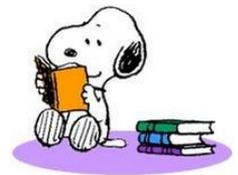




# RGS: Bonkers About Books!

January 2026



Hi,

Happy new year and welcome to the National Year of Reading! By now, you will have seen my email and video about our plans for the year, and I hope you've made your family pledge and have it pinned on the fridge to remind you (thank-you to everyone who has sent pictures of theirs in; please keep sending them! As January's theme is **New Year, Try Something New**, I've included books in this edition that I think will appeal to those who need a change and some that appear on the recommendation sheets (you've had these sent to you but I thought it might be useful to also share them again here. What would you add to the list?

Mrs Wall

**Y3/4, if you like...**

**Try...**

**Y5/6, if you like...**

**Try...**

**If you like...**

**Try...**

**If you like...**

**Try...**

## Finn's Epic Fails - Phil Earle

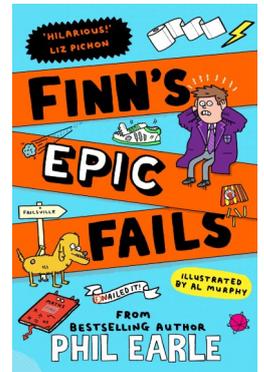
Finn is eleven and is trying desperately to navigate life without too much embarrassment; however, he doesn't factor in his siblings, his lycra-loving father, school and his teachers into this equation. With only his friends Google and Laszlo for support, can Finn successfully navigate Year 7 without too many epic fails?

Phil Earle is a master when it comes to writing gripping war-based novels and his books are hugely popular in school (as well as with me!). **Finn's Epic Fails** is a very different genre but definitely shows Phil's diversity as a writer. From the start, the book is laugh out loud funny (that first scene in the school swimming pool had me howling!) and the laughs just keep coming.

The fail-o-meter at the start of each chapter gives you a hint as to how disastrous the event is going to be for Finn who is a brilliant character that readers will be able to relate to. As the middle child, he is battling a younger and an elder sibling, both with their own unique ways to torment him. Elder brother Jonah seems to love himself as much as he hates Finn, and will do anything to make life miserable for him (sharing a room together just adds to Finn's misery!). Younger sister Maisie seems to like Finn ... but loves unicorns far more and will do anything to make her life more unicornified (clearly not a real word but it seems to fit!). Then you add in Finn's dad whose love of cycling since the divorce has led to a worrying obsession with lycra ... poor Finn doesn't stand a chance!

This is a chatty, first person novel that is a whole heap of entertaining. Phil's observations on school life had me giggling away to myself ... I just hope they don't give any of the students at my school any ideas!

With a diary-style font and illustrations by Al Murphy which perfectly compliment the plot, **Finn's Epic Fails** is a book that is going to be hugely popular. Publishing 29th January, it's going to be the perfect pick-me-up for those January blues when the weather is grey and miserable. The start of a new series, I'm already excited to see what's in store next for Finn.



## Avalanche - Simon Fox

Tom is spending the holidays at a luxury ski chalet whilst his mum is working security for Eric, the head of a biotech firm. Spending his days learning to ski isn't as fun as he thought it might be and he longs to be home. However, things take a dramatic turn when hijackers turn up determined to get their hands on technology Eric has been developing. When the hijackers trigger an avalanche, the chalet and everybody in it become cut-off from the rest of the world and any chance of getting help. The only chance they have is the fact that the hijackers are unaware of Tom's presence so it's up to him to save the day.

Simon Fox's previous books (you can read my reviews here: [Running Out Of Time](#); [Dead Lock](#)) are both popular in school and when I began reading *Avalanche*, there was a lot of interest from children, and who can blame them?

**Avalanche** starts with a very fed up Tom: he is away from home and his friends; he's at ski school but isn't enjoying it and he feels it's going to be a long holiday. His mum's job means that she doesn't want to leave her post so Tom has no choice but to get to know Eric's daughter Emily who is far from friendly. The two are just returning to the chalet when the hijackers descend. Their gunshots are what trigger the avalanche which causes utter chaos and so begins an incredible roller-coaster of an adrenaline rush as Tom and Emily fight, first to save themselves and then to save their parents. As you would imagine, Tom and Emily face dangers at every turn, but they also need to learn to get along with each other, as well as navigating Emily's type 1 diabetes which adds an extra level. The chalet setting and the fact that the avalanche has cut them off, adds to the tension and creates a real sense of claustrophobia (more so when Tom and Emily are trapped under the snow).

Showing the lengths people will go to for both good and bad, **Avalanche** shows us that friendship can form at any time. With danger at every turn, this is a book that will get your heart racing and you won't want to put it down.



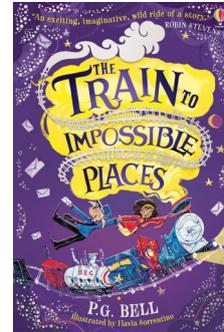
## Daily Reads.

