

How to Select the Best Books for Your Kids

The other day I received a brief survey from Renaissance Learning. Designed for parents, teachers, and administrators, it asked participants to list three must-read books for students in the following age categories:



At first blush, the survey may seem simple and almost frivolous in nature. But in actuality, the books we select for our children are profoundly important for three reasons.

The first is that the books children read shape their understanding of culture. A steady diet of books focusing on modern topics gives a [narrow-minded view of life](#). Interspersing a child's literary diet with books written in other times broadens the mind and provides a better foundation for understanding the world and various cultural references.

In the second place, children – to be honest, humans in general – naturally gravitate toward the easy path. Unless we direct children toward more challenging reading material, they are prone to stagnate in their thinking and ability to advance.

The third reason is that the books children read have a deep impact on the formation of their judgment. That judgment, as John Adams [noted](#), will eventually be used to govern the nation:

“The very Ground of our Liberties, is the freedom of Elections. ... I must judge for myself, but how can I judge, how can any Man judge, unless his Mind has been opened and enlarged by Reading.”

In other words, the books we give our children today will inform their decisions tomorrow.

With that sober thought, how would you answer this survey? I encourage you to [take it here](#). Then let us know your choices in the comments below, along with your reasoning for choosing them.

For the curious, my selections are in the following list. I chose them primarily on the important cultural markers they give, but they also offer challenging reading material and delve into a variety of issues which are applicable even to today's world.

Kindergarten – 2nd Grade

1. [Peter Rabbit and other Beatrix Potter Tales](#)
2. [Little House on the Prairie](#)
3. [Charlotte's Web](#)

3rd – 5th Grade

1. [Anne of Green Gables](#)
2. [Little Women](#)
3. [The Adventures of Robin Hood](#)

6th – 8th Grade

1. [The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#) and/or [Huckleberry Finn](#)
2. [Johnny Tremain](#)
3. [Animal Farm](#)

9th – 12th Grade

1. [Romeo and Juliet](#)
2. [A Tale of Two Cities](#)
3. [Pride and Prejudice](#)

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