



# SLJ's TOP 100 CHILDREN'S NOVELS

A Fuse #8 Production

**Whether we're spying** with Harriet, spinning with Charlotte, or running away with Bud, the novels of our youth give us some of our earliest friends and companions. Considering only fictional titles for children between the ages of 9-12, the readers of *School Library Journal* voted on what they felt were their own individual Top Ten Children's Novels of all time. Points were given for rank and order and counted accordingly. The result is a list of the Top 100 Children's Novels for the 21st century. —*Betsy Bird*

## The List

1. [Charlotte's Web](#)  
by E.B. White (1952)
2. [A Wrinkle in Time](#)  
by Madeleine L'Engle (1962)
3. [Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone](#)  
by J.K. Rowling (1997)
4. [The Giver](#)  
by Lois Lowry (1993)
5. [The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe](#)  
by C.S. Lewis (1950)
6. [Holes](#)  
by Louis Sachar (1998)
7. [From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler](#)  
by E. L. Konigsburg (1967)
8. [Anne of Green Gables](#)  
by L.M. Montgomery (1908)
9. [The Westing Game](#)  
by Ellen Raskin (1978)



**1** **Charlotte's Web**  
by E.B. White  
(1952)

HARPER & BROS • GRADES 3 –5

### VOTED AND QUOTED

*I'm sure this will be number one again, and for good reason. A magical barnyard that maintains its "barn"ness. Amazing stuff.*  
—Heather Christensen

### BIRD'S WORDS

"Where's Papa going with that axe?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast."

Some books are so firmly entrenched in the public consciousness that it is impossible to conduct a poll of this sort and expect them to be anywhere but #1. You, *Charlotte's Web*, you will always be number one to American children and adults everywhere.

The plot, from Anita Silvey's *Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book*, reads: "In *Charlotte's Web*, Charlotte, a spider, serves as the main protagonist; Fern, a young girl, plays a supporting role. Both females work to save the life of Wilbur, the runt pig of the litter... at the state fair, Charlotte asserts the power of the pen... With just seven words, she convinces everyone that Wilbur, "some pig," is truly something special and must be kept alive."

Ms. Silvey says in *100 Best Books for Children* that the book "began as an essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled 'Death of a Pig,' which told how White tended to an ailing pig, only to have it die." The idea came to White while he was carrying slops to his pig "and thinking about

I read this book for the first time during the summer between third and fourth grades. It was then that I decided it was more interesting to lay in bed and read rather than to watch cartoons. I was hooked from the very start, and I could barely put the book down long enough to eat or sleep. —*The Sauls Family*



# 1 Charlotte's Web [continued]

writing a children's book. He wanted a way to save a pig's life, and then he started watching a large spider."

The *New Yorker* article "The Lion and the Mouse" describes how the late, great librarian Anne Carroll Moore was not a particular fan of *Charlotte's Web*, since she felt that the character of Fern was "never developed." The article chronicles editor Ursula Nordstrom's response:

"Nordstrom . . . gleefully wrote to White, 'Eudora Welty said the book was perfect for anyone over eight or under eighty, and that leaves Miss Moore out as she is a girl of eighty-two.'"

All of my boys have had this classic read aloud to them, then we watched the movie with popcorn and candy. It's a rite of passage into the club of reading in our family.  
—Tess Alfonsin

I know, I know it's so predictable but I loved this book as a kid (despite having a terrible fear of spiders) and still love it as an adult. It has changed and grown with me—and isn't that the testament of something that is truly great? As a kid I saw it as a book about friendship and now I see it is a book about loss. It's deep stuff. And nothing is better than the audiobook read by E.B. White. I like to have it on in the background while I do mundane things like clean and fold laundry, hoping that I will absorb some of his genius. —Sharon Ozimy

The book won a Newbery Honor in 1952. Ms. Welty said of it in *The New York Times*, "What the book is about is friendship on earth, affection and protection, adventure and miracle, life and death, trust and treachery, pleasure and pain, and the passing of time. As a piece of work it is just about perfect, and just about magical in the way it is done. 'At-at-at, at the risk of repeating myself,' as the goose says, *Charlotte's Web* is an adorable book."

*Humble. Radiant. Terrific. Some Pig.* —Hotspur Closser



## 2 A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle (1962)

FARRAR, STRAUS, AND GIROUX • GRADE LEVEL: 6–8

### VOTED AND QUOTED

*Magical. Thrilling. As a kid, I loved that it stretched my brain. Other dimensions! Time travel! Oh how I loved the "Aunt Beast" creatures — how in a world with no eyes, the inhabitants would never anticipate the existence of sight. I spent hours upon hours trying to imagine other senses we don't have, and so would never anticipate.* —Aaron Zenz

The only book I've ever finished, turned over, and immediately started reading again. —Lauren Martino

### BIRD'S WORDS

Yeah. I loved it too. And yep, I've read it as an adult. Still love it.

The plot description from my copy: "It is a dark and stormy night. Meg Murry, her small brother Charles Wallace, and her mother are in the kitchen for a midnight snack when a most disturbing visitor arrives. 'Wild nights are my glory,' the unearthly stranger tells them. 'I just got caught in a downdraft and blown off course. Let me sit down for a moment and then I'll be on my way. Speaking of ways, by the way, there is such a thing as a tesseract.' Meg's father had been experimenting with this fifth dimension of time travel when he mysteriously disappeared. Now the time has come for Meg, her friend Calvin, and Charles Wallace to rescue him."