Every afternoon, following registration, each class listens to a daily read. As well as listening to the book, it gives everyone time to practise mono-tasking as well as using our reading skills to answer questions about the book. It's an important part of the day as it brings the class together, allows everyone the time to relax and helps practise key skills.

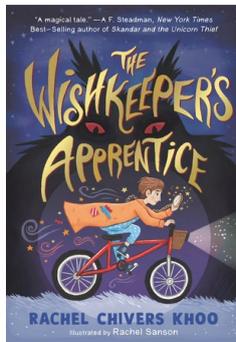
3D



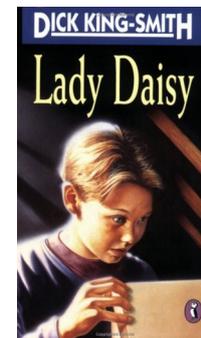
3T & 3W



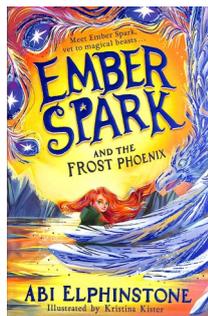
4AW & 4LW



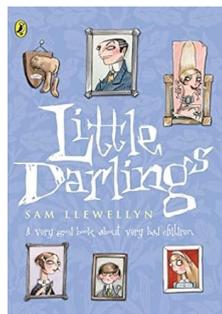
4MH



5B



5C



5M



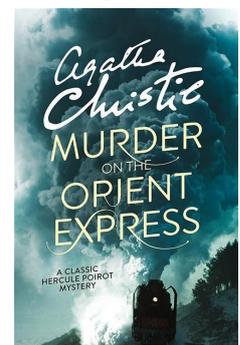
6B



6L

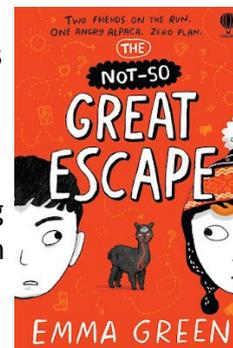


6W



## The Not-So Great Escape - Emma Green

Things have been tricky for Hedley since the accident that killed his mum: his dad's legs 'no longer work' so he spends his days in bed. As a result, Hedley spends weekends at Bridlebank Therapy Centre where he shares a room with Aiden who seems intent on bullying him. Hedley prefers to play things safe all the time whereas Aiden is happy to take risks. So what happens when the pair are sent to help out at Farmer Bert's Petting Farm? A stolen alpaca, an accidental robbery and a night on the run is what. But when the unlikely group become an internet sensation, can the adventure help Hedley learn that playing it safe isn't always best?



Hedley hates taking risks and spends his life calculating the the risk of everything he does. His life has changed immeasurably since the accident and this is clearly what drives what he does. He is protective of two things: his sister and the hat his mum gave him; not that his room mate Aiden respects that. Aiden clearly has his own issues and his father's ever changing occupations, when he talks about him, hints as to why Aiden is the way he is. Although the boys appear very different, it is clear as the book progresses that they need each other. Aiden is the mastermind behind the alpaca heist and his unique take on everything is humorous to read.

**The Not-So Great Escape** is full of laughs and capers as the mad-capped adventure unfolds whilst Aiden, Hedley and his sister Lilly help to return an alpaca to the home they believe it should be in. Along the way, quite by accident, the mis-matched group become famous and the media updates at the ends of chapters creates a unique update.

The book is huge amounts of fun and the plot is fast-paced but, woven into that are some strong, important messages for readers, with an ending that I really didn't see coming (it stopped me in my tracks and I was grateful I wasn't reading it in public... yes, I did cry!). Perfect for fans of Jenny Pearson, **The Not-So Great Escape** is a story about finding yourself, friendship and learning to move on.

## My Name Is Sunshine Simpson - G. M. Linton

Sunshine Simpson lives with her parents, her twin siblings and her grandad. At school, she has been helping new girl, Evie, to settle in, however, the more she gets to know Evie, the more she feels that she is being unkind to her. Evie seems to be better at everything and Sunshine's confidence is wavering. Then, when their teacher announces that every class in school will be doing an assembly to celebrate the Golden Jubilee and the theme for their class is 'And this is why x is important to me', Sunshine really begins to worry as she feels she needs to outdo Evie. She turns to her grandad for help: he's the life and soul of everything and known to all; he's the ox-man who loves life and lives it to the full, but even he isn't his usual self, and Sunshine doesn't know what's happening or why there seems to be lots of 'big people business' going on without her. The closer they get to the assembly, the more Sunshine seems to be suffering from 'lost-voice-itis', but can she recover it in time?



