

L.G.'s Awesome Book List

Middle Grade/Tweens

I'm a writer, and I homeschool, thus I collect children's books. After sending a bunch of book recommendations to a friend, I realized I ought to turn the list into a blog post. I've read all these books unless I've noted otherwise. I preferred fantasy, adventure, and historical fiction as a kid, so those flavors are pretty prominent. I admit I may not be the best judge of reading level, so know your child's ability! The list is alphabetical by title, and series are listed under the first book in the series.

My philosophy of children's literature

I expect literature to widen a child's world, help them work through difficult topics in the safety of their imagination, and expand their vocabulary and language skills such as rhyme, alliteration, similes, and metaphors. But ultimately, I expect books to teach truth and beauty along with sin and its consequences. I don't believe depressing or nihilistic endings make sense from a Christian worldview, but saccharin-sweetness is equally problematic. I'm not afraid of scary books as long as the hero or heroine triumphs.

I have placed a blue heart next to books I think are more boy-oriented or pink next to girl-oriented. I could easily label them all purple since I grew up loving Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, and other books often recommended for boys. Still, I do think some books are more boyish or girly than others and deserve those labels. You know your kids best, so use or ignore the colors at your discretion.



I highly recommend searching out your local used bookstore for these titles, especially if you're looking for some of the vintage ones. I don't get any money for this list, so I'm not going to give you links or suggestions other than you should buy books as cheap as you can! I also believe in having extra copies of particularly good books so they can be loved into retirement and replaced.

Happy reading!

Middle Grade/Tweens

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-glass* by Lewis Carroll

As a child, I loved the weirdness of these books. Carroll captures the confusion of a child trying to make sense of adult language and turns it into silly adventures.

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery ♥

I identified with Anne's secret imaginary world as well as her penchant for renaming things to sound more exciting and beautiful.

The Black Pearl by Scott O'Dell

Ramon goes pearl diving and finds a treasure that his father believes may be the legendary pearl of heaven, but he may have also angered a monster.

Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Brink

I recall some creepy moments involving Indians and scalps. You might read it before giving it to your child to be sure there isn't anything you're uncomfortable with. I believe it would be a good discussion starter.

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry ♥

Mafatu is terrified of the ocean which makes his father ashamed, so he sets out to conquer his fear. After he loses his canoe in a storm, he washes up on a deserted island... or so he thinks.

Cheaper by the Dozen by Frank Gilbreth Jr.

Frank and Lillian Gilbreth decided to have twelve children, six boys and six girls. And that's what they did. I have a soft spot for this book because Frank Gilbreth is also the father of organizational psychology, and the story illustrates how he used his large brood as a home laboratory for his theories with hilarious results!

The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis

No list would be complete without Narnia. Every child needs to feel the rush of excitement the first time the Pevensies meet Aslan.

The Cooper Kids Adventures by Frank Peretti

Eight books in all, some better than others, all solidly Christian and exciting fun stories.

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

I named one of my children after the titular character. This is horror, so it is scary. It's also exquisitely written and wildly creative. Never has a black shoe button seemed so foreboding than in this book!

The Day Boy and the Night Girl by George McDonald

A witch raises a boy so he never knows darkness and a girl so she never knows daylight, and yet, somehow, they meet. George McDonald influenced C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, and this is a good introduction. Once I read *The Princess and the Goblin* (his best-known work), I'll probably add it here.

Fortunately, the Milk by Neil Gaiman

Dad goes out to get milk and is gone a bit longer than expected. When he gets home, his explanation for his absence involves time travel, aliens pirates, dinosaurs, a volcano, and vampires. As soon as I finished reading this one aloud, my kids asked if we could start over and read it again.

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg

Another classic. If you read this book as a kid and didn't want to run away and live in a museum, I am convinced there is something wrong with you.

The Golden Goblet by Eloise Jarvis McGraw ♥

Historical adventure set in ancient Egypt. Ranofer wants to be a goldsmith, but his evil half brother Gebu keeps him enslaved. He gets a chance to change his life when he finds a golden goblet that his brother has kept hidden.

The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien

I read *The Hobbit* quite young (third grade, with my dad), and my husband has read it aloud to our oldest two. Tolkien is the only high fantasy writer I've ever enjoyed. Yes, I took a class on Tolkien in college and moved a final to see all three films in the theater on Trilogy Tuesday. And no, I haven't read the *Silmarillion*.

Holes by Louis Sachar ♥

Stanley seems to have terrible luck. He ends up at Camp Greenlake doing "community service" digging holes in a desert, but maybe all these holes will change his luck. I also highly recommend the movie!

The Hound of the Baskervilles by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ♥

I love all things Sherlock Holmes. This is Doyle at his creepy best.

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell ♥

A girl ends up living alone on an island in the Pacific. It's sort of like *My Side of the Mountain* but a girl on an island.

The Mandie Series by Lois Leppard ♥

I borrowed a ton of these from a friend and loved them — solid Christian fiction for girls.

Mara, Daughter of the Nile by Eloise Jarvis McGraw

Mara is a slave who becomes a spy in the court of Queen Hatshepsut. I think of this as a more girl-oriented version of *The Golden Goblet*. Very good historical fiction.

The Midnighters trilogy by Scott Westerfeld: *The Secret Hour*, *Touching Darkness*, and *Blue Noon*

I have a soft spot for this series since it is set in Bixby, Oklahoma, and I happen to be Okie born and bred. Teens discover there is a secret hour warped within midnight. For an hour, everyone else freezes while those born precisely at midnight discover unique powers as well as terrifying monsters to battle. I never finished *Blue Noon* because I had to give it back to the library. Someday I'll finish it because it's still bugging me almost ten years later!

Mistress Masham's Repose by T.H. White ♥

This book should be much better known than it is. A young girl discovers a group of refugee Lilliputians (as in the tiny people from *Gulliver's Travels*) living on an island on the grounds of the estate where she lives. I still want a spider silk handkerchief like Maria.

Outlaws of Time series by N.D. Wilson ♥

Books by N.D. Wilson are the only ones I recommend without actually reading them because I know they'll be good. This series is on our shelf, and I'm hoping to get to them this Christmas.

The Prince and the Pauper by Mark Twain ♥

You probably think you know this story because it has been copied so many times. It's worth it to read the original, complicated language and all.

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi

A young woman sails home to Rhode Island from boarding school in England and finds herself the lone passenger on a ship with a scoundrel captain and a crew looking to mutiny. Charlotte is a heroine you will remember!

The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin

This book still bugs me years later because the puzzles were so intriguing! Turtle Wexler is definitely a scrappy, smart, and memorable little girl. If your child likes puzzles, they will probably like this one.

White Fang and *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

These are classic "dog" stories that can be pretty scary. London was one of my favorite writers growing up.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare ♥

This historical novel is set in colonial Connecticut. Kit Tyler has run away from her home in Barbados to escape marriage to a much older man, and she has to figure out how to live with her Puritan extended family. This one features quite a bit of innocent romance, so boys may turn up their noses.

The Winds of Light series by Sigmund Brouwer

Warring groups of magicians, Merlins and Druids, use science to convince people they know magic and fight for control of medieval England. It has a little bit of romance mixed in later in the series. I got four books from this series on Christmas morning as a kid and finished three by dinner.