#### 10. Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson (1977)

#### 11. When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead (2009)

#### 12. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban by J.K. Rowling (1999)

#### 13. The Thief by Megan Whalen Turner (1997)

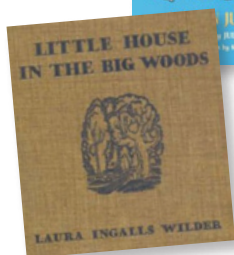
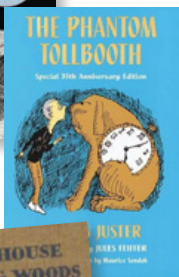
#### 14. The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien (1938)

#### 15. The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1911)

#### 16. Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt (1975)



#### 17. Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh (1964)



18. [The Book of Three](#)  
by Lloyd Alexander (1964)

19. [Little House in the Big Woods](#)  
by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932)

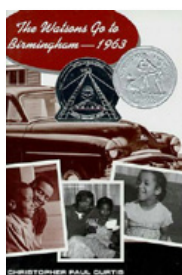
20. [Because of Winn-Dixie](#)  
by Kate DiCamillo (2000)

21. [The Phantom Tollbooth](#)  
by Norton Juster (1961)

22. [The Dark Is Rising](#)  
by Susan Cooper (1973)

23. [Hatchet](#)  
by Gary Paulsen (1989)

24. [Ramona the Pest](#)  
by Beverly Cleary (1968)



25. [The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963](#)  
by Christopher Paul Curtis (1995)

## 2 A Wrinkle in Time [continued]

I just helped celebrate this book's 50th anniversary, and rereading it reminded me why it endures. An oddball blend of science fiction, fantasy, and even religion, *A Wrinkle in Time* continues to touch the Megs of this world, who are in need of all kinds of hope. "So you're a klutz. You can still change the world. And there will be people who love you, people you love back." It's a message that will always matter.  
—Kate Coombs



But can they outwit and overpower the forces of evil they will encounter on their heart-stopping journey through space?"

According to *American Writers for Children Since 1960: Fiction*, L'Engle wrote the book, which 26 publishers rejected, while reading Albert Einstein and Max Planck. It was also L'Engle's rebellion against Christian piety.

Cynthia Zarin, in a 2004 *New Yorker* article, described it as "science fiction, a warm tale of family life, a response to the Cold War, a book about a search for a father, a feminist tract, a religious fable, a coming-of-age novel, a work of Satanism, or a prescient meditation on the future of the United States after the Kennedy assassination."

*How excited am I for the 50th anniversary? So excited I threw a birthday party for it at my library. So excited I'm writing a year-long series of blog posts on the subject. So excited I'd been PLANNING FOR IT for over a year. Because this is THAT BOOK for me, that ONE BOOK.* —A.M. Weir

Science fiction was a rare bird in popular children's literature back then. In her article "Childlike Wonder and the Truths of Science Fiction" in *Children's Literature*, L'Engle writes, "One of the reasons that *A Wrinkle in Time* took so long to find a publisher is that it was assumed that children would not be able to understand a sophisticated way of looking at time, would not understand Einstein's theories. But no theory is too hard for a child so long as it is part of a story; and although parents had not been taught Einstein's  $E = mc^2$  in school, their children had been."

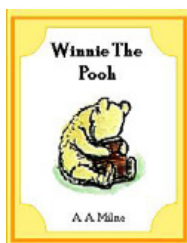
Christian fundamentalists have regularly banned this 1963 Newbery winner. L'Engle's response: "They said it wasn't a Christian book. I said, 'Quite right.' I wasn't trying to write a Christian book. But, of course, it is. So is *Robin Hood*. The Mrs. Ws witches? They're guardian angels!"

*This is my number one for very personal reasons—it made such an impact on me as an awkward preteen. I loved Meg for all her imperfections and total loyalty and love for her family.* —Heather Christensen

I was positive that she wrote this book just for me.  
—Mary Friedrichs

*Whereas many adults talk down to kids, or assume they can't understand, L'Engle dives right into the heart of religion, faith, hope, fear, time, and space and gives kids room to ponder those Big Issues within the safe confines of a story. There is a lot to take away from the book, and I notice something new each time I read it, but my favorite thing, time and again, is how Meg's flaws become her strengths. All kids have times when they feel plain, ugly, or out of place, and L'Engle does them a great service by turning those negative feelings into their own kind of superpower.*  
—Katie Ahearn





26. [Winnie-the-Pooh](#)  
by A.A. Milne (1926)

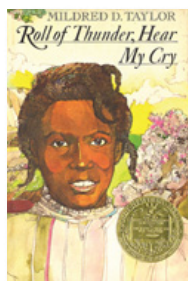
27. [Little House on the Prairie](#)  
by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1935)

28. [The Golden Compass](#)  
by Philip Pullman (1995)

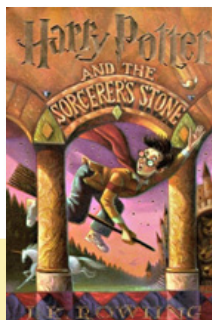
29. [The Penderwicks: A Summer Tale of Four Sisters, Two Rabbits, and a Very Interesting Boy](#)  
by Jeanne Birdsall (2005)

30. [Matilda](#)  
by Roald Dahl (1988)

31. [Alice's Adventures in Wonderland](#)  
by Lewis Carroll (1865)