Sunshine is a wonderful character who is most definitely not perfect. She is doing her best to be a good friend, a good daughter and grand-daughter and to find her way in the world, but things just don't seem to be making sense to her at the minute and her confidence is being well and truly knocked. I can imagine that there will be so many children who will be able to relate to Sunshine and I love that she doesn't quite get things right and that she feels a little lost. Friendships can often be tricky and this book highlights that in the best way: you just never know what's going on at home, and Sunshine's trying to cope with the changes she sees in her grandad as well as everything that is going on at school. At so many points in the book, I wanted to reach into the pages and give her a hug ... especially after she'd picked up the scissors!

With themes of friendship, family, heritage and grief all woven beautifully into the story, **My Name Is Sunshine Simpson**, is a book that will make you shed a tear or two but will leave you with a warm glow in your heart. It reminds readers that it's ok not to have all the answers, that friendship can be tricky at times but it's worth working for; it shows us that we all make mistakes and it shows us that being ourselves and being proud of that is something we should all be striving for.

**My Name Is Sunshine Simpson** features on January's National Year of Reading Recommendation sheets.



Reduces Stress and Promotes Relaxation

ABC



Boosts Your Brain Power



Improves Concentration and Focus



Enhances Vocabulary and Writing Skills

10

Boosts Mental Stimulation and Cognitive Function

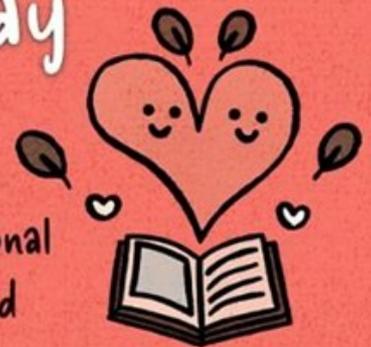


# Unexpected Benefits of Reading Every Day



Expands Your Knowledge

Improves Emotional Intelligence and Empathy



Strengthens Imagination and Creativity

Helps with Goal Achievement



Improves Sleep



Read More On [HAVENREAD.BLOG](http://HAVENREAD.BLOG)

This edition of Bonkers About Books was proof-read by:

Agastya, Mila & Arya



## Libby And The Parisian Puzzle - Jo Clarke

Libby's mum is heading to Ecuador for work and, for the first time, she is going alone so Libby is being sent to Paris to stay with her Aunt Agatha at the school she runs. Travelling by train, Libby knows that her Aunt will be meeting her at the Gare du Nord, however, when she arrives, she is nowhere to be seen; fortunately, the lady in the carriage with her turns out to be Miss Browne who is due to start at the school as a teacher. The pair share a taxi and life at the boarding school begins. Daily life comprises trips to the major landmarks as well as projects and art activities. However, following one of these excursions, her aunt is arrested on suspicion of stealing a valuable jewelled brooch and it's up to Libby and her new roommate, Connie, to discover the truth of the theft before it's too late.



Set in Paris, **Libby and the Parisian Puzzle** did not disappoint when it came to leading me around one of my favourite cities! From a trip on a baton mouche to a day at Le Louvre, I felt as if I was wandering around the city with Libby and Connie. And oh, the food! Jo certainly knows how to make your mouth water! With frequent descriptions of hot chocolate, pastries and macarons, I can guarantee you will be craving a sugar fix at several points during the book (you may want to stock up before you start reading!). I love Paris and have been trying to head back for some time but, after reading this, I feel like I've had a fix to keep me going until I can head back in person.

Libby is a wonderful character and you get to know her from the very first page. Naturally curious and delightfully chatty, she loves a mystery and is hooked on her Isobel Investigates books. She's nervous about being separated from her mum but loves the idea of being in Paris with her aunt (who wouldn't be excited about being at a boarding school in Paris where you spend your days exploring the city?!) and settles into the school quickly. This is undoubtedly helped by the arrival of her roommate, Connie, who appears nervous when we first meet her and has clearly been sent to the school in order to become more ladylike. Fortunately, Connie has other ideas and she and Libby become firm friends who are united in their quest to get to the bottom of the jewellery theft.

I should also mention the school: Mousedale's Travelling School. Imagine being part of a school where you move to a different place every term? Their time in Paris is spent visiting the major landmarks and experiencing life in the most beautiful city - every day would be an adventure. Different for Libby as she has never been to school but also nowhere near the same as school-life as we know it, I can only imagine how many readers will long to enrol at Mousedale's as they read the book, and I'm already excited to know where they will be next term!

I have known Jo through Twitter for some time so when I discovered that she was writing a book, I was incredibly excited. To have been able to read an early NetGalley copy has been a privilege and an absolute thrill, and **Libby and the Parisian Puzzle** most definitely did not disappoint! It's a perfect blend of mystery and adventure, combined with a great feast of French delicacies and lashings of hot chocolate! Perfect for fans of Murder Most Unladylike, this is a series that is going to be a huge hit with readers and I can't wait to share it in school.

**Libby And The Parisian Puzzle features on January's National Year of Reading Recommendation sheets.**

## Parent Prompts.

### Questions to ask whilst listening to your child read:

- What do the words ..... and ..... suggest about the character, setting and mood?
- What impression do you get of ... from this paragraph/chapter?
- Who is telling the story?

