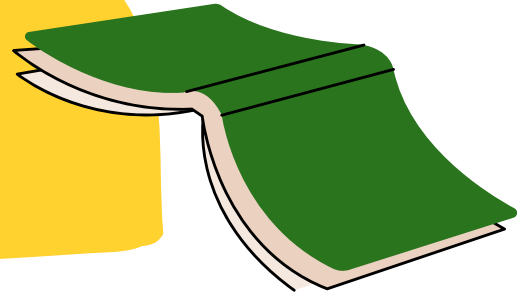


# WHY READING CLASSICS STILL MATTERS

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When parents ask me what their children should be reading, my usual answer is simple: anything that gets them reading.

That still stands. A child who loves reading Diary of a Wimpy Kid, graphic novels, fantasy series or football facts is building confidence, stamina and enjoyment – all of which matter hugely.

But there's another layer worth considering, especially as children move towards 11+ exams and GCSE: exposure to classic literature.

This doesn't mean abandoning modern books, or forcing children through long, joyless novels they hate. It means adding classics into the mix – gently, strategically, and often together.

## Why Classics Help (Academically and Beyond)

Classic texts tend to use:

- More complex sentence structures
- Richer and less familiar vocabulary
- More varied narrative styles and viewpoints

These are exactly the features children encounter in:

- 11+ comprehension papers
- GCSE English Language extracts
- unseen texts and analysis tasks later on

In fact, recent 11+ exams have included extracts from texts such as:

- Tess of the d'Urbervilles
- Jane Eyre
- The Mill on the Floss
- The Road to Wigan Pier

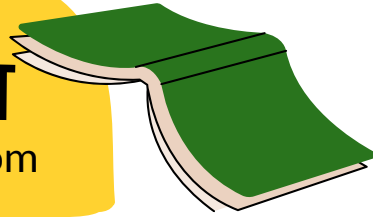
Books that many Year 11 pupils have never actually read in full.

**Children who are familiar with older styles of writing are often:**

- **quicker at processing dense passages**
- **more confident tackling unfamiliar vocabulary**
- **better at sustaining concentration with longer texts**

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Child's Classics  
Journey  
Today!**





## **Gentle First Steps: Accessible Classics**

These work well for confident readers around ages 8–11, or for reading independently with support.

- Fairy Tales – Hans Christian Andersen

Short, vivid stories with rich language and clear moral threads.

- Fairy Tales – Brothers Grimm

Darker than many expect, but fantastic for discussion and vocabulary.

- Roald Dahl Short Story Collection

Familiar voices, but more sophisticated language than many modern children's books.

- Malory Towers – Enid Blyton

Dated in places, but excellent for fluency and stamina.

- The Famous Five – Enid Blyton

Straightforward plots with a strong narrative drive – great stepping stones.

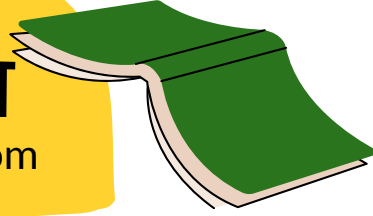
Other accessible classics you might also consider:

- The Wind in the Willows – Kenneth Grahame
- The Jungle Book – Rudyard Kipling
- Black Beauty – Anna Sewell

## **Richer Classics to Read Together (or Slightly Older Readers)**

These are ideal for shared reading, discussion, or confident readers aged 10–13.

- The Lost World - Adventure-driven, exciting, and linguistically rich.
- The Secret Garden - Beautiful language and emotional depth.
- Swallows and Amazons - Demands concentration but hugely rewarding.
- The Chronicles of Narnia - Accessible allegory with increasingly complex themes.
- Little House on the Prairie - Excellent for historical context and descriptive writing.
- The Railway Children - Warm, character-driven and deceptively sophisticated.
- Five Children and It - Fantastic for exploring narrative voice and cause-and-effect.
- Anne of Green Gables - Rich vocabulary, humour and emotional insight.
- The Hobbit - A brilliant bridge between children's and adult literature.



## **Classics That Stretch Thinking (Usually 11+ / Early Secondary)**

These are often best read with an adult, or revisited later.

- Oliver Twist - Demanding language, but invaluable exposure.
- Little Women - Rich characterisation and complex moral choices.
- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer - Humorous, but linguistically and culturally challenging.
- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn - Often better discussed than read independently at first.
- Robinson Crusoe - Dense, but excellent preparation for GCSE-style texts.
- Animal Farm - Short, powerful, and ideal for introducing allegory.
- Lord of the Flies - Best saved for older readers, but hugely influential at GCSE.

## **How to Introduce Classics Without Killing the Joy**

- Read alongside modern books — not instead of them
- Try reading aloud or listening to audiobooks together
- Don't worry about full comprehension first time
- Talk about unfamiliar words briefly, not endlessly
- It's okay to pause a book and come back to it later

The goal isn't to "finish the list". It's to build confidence with complex language.

## **Final Thought**

Children don't need to love every classic they read.

But familiarity with classic language gives them a huge advantage — not just for exams, but for reading confidence, critical thinking and long-term literacy.

And that's something that lasts far beyond 11+ or GCSE.