32. [Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry](#)  
by Mildred D. Taylor (1976)



### 3 Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling (1997)

BLOOMSBURY (UK), SCHOLASTIC • GRADE LEVEL: 4–8

#### VOTED AND QUOTED

*Oh, our family got hours and hours and hours of enjoyment out of these books. We read all of the first five out loud as a family, with no reading ahead. (Or as little reading ahead as we could stand.) Her imaginative details are unsurpassed, and she knows how to leaven her writing with plenty of humor. —Sondra Eklund*

#### BIRD'S WORDS

The publisher's description: "Orphaned as a baby, Harry Potter has spent 11 awful years living with his mean aunt, uncle, and cousin Dudley. But everything changes for Harry when an owl delivers a mysterious letter inviting him to attend a school for wizards. At this special school, Harry finds friends, aerial sports, and magic in everything from classes to meals, as well as a great destiny that's been waiting for him...if Harry can survive the encounter."

Although not necessarily the best in the series, this was really a ground-breaking book. I love the way that the reader is drawn into the story. Harry is an "everyman" character, not knowing any more about magic and the wizarding world than we do, and so we learn along with him. I think Rowling is very respectful of the young reader in this book, not over-explaining things like the Cerberus and the "mirror of erised," but rather giving the reader the opportunity to make discoveries.

—Sarah Flowers

The general story behind the book's creation goes that Rowling was a welfare mom when she wrote it, though there have been conflicting reports about precisely how destitute she was. Because it makes for a better story, people want to say that she was living on breadcrumbs with her daughter, scribbling the book out on napkins in coffee shops. Hardly. But she was a single mom who wasn't exactly flush with cash when she typed the book out the first time.

Harry himself came to her while she was riding a train in 1990. Later she got an agent and, according to Anita Silvey's *100 Best Books for Children*, "although nine English houses rejected Harry Potter, the agent sent it to a small British publisher, Bloomsbury, and Barry Cunningham took on the project." Arthur A. Levine purchased the American rights to the book in 1997, paying a whopping \$100,000 in auction on a first-time author. Risky, but worth it.

The advantage of conducting a poll of this sort is that I don't have to participate in it myself. A confession? I never

*Sometimes hype is just hype, but when it came to the anticipation surrounding the release of each Harry, the substance of what was hoped for met the expectation. Beyond blockbuster movies and Lego sets beats the heart of true heroism. By the end of the seventh book, every character on the side of right had a moment to shine, from Mrs. Weasley to Neville, all the way down to Dudley and his cup of tea. Rowling stands alongside Jane Austen in her ability to allow her characters to open their mouths and prove themselves a fool. Rowling also created, hands down, the most evil villain in all of children's lit. No, I'm not looking at you, Tom Riddle. Delores Umbridge wears that vile crown. Voldemort never put on airs that he was anything other than a power-mad megalomaniac, whereas Umbridge coated her pious bigotry in pink virtue and creepy kittens. There lies a cautionary tale. —DaNae Leu*



33. [Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH](#)  
by Robert C. O'Brien (1971)

34. [Where the Red Fern Grows](#)  
by Wilson Rawls (1961)

35. [Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing](#)  
by Judy Blume (1972)

36. [The Witch of Blackbird Pond](#)  
by Elizabeth George Speare (1958)

37. [The Wednesday Wars](#)  
by Gary D. Schmidt (2007)

38. [Frindle](#)  
by Andrew Clements (1996)

39. [The Invention of Hugo Cabret](#)  
by Brian Selznick (2007)

40. [Maniac Magee](#)  
by Jerry Spinelli (1990)

41. [The Wonderful Wizard of Oz](#)  
by L. Frank Baum (1900)

42. [Gone-Away Lake](#)  
by Elizabeth Enright (1957)

43. [Jacob Have I Loved](#)  
by Katherine Paterson (1980)

### 3 Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone [continued]

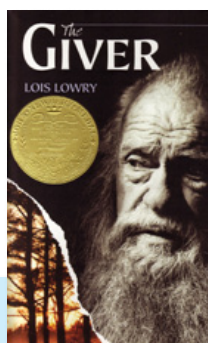
There's a boy who lives in a cupboard under the stair, and he has an unusual scar on his forehead... Harry Potter is no doubt the most famous wizard since Gandalf, but what makes him and his friends at Hogwarts so compelling that half the world seemed to be reading the series at some point? I would say that Rowling showed us the power of writing about friendship and writing with originality. Harry, Ron, and Hermione are easy to root for, and things like quidditch and every-flavor jelly beans are the freshest details in children's fiction since Cinderella showed up in a pumpkin coach wearing glass slippers.  
—Kate Coombs

made a top ten list of my own favorite children's books. If I did, I'd have a hard time deciding which Harry Potter to place there. One of them would make an appearance, but which? #3 is my favorite. #2 turned me into a librarian. But as mom points out, if the first hadn't been a success, we would never have gotten to see any of the others. Odds are I'd include it.

Said *The Scotsman*: "*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* has all the makings of a classic... Rowling uses classic narrative devices with flair and originality and delivers a complex and demanding plot in the form of a hugely entertaining thriller. She is a first-rate writer for children."

*The Guardian* agreed: "A richly textured first novel given lift-off by an inventive wit."

