

Your guide to Spark Reading



Welcome to Spark Reading

A hand-picked collection of books and expert-created shared reading resources. We have specially created this pack to help you support your Key Stage 3 students to read regularly and build their reading enjoyment.



Your pack includes:

This **guide** with tips on using the programme and introductions to the 15 titles.

Five group reading guides with discussion points and activity ideas for group reading.

40 books comprising of five group reading sets, five read-aloud titles and five titles ideal for shared or independent reading.

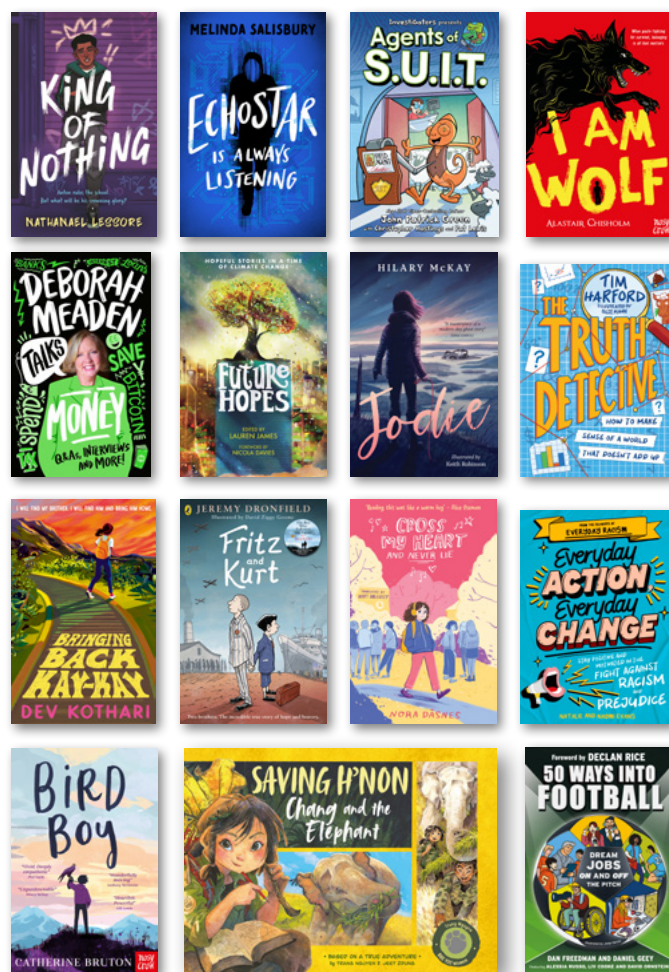
Three posters for making eye-catching displays in your classroom or school library.

Read on to discover how to spark a love of reading in your Key Stage 3 students.

Spark Reading books are selected by BookTrust with an independent panel of experts consisting of teachers and school librarians, all of whom have lots of experience, knowledge and passion for getting children reading.

The 15 titles, including novels, novellas, short stories, non-fiction and graphic novels, have been chosen to offer an exciting range of different reading experiences with a mixture of genres, characters, writing styles and formats.

Every book features high-quality writing and storytelling, and has been selected for its ability to engage and appeal to young people, and to support and inspire them wherever they are on their reading journey.



Using Spark Reading at your school

The Spark Reading books can be used in numerous ways to support Key Stage 3 students to read regularly and build their reading enjoyment. A Head of English in a school in South West England shares four ideas for fostering a whole-school reading culture.

Using non-fiction

"We run 'non-fiction Friday' where we have a whole lesson dedicated to book talk and sharing non-fiction books together, which is great for getting students engaged."

Spark Reading includes five engaging non-fiction titles. They are perfect for sharing and packed with facts and true stories.

Read with a friend

"We're building the community aspect of reading with things like 'read with a friend' displays, offering duplicate copies of a book that's really accessible, so two students can read it together and discuss."

The five group reading titles are perfect for reading together. For example, *EchoStar* is an accessible title with lots to discuss.

Reading displays

"We have displays on each door saying what the teacher is reading, and to ask them about it. Everybody from the head through to the cleaners and cooks will stop and have conversations about what they're reading with the students."

You can match books to teachers' subjects. For example, *Fritz and Kurt* could go to the history department and *50 Ways into Football* could go to PE.

