: *The Last Bear, Black Beauty*

If they prefer fantasy: *Howl’s Moving Castle, The Hobbit*

If they enjoy real-life stories: *Wonder, Street Child*

If they like short nonfiction: *Survivors, Women in Science*

Suggested list of 50 books

-  Green (Easier)
Accessible language, straightforward plot, modern style.
-  Amber (Moderate)
Richer vocabulary, more complex sentences, deeper inference.
-  Red (Challenging)
Dense vocabulary, older style, multiple themes, or abstract writing.

CLASSIC FICTION (10)

1. *Black Beauty* – Anna Sewell 
2. *The Secret Garden* – Frances Hodgson Burnett 
3. *The Wind in the Willows* – Kenneth Grahame 
4. *The Railway Children* – E. Nesbit 

5. A Little Princess – Frances Hodgson Burnett ●
 6. Little Women – Louisa May Alcott ●
 7. Anne of Green Gables – L. M. Montgomery ●
 8. Treasure Island – Robert Louis Stevenson ●
 9. Charlotte's Web – E. B. White ●
 10. The Borrowers – Mary Norton ●
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☀ MODERN & CONTEMPORARY FICTION (20)

11. Cogheart – Peter Bunzl ●
12. The Explorer – Katherine Rundell ●
13. Rooftoppers – Katherine Rundell ●
14. The Boy at the Back of the Class – Onjali Q. Raúf ●
15. Wonder – R. J. Palacio ●
16. The Wild Robot – Peter Brown ●
17. The Slightly Invisible Boy – Sally Gardner ●
18. The Shark Caller – Zillah Bethell ●
19. Brightstorm – Vashti Hardy ●
20. Street Child – Berlie Doherty ●
21. Skellig – David Almond ●
22. The Wolf Wilder – Katherine Rundell ●
23. The Girl Who Stole an Elephant – Nizrana Farook ●
24. The Nowhere Emporium – Ross MacKenzie ●

- 25. Journey to the River Sea – Eva Ibbotson ●
 - 26. The Boy Who Met a Whale – Nizrana Farook ●
 - 27. The Secret of Platform 13 – Eva Ibbotson ●
 - 28. The Letter for the King – Tonke Dragt ●
 - 29. The House with Chicken Legs – Sophie Anderson ●
 - 30. The Last Bear – Hannah Gold ●
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✨ CHALLENGING FANTASY / ADVENTURE (10)

- 31. Northern Lights – Philip Pullman ●
 - 32. Artemis Fowl – Eoin Colfer ●
 - 33. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban – J. K. Rowling ●
 - 34. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – C. S. Lewis ●
 - 35. Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief – Rick Riordan ●
 - 36. Howl's Moving Castle – Diana Wynne Jones ●
 - 37. The Hobbit – J. R. R. Tolkien ●
 - 38. Tom's Midnight Garden – Philippa Pearce ●
 - 39. The Firework-Maker's Daughter – Philip Pullman ●
 - 40. The Secret Keepers – Trenton Lee Stewart ●
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■ NON-FICTION (HISTORY, SCIENCE, BIOGRAPHY) (10)

41. Women in Science – Rachel Ignatofsky ●
42. Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History – Vashti Harrison ●
43. Young Readers' Shakespeare: Macbeth – Edited for children ● (themes)
44. Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World – Kate Pankhurst ●
45. Survivors – David Long ● (mature themes)
46. Great Adventurers – Alastair Humphreys ●
47. The Story of Inventions – Anna Claybourne ●
48. What You Need to Be Warm – Neil Gaiman ●
49. Britannica Children's Encyclopedia – ●/● (varies by page)
50. Corpse Talk: Ground-Breaking Scientists – Adam & Lisa Murphy ●