*Turned the tide of children's literature.* —Cheryl Phillips



### 4 The Giver by Lois Lowry (1993)

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN • GRADE LEVEL: 6–8

#### BIRD'S WORDS

The publisher's description: "December is the time of the annual Ceremony at which each twelve-year-old receives a life assignment determined by the Elders. Jonas watches his friend Fiona named Caretaker of the Old and his cheerful pal Asher labeled the Assistant Director of Recreation. But Jonas has been chosen for something special. When his selection leads him to an unnamed man—the man called only the Giver—he begins to sense the dark secrets that underlie the fragile perfection of his world."

As per usual, we turn to good old *100 Best Books for Children* by Anita Silvey for the skinny on this title. It was Lowry's 21st novel, you know. The book was inspired by both the old and the young. On the one hand, Lowry was visiting her parents in a nursing home. Her mother had retained her memory but lost her sight. Her father could see but was losing his memory. This became coupled

*It's likely that Lois Lowry's 1994 Newbery Medal winner has introduced more readers to dystopian fiction than any other book. Covering themes of mortality and religion, it's also a regular on the most challenged list. One thing is for sure: you'll never forget it.*  
—Travis Jonker

with a comment from Lowry's grandson while on a Swan Boat ride in the Boston Public Garden. "Have you ever noticed that when people think they are manipulating ducks, actually ducks are manipulat-



My 7th grade teacher, Mrs. Morgan, read this aloud to us. My best friend and I checked a copy out of the library, and on a sleepover, shared it until we finished it—because we could not wait.  
—Jessalynn Gale

VOTED AND QUOTED



#### 44. Okay for Now

by Gary D. Schmidt (2010)

#### 45. Island of the Blue Dolphins

by Scott O'Dell (1960)

#### 46. The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle

by Avi (1990)

#### 47. Little Women

by Louisa May Alcott (1868)

#### 48. The Bad Beginning

by Lemony Snicket (1999)

#### 49. My Father's Dragon

by Ruth Stiles Gannett (1948)

#### 50. Number the Stars

by Lois Lowry (1989)

#### 51. The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, A Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread

by Kate DiCamillo (2003)

#### 52. Betsy-Tacy

by Maud Hart Lovelace (1940)

#### 53. The Graveyard Book

by Neil Gaiman (2008)

## 4 The Giver [continued]

I think I might have a little bit of a Lois Lowry addiction. I had such a strong need to read *The Giver* while I was abroad in the Middle East that I wept with joy when I happened to find a copy of it in a used bookstore in Damascus.

—Dana Chidiac

stand here tonight and reveal the 'true' ending, the 'right' interpretation of the ending, will be disappointed. There isn't one." Ambiguity has since gone out the window, because the sequels *Gathering Blue*, *Messenger* and *Son* (out in fall 2012) reveal Jonas wandering about.

It gets challenged in libraries and schools on a regular basis, unfortunately. I was a little shocked by the *USA Today* headline, "Suicide book challenged in schools." Excuse me, whaaa? Apparently folks think that the book is "dangerous because of its portrayal of suicide, euthanasia, and infanticide in a neutral to positive light." They haven't read it.

The shiny little Newbery Award it won in 1994 was Lowry's second.

Best first sentence: "It was almost December, and Jonas was beginning to be frightened."

*Blew my little mind.* —Miriam Newman

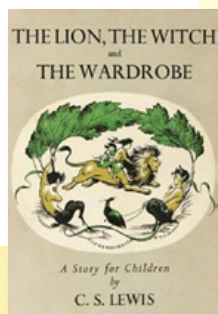
*The original dystopian.* —Jennifer Padgett

ing people?" These seemingly disparate thoughts gave us the book we have today.

It was a big-time hit from the start, and the first middle-grade dystopian novel to get any attention since the early 1980s. For a while there, folks were convinced that the ending of the book was ambiguous. Does Jonas live? Does he die? In her 1994 Newbery acceptance speech, Ms. Lowry said, "Those of you who hoped that I would

*One of the cooler things about getting old is when you meet adults younger than you who, for instance, may have read an amazing book you first read when you were 18 but THEY read at that perfect book age, when they were 10 or 11, and it is for them what YOUR #1 is for you, and it's like, WHOA. Awesome. I loved it enough when I was 18.*

—Amy M. Weir



## 5 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

by C.S. Lewis  
(1950)

MACMILLAN • GRADE LEVEL: 4–6

### VOTED AND QUOTED

*I remember at my vast old age in 7th grade sadly concluding that I was too old for the Narnia books now. (I had already read them many times.) Then I took them up again in college and found new riches. I know I will never "outgrow" them again. No kid who reads this book will ever look at a closet door the same way again.* —Sondra Eklund

### BIRD'S WORDS

The synopsis from the publisher reads, "When Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are sent to stay with a kind professor who lives in the country, they can hardly imagine the extraordinary adventure that awaits them. It all begins one rainy summer day when the children explore the Professor's rambling old house. When they come across a room with an old wardrobe in the corner,







54. [Half Magic](#)  
by Edward Eager (1954)
55. [All-of-a-Kind Family](#)  
by Sydney Taylor (1951)
56. [A Little Princess](#)  
by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1905)
57. [The Wolves of Willoughby Chase](#)  
by Joan Aiken (1962)
58. [Swallows and Amazons](#)  
by Arthur Ransome (1930)
59. [The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane](#)  
by Kate DiCamillo (2006)
60. [Bud, Not Buddy](#)  
by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999)
61. [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory](#)  
by Roald Dahl (1964)
62. [Clementine](#)  
by Sara Pennypacker (2006)
63. [The Great Gilly Hopkins](#)  
by Katherine Paterson (1978)
64. [The Twenty-One Balloons](#)  
by William Pene du Bois (1947)