Book clubs

"I run an after-school book club that students can choose to come to, but I also do it by invitation if I feel that it will benefit certain students. I often invite a friend to come along too, so the student doesn't feel that I'm singling them out because they can't read well."

When starting a book club, students can pick one of the five group reading titles. The reading guides provide questions and activities specific to each of the five books.

Using Spark Reading in reading groups

The five sets of books are perfect for reading groups. The warm-up exercise below can be used at the start of a group with any of these books. The reading guides then provide specific activities that can be used for each title.

At the start of a group, you can ask these four questions:

1. What did you like?
2. What did you not like?
3. What confused you or made you ask a question?
4. What did you notice that reminded you of something you had seen/heard/watched/read/done before?

When asking these questions, you can:

1. Go around the group and ask everyone to give one answer to the first question (one sentence only – keep it snappy!). Allow answers to be repeated or skipped.
2. When students are answering, encourage everyone, including members of staff, to listen without interrupting.
3. Model how to answer a question. The group may need to be reassured that expressing something you did not like or found confusing is a good thing.
4. Step back to facilitate the group sharing their thoughts with each other or continue to participate if the group is keen to hear your thoughts. Go with what best serves the group.
5. Use these starting points as the basis of an extended discussion during the group if it feels like students want the opportunity to delve deeper.
6. Be led by their interests and encourage the discussion to move outside of the text into other media and the real world.



Group reading titles



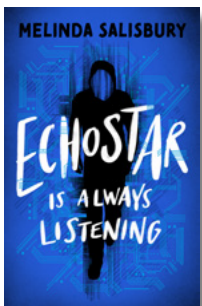
Category: Fiction

Genre: Drama,
real-world
experiences, humour

King of Nothing by Nathanael Lessoré

Why this book was chosen: Written with a truly unique voice, this simultaneously humorous and hard-hitting story about friendship and fitting in tackles the real-life challenges that many teens – especially teen boys – face today, including themes of masculinity, class and power. Award-winning author Nathanael Lessoré handles difficult issues sensitively and is a fresh, new writer in this genre. A brilliantly written, topical book that will really speak to readers and their own everyday experiences.

Key themes: Friendships, bullying, hardship, masculinity



Category: Novella

Genre: Thriller

EchoStar by Melinda Salisbury

Why this book was chosen: Spine-chilling ideas around AI and online safety underpin this superb thriller that ticks all the boxes to keep readers on the edge of their seat. Tension builds quickly from the opening pages as readers are taken into Ruby's world, leading up to an explosive finale. This short novella is printed in a super-readable, dyslexia-friendly format, ensuring the book is accessible to a range of readers and reading abilities.

Note: Includes some mature themes for which younger or more sensitive readers may need support

Key themes: Friendship, AI, online safety, coercive behaviour



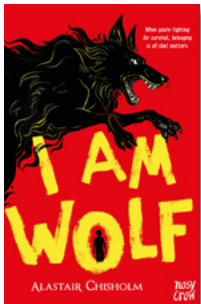
Category: Graphic Novel

Genre: Crime, humour

Agents of S.U.I.T. by John Patrick Green with Christopher Hastings and Pat Lewis

Why this book was chosen: This bright, full-colour graphic novel is packed with so much silly humour, it's sure to appeal to even the most reluctant of readers. A spin-off from the popular *InvestiGators* series, its satirical take on the spy detective genre offers a fun and light-hearted read, while the many puns invite readers to play with language in interesting ways. With cartoon-style graphics and all the text in speech bubbles, it's accessible and appealing to less confident readers and supports the development of visual literacy.

Key themes: Thinking outside the box, self-determination



I Am Wolf by Alastair Chisholm

Why this book was chosen: While the setting of *I Am Wolf* – a futuristic dystopian world where humans live on giant mechanical animals that roam ruined lands – is reminiscent of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, it is simultaneously full of unique concepts and phenomenal world-building which students will love. With themes of difference, identity and belonging, and characters that are nuanced and relatable, it is both a fast-paced adventure and thought-provoking read.