## 5 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe [continued]

I remember a sense of magic while reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* as a child. And I'm not referring to the magic contained in the storyline, but rather the giddy awe of falling into the story. It was thrilling. It's a very specific emotion, one I don't think we have a word for, and one I don't think I've ever felt as an adult — but it's an emotion that I remember perfectly. The characters and worlds seemed so alive. I think it's one of the few times I really felt transported to another place through the pages of a book. And being the *Chronicles of Narnia*, that's rather fitting. —Aaron Zenz



Lucy immediately opens the door and gets inside. To her amazement, she suddenly finds herself standing in the clearing of a wood on a winter afternoon, with snowflakes falling through the air. Lucy has found Narnia, a magical land of Fauns and Centaurs, Nymphs and Talking Animals—and the beautiful but evil White Witch, who has held the country in eternal winter for a hundred years.”

According to *100 Best Books for Children* by Anita Silvey (do you own your copy yet?), when Lewis was 16, he envisioned a faun carrying an umbrella in a wood full of snow. “Then nine years later, a lion leapt into a story, and Lewis began working on a book entitled “The Lion.” I was unaware that he was only 25 when he began the tale. He'd be fifty-two by the time it published. That's what we call in the business a gestation period. He did show an early manuscript to one Roger Lancelyn Green, though, and Green helped him get his manuscript up to snuff. The book was originally meant to stand alone, which is part of the reason it bugs me when publishers release the books in the order of what happens in the series rather than the order of when the books were written.

*I still remember the day I finished this book, laying on my parent's family room couch on a bright, sunny summer day. I would have been playing outside in the sprinkler had I been able to put it down. Instead I was SOBBING on the couch as Aslan died. I finished it and read it again. And again. I don't always think the oldest, most classic version of a tale is the one that kids should keep reading. If someone else comes along and does the tale better, by all means, let's read that one... but has anyone done this better?*

—Nicole Johnston Wroblewski

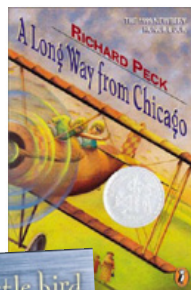


Of course, he was buds with J.R.R. Tolkien who wasn't a fan of the series. Considering Tolkien was a fellow who spent ages constructing a history and a bloody language for his fantastical world, he found the whole Narnia thing a bit slapdash.

The first series I read to myself, starting halfway through when I switched from listening to my mom read them aloud, to sneaking them off to my room to read ahead. I was convinced that someday I would meet the Pevensies and tell them that I knew about Narnia, too. Sadly, Turkish Delight did not live up to my expectations.

—Jessalynn Gale

Now if you walk into the book as a kid and aren't aware that you're facing a great big gigantic Christian allegory, you probably won't notice it anyway. For adults, it's incredibly obvious. Still, as Anita Silvey says, “The books have endured not because of their philosophy, but because they bring to life a magical world that readers want to enter again and again.”



65. [Wonder](#)

by R.J. Palacio (2012)

66. [The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate](#)

by Jacqueline Kelly (2009)

67. [A Long Way from Chicago](#)

by Richard Peck (1998)

68. [The High King](#)

by Lloyd Alexander (1968)

69. [The Ruins of Gorlan](#)

by John Flanagan (2006)

70. [Walk Two Moons](#)

by Sharon Creech (1994)

71. [Each Little Bird That Sings](#)

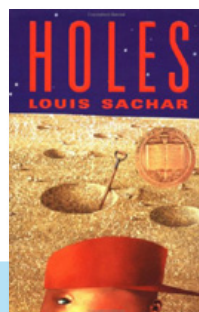
by Deborah Wiles (2005)

72. [Where the Mountain Meets the Moon](#)

by Grace Lin (2009)

73. [The Best Christmas Pageant Ever](#)

by Barbara Robinson (1972)



6 **Holes**

by Louis Sachar  
(1998)

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX • GRADE LEVEL: 6–8

VOTED AND QUOTED

*We're all friends here, so I won't mince words—Louis Sachar's 1999 Newbery winner is the closest thing to a perfect book I've ever read. With a cast of intriguing characters tied together by an enticing mystery, this is children's literature at its finest.* —Travis Jonker

BIRD'S WORDS

"Perfect." Perfectly crafted, perfect combination of literary excellence and popularity, perfect perfect perfect. I cannot help but agree. *Holes* is also the book that makes me hungry for onions.

The publisher's synopsis: "As further evidence of his family's bad fortune, which they attribute to a curse on a distant relative, Stanley Yelnats is sent to a hellish boys' juvenile detention center in the Texas desert. As punishment, the boys here must each dig a hole every day, five feet deep and five feet across. Ultimately, Stanley 'digs up the truth'—and through his experience, finds his first real friend, a treasure, and a new sense of himself. . . . a wildly inventive, darkly humorous tale of crime and punishment—and redemption."

*Perfect  
in every way.*  
—Aaron Zenz

Sachar explained one inspiration for the book to Leonard Marcus in *Funny Business: Conversations with Writers of Comedy*. Said former Fuller Brush man Sachar, "when I start a book . . . I just try to find something that intrigues me enough to write about it for at least a week. With *Holes* I began with the camp. . . . I had recently moved from San Francisco to Texas, where it's so hot in summer and summer lasts forever. I was writing about the heat. Lake Travis is not too far from Austin, and I imagined it being so hot that Lake Travis dried up . . . I got the idea for a juvenile correction camp before I had any characters." Misery breeds creativity. Love it.

*This book is possibly the most brilliant book ever written. I have tried to read it in hope of learning some tricks about plotting, but instead I just despair that crafting something so brilliant could never, ever be done. It's just PERFECT.*  
—Amy M. Weir

I read and loved many a Sachar book as a child, and was surprised to learn that he was still writing when this came out. What I found was something that I never would have expected from the writer of *A Boy in the Girl's Bathroom*. A book that pays so much respect to its readers by allowing for multiple levels of complexity, thematically and formally, that I was tempted to believe that it was too tough for younger readers until I saw the response it got from kids. Just a masterful book on every level. —Mark Flowers

On his website, Sachar says: "The hard part was laying out the strands throughout the story, telling the story of Kate Barlow and of Elya Yelnats and Elya's son, without it getting in the way of Stanley's story. The other problem I had occurred when Stanley was digging his hole for the first time. I wanted the reader to feel what a long, miserable experience this is, digging those five by five holes. But how many times can you say, 'He dug his shovel back into the dirt and lifted out another shovelful?' My solution was to interweave two stories, bringing more variety to the tale. Stanley's anxious first days at Camp Green Lake are set off against the story of his ancestor, Elya Yelnats."

*Holes* won a Newbery Medal, a National Book Award, and Globe-Horn Book Award. This almost never happens, and when it does, it must be for a pretty remarkable book.





74. [Are You There, God?  
It's Me, Margaret](#)  
by Judy Blume (1970)

75. [The Saturdays](#)  
by Elizabeth Enright (1941)

76. [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#)  
by Jeff Kinney (2007)

77. [My Side of the Mountain](#)  
by Jean Craighead George (1959)

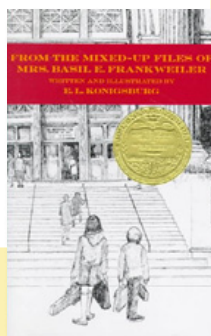
78. [Ballet Shoes](#)  
by Noel Streatfeild (1936)

79. [The Egypt Game](#)  
by Zilpha Keatley Snyder (1985)

80. [The Four-Story Mistake](#)  
by Elizabeth Enright (1942)

81. [The Witches](#)  
by Roald Dahl (1983)

82. [The Cricket in Times Square](#)  
by George Selden (1960)



**7** From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler  
by E. L. Konigsburg  
(1967)

PUBLISHER? • GRADE LEVEL: 3–7

## VOTED AND QUOTED

*The reason I wanted to move to New York City, and did! Every time I visit the Met, I think of this book.* —DeAnn Okamura

## BIRD'S WORDS

The synopsis from the book itself reads, “Claudia knew that she could never pull off the old-fashioned kind of running away . . . so she decided to run not from somewhere but to somewhere—somewhere large, warm, comfortable, and beautiful. And that was how Claudia and her brother, Jamie, ended up living in the Metropolitan Museum of Art—and right in the middle of a mystery that made headlines.”

Origins: According to Perry Nodelman in *American Writers for Children Since 1960: Fiction*, “Konigsburg has said the book originated at a family picnic in Yellowstone National Park, during which her children complained about everything they could think of: ‘I realized that if my children ever left home, they would never revert to barbarism. They would carry with them all the fussiness and tidiness of suburban life. Where could they go...? Maybe they could find some way to live with caution and compulsiveness and still satisfy their need for adventure.’” I love that quote. It sort of allows the entire book to make sense to me. The characters of Claudia and Jamie were also based on Konigsburg’s own kids.

Personally, I was very pleased indeed to read the book and find that the library Claudia visited when she and Jamie needed to do some research was the then-new Donnell Library on 53rd between 5th and 6th Avenue. I used to work there. At the time the book came out, New York Public Library’s

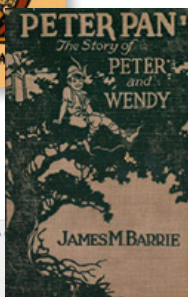
Central Children’s Room had not yet moved to that location (they would do so in 1970). Now the library is gone, but it lives on in Claudia’s research.

*I read it and read it and read it and never get bored. How could I? It has bathing in a fountain, rich people’s wishes and poor people’s wishes, a violin case full of clothes, a nerdy rebel, and macaroni and cheese.* —Miriam Newman

The book won a Newbery Award in 1968, beating out *The Black Pearl* by Scott O’Dell, *The Fearsome Inn* by Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Egypt Game* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder and (amazingly enough) fellow E.L. Konigsburg title (and her first novel) *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth*. That was a good year for her. Indeed, *Frankweiler* was published just a few months after *Jennifer*. Nodelman says, “The Newbery list has not included two books by the same author before or since.”

*A brother and sister run away to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Is it plausible? Dude, you’re missing the point. For kids, this 1968 Newbery Medal winner is escapist fiction at its best.* —Travis Jonker

I listened to this book on audiobook cassette every night for weeks in the fourth grade. I was too shy to run away to a museum, so I lived vicariously through Claudia and Jamie. Add in an art mystery? I was obsessed! This was also the first I learned the sad truth about movie adaptations. The made-for-TV movie came out a few years after I read the book and it failed miserably to meet my 13-year-old expectations. I cried so much after the movie aired and consoled myself in the book once again because the novel was of course much better. —Sarah (“Green Bean Teen Queen”)


83. [Ozma of Oz](#)

by Frank L. Baum (1907)

84. [The Long Winter](#)

by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1940)

85. [Ella Enchanted](#)

by Gail Carson Levine (1997)

86. [Peter Pan](#)

by J.M. Barrie (1911)

87. [The Strange Case of Origami Yoda](#)

by Tom Angleberger (2010)

88. [The BFG](#)

by Roald Dahl (1982)

89. [The Mouse and the Motorcycle](#)

by Beverly Cleary (1967)

90. [The Children of Green Knowe](#)

by L.M. Boston (1954)

91. [Pippi Longstocking](#)

by Astrid Lindgren (1950)

92. [Flipped](#)

by Wendelin Van Draanen (2001)

8

## Anne of Green Gables

by L.M. Montgomery  
(1908)

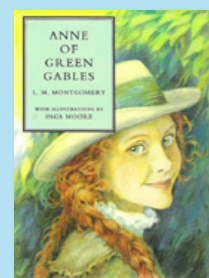
L.C. PAGE AND COMPANY • GRADE LEVEL: 6–8

### VOTED AND QUOTED

*This is my “Choose one book to have with you on a desert island” book, even above a Harry Potter novel. The Anne series is the first series I fell passionately in love with, and it starts with this book. After becoming acquainted with Anne, I immediately began to divide the world into ‘kindreds’ and ‘non-kindreds’ and started looking for my Gilbert Blythe. (Forget Mr. Darcy! Give me Gilbert any day.)* —The Sauls Family

### BIRD’S WORDS

L.M. Montgomery, to my mind, single-handedly destroys the notion that authors give themselves initials instead of using their first names to throw off potential male readers who wouldn’t want a book penned by a woman. Is there any book in this world girlier than *Anne of Green Gables*? Or, for that matter, any other of Ms. Montgomery’s works? Be that as it may, ‘tis a fine novel for both the boy and girl set. Aside from *Pippi Longstocking*, there’s no other literary redhead of quite the same tomboyish aspects as our Anne.



I don’t know how many turns of phrase I’ve picked up from Anne — “kindred spirits” I still use frequently. I always wanted to BE Anne, and used to wish for a bosom friend whom I referred to as “my Diana Barry.” When I finally found her, it turned out I was Diana Barry, because my best friend was definitely more Anne. But that works for me, too. —Amy M. Weir

How it came to be: In *100 Best Books for Children* we learn that when Ms. Montgomery began writing the book, she “first intended the story to be a mere seven chapters long, ideal for a serial treatment in a Sunday school paper.” That plan quickly fell by the wayside, and so she submitted it to several publishers. It was rejected multiple times, and according to *What Katy Read*, after she got four rejections in a row, “Montgomery put the manuscript in an old hat-box, intending at some later date to cut it back to its original proportions. But she changed her mind when she rediscovered the forgotten work in the winter of 1906, and decided

to try it out once more.” So it reached L.C. Page and Company. They offered her “either an outright fee of \$500 or a royalty of nine cents a book.” Thank the heavens above she went with the royalty. Her first royalty check—\$1,730. The book was an instant hit.

Obviously the publisher wanted sequels and she obliged, though she would say that the “freshness of the idea was gone.” Seven books would follow, but they never quite lived up to the first. There was also a recent prequel: In conjunction with Anne’s 100th birthday, Budge Wilson wrote *Before Green Gables*, which met with mixed reviews.

Book #1 remains hugely beloved. Indeed, in December 2009 a first edition of this book sold at auction for \$37,500. This smashed the previous vintage children’s novel record of \$24,000. Sotheby’s also auctioned off the book in 2005, but that sale was marred slightly by the fact that they referred to the title as “a beloved *American* children’s book.” One must assume that the Canadians were NOT pleased.

Anne took this skinny, awkward, mousy-haired suburban lass from the age of bell bottoms and sunset-print polyester shirts and dropped her into a world of Victorian charm. A world of puffed sleeves, bosom friends, strolls down wooded lanes, and unbridled imagination. I must have reread Gilbert rescuing Anne from under the bridge a million times. Oh, the transforming power of literature on a young romantic soul. Anne, how I dreamed of being you. —DaNae Leu



93. [Journey to the River Sea](#)  
by Eva Ibbotson (2001)

94. [Ramona and her Father](#)  
by Beverly Cleary (1977)

95. [The Little Prince](#)  
by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943)

96. [The Horse and His Boy](#)  
by C.S. Lewis (1954)

97. [The Diamond in the Window](#)  
by Jane Langton (1962)

98. [Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire](#)  
by J.K. Rowling (2000)

99. [The Boxcar Children](#)  
by Gertrude Chandler Warner (1942)

100. [Love That Dog](#)  
by Sharon Creech (2001)

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9

**The Westing Game**  
by Ellen Raskin  
(1978)

E. P. DUTTON • GRADE LEVEL: 6–8

## VOTED AND QUOTED

*It seems smarter and funnier, and altogether more perfect every time I reread it.* —Jenne Abramowitz

## BIRD'S WORDS

I was once at a Books of Wonder Christmas party when Peter Glassman started popping some children's literature trivia at me, including a question that just baffled me. "What is the only Newbery-winning jacket illustrated by someone who would later go on to win their own Newbery?" I was stumped. The answer? Ellen Raskin illustrated the original cover for Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, and would go on to win a Newbery for *The Westing Game*.

The plot description from the book reads, "Sixteen people were invited to the reading of the very strange will of the very rich Samuel W. Westing. They could become millionaires, depending on how they played the game. The not-quite-perfect heirs were paired, and each pair was given \$10,000 and a set of clues (no two sets of clues were alike). All they had to do was find the answer, but the answer to what? The Westing game was tricky and dangerous, but the heirs played on, through blizzards and burglaries and bombs bursting in the air. And one of them won!" Oddly cheery recap, that.

My favorite of all Newbery Award winners, this is always the first book I hand to kids who asks for a mystery, and sometimes even if they don't ask for a mystery. I remember my brain hurting while I read it when I was young, and upon rereading it as an adult, found the mystery to be just as compelling and twisty as I remembered.

—Mark Flowers

Simply stated the best book ever. It stands the test of time, and I give it to kids every year. Turtle, while incredibly unlikeable, is lovable just the same, and the quirky characters have just the right amount of strange. Raskin also managed to do the "what-happened-in-the-future" part of it right (unlike some awful epilogues of late). I do wish that David Lynch would make this into a movie. —Stacy Dillon

If Raskin was any character in the book, it's easy to guess which one. *American Writers for Children Since 1960: Fiction* put it this way: "Raskin was certainly Turtle Wexler, and *The Westing Game* as a tribute to capitalism is not surprising because she was a capitalist herself. She maintained a portfolio of stocks and played the market successfully. She was very proud that she was once asked to manage a mutual fund but felt it would take too much time." I bet. There is no other American children's novel out there that has so effectively gotten kids interested in the stock market.

Sadly, *The Westing Game* would be the last children's novel Raskin would ever write. She died in 1984 at the age of 56.

In terms of the Newbery itself, it won the Award proper in 1979, beating out only one Honor Book, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (#63 on this list) by Katherine Paterson.

Re-read this many times. —Marianne Minnich

Oh, Ellen, why did you die so young? —Susan Van Metre



# SLJ's Top 100

CHILDREN'S NOVELS

A Fuse #8 Production

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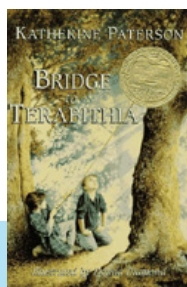
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# 10

## Bridge to Terabithia

by Katherine Paterson

(1977)

HARPERCOLLINS • GRADE LEVEL: 4–7

## VOTED AND QUOTED

*Unforgettable, this book is often a child's first real book dealing with loss and mourning.* —DeAnn Okamura

The teacher read this book to our class. I still remember that punch-in-the-stomach shock and trying-not-to-cry throat ache I felt when she read the ending. I never knew before *Bridge to Terabithia* that a story could make you care so much about people who don't actually exist. —*Bigfoot Reads*

## BIRD'S WORDS

Our former National Ambassador of Young People's Literature appears yet again on this list, and her *Terabithia* (which didn't crack the Top Ten last time) sits proudly here.

The publisher's synopsis: "All summer, Jess pushed himself to be the fastest boy in the fifth grade, and when the year's first school-yard race was run, he was going to win. But his victory was stolen by a newcomer, by a girl. . . . unexpectedly, Jess finds himself sticking up for Leslie, for the girl who breaks rules and wins races. The friendship between the two grows as Jess guides the city girl through the pitfalls of life in their small, rural town, and Leslie draws him into the world of magic and ceremony called Terabithia. Here, Leslie and Jess rule supreme among the oaks and evergreens, safe from the bullies and ridicule of the mundane world. Safe until an unforeseen tragedy forces Jess to reign in Terabithia alone, and both worlds are forever changed."

Aside from *Charlotte's Web*, this is THE death book for children. Charlotte at least telegraphs that she's going to be going. Leslie, in contrast, just disappears. Hers is a shockingly realistic death.

How did the novel come about? According to *Children's Literature Review*, during the 1970s, Paterson's young son David lost a friend who was tragically struck by lightning.

Still  
cry every time.  
—Terry Herblin

While attending the annual meeting of the Children's Book Guild of Washington, Paterson recounted her son's recent loss to the attendees, and Dutton Publishing children's editor Anne Durrell suggested that the incident could be the basis for a novel. Durrell also said to Paterson at the time, "Of course, the child can't die by lightning. No editor would ever believe that." True.

As Paterson later said in her Newbery acceptance speech, her son went through "all the classical stages of grief, inventing a few the experts have yet to catalogue."

The book gets banned with frightening frequency. Karen Hirsch's *Censored Books II: Critical Viewpoints*,

1985–2000 notes that objectionable factors include "profanity" and "vulgar language," plus concern that "the book would 'give students negative views of life,' 'make reference to witchcraft,' show 'disrespect of adults,' and promote an 'elaborate fantasy world that they felt might lead to confusion.'"

It won the 1978 Newbery Medal, beating out *Ramona and Her Father* and the long-forgotten *Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey* by Jamake Highwater (prove me wrong).

*I don't even know how to review this book. It's amazing and heartbreaking and wonderful.* —Kristi Hazelrigg

**About:** The Top 100 Children's Novels list (there is also a list for picture books) is a readers' poll conducted by Elizabeth Bird on her blog, Fuse #8 at *School Library Journal* ([www.slj.com](http://www.slj.com)).