Key themes: Identity, disability, being a leader, self-belief

Category: Fiction

Genre: Science Fiction,
dystopia, adventure



Deborah Meaden Talks Money by Deborah Meaden

Why this book was chosen: Non-fiction is a great way into reading for students who struggle to engage with books, and money and business is a topic on many young people's minds – in particular, how to make money and how to keep it. This book has short chapters and bite-sized chunks of text, making it accessible and good for dipping in and out of, while interviews with contemporary personalities alongside ideas and concepts that have real-life applications ensure it is relatable, relevant and engaging.

Key themes: Understanding money, business, jobs

Category: Non-fiction

Genre: Business
and finance



Titles for reading aloud



Category: Short Stories

Genre: Speculative fiction

Future Hopes edited by Lauren James

What if, in the future, everyone had an allocated carbon footprint and you had to work off any extra you create? Or what might happen if someone discovered bacteria that could eat all our plastic waste? What if we had to grow our own food? Each of the stories in this multi-author collection is inspired by an environmental conservation idea, but at the heart of every story are young people and their everyday desires, dreams and worries.

Why this book was chosen: Short stories offer a fresh reading experience and enable students to access a complete story experience in one reading session. This collection encompasses a variety of genres, perspectives and different interpretations of the environmental theme. Short and impactful, they are great for reading aloud, and each story includes suggested discussion points at the end.

Note: The story 'Float' references teen use of 'cannabix'

Key themes: Environmentalism, conservation, climate change, science, being human



Category: Novella

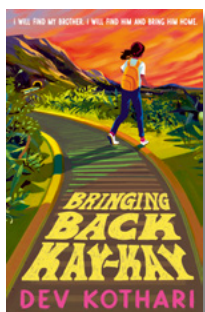
Genre: Ghost story

Jodie by Hilary McKay

On a school trip to a field centre, avoiding her classmates and their awkward silences, Jodie ignores the teacher's warning and ventures out alone onto the marshland. She's sure she heard barking coming from the old truck half-sunken in the mud, and now she is trapped there, with the tide rapidly rising. There was no dog – or was there? – and no one can hear her. As the water creeps in, is there anyone who will help Jodie escape in time?

Why this book was chosen: A novella printed in a dyslexia-friendly format, *Jodie* offers a short, accessible and atmospheric ghost story with a well-rendered representation of being the outsider.

Key themes: Grief, disconnection, trust and empathy, finding friends



Category: Fiction

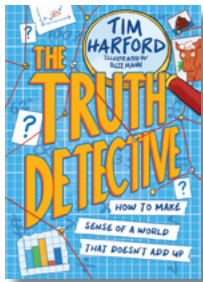
Genre: Mystery

Bringing Back Kay-Kay by Dev Kothari

Lena's older brother, Kay-Kay, has gone missing. After disappearing from the train on the way back from a school trip, the police suggest he's run away and they don't seem that interested in investigating. Lena cannot believe it. Determined to find him, she begins her own investigation, but soon learns her brother isn't at all who she thought he was. What has Kay-Kay been hiding and what has really happened to him?

Why this book was chosen: With its second-person narrative, an intriguing story arc and brilliant character development, this book really stands out. It offers lots of opportunities for discussion as well as being a great read. The inclusion of Kay-Kay's poetry and the South Asian setting add additional interest and points of difference.

Key themes: Missing sibling, family dynamics, friendship, finding friends, mental health, self-belief



Category: Non-fiction

Genre: Understanding the world

The Truth Detective by Tim Harford, illustrated by Ollie Mann

How do you know if something someone tells you, or something that you read online, is actually true? How do you find the right answer to a difficult question? Can you trust statistics? Using real-world stories and examples, Tim Harford delves into the ways information is used both for and against us, and introduces a variety of tricks, tools and tactics that can be used to help discern the truth about the world around us and combat 'fake news'.

Why this book was chosen: Providing different ways of looking at the world and how to start making sense of news stories and numbers, *The Truth Detective* supports development of students' world-view and will help equip young people to navigate the information bombardment of social media. To get the most out of this book, it's best to read chapter by chapter, rather than dipping in and out.

Key themes: Fake news, information sources, managing statistics



Category: Narrative non-fiction

Genre: Historical, World War II

Fritz and Kurt by Jeremy Dronfield, illustrated by David Ziggy Greene

When Hitler annexes Austria in 1938, the happy and carefree childhood of brothers Fritz and Kurt is swiftly ended as the Nazis begin their systematic genocide of Jewish people. While little Kurt is evacuated to America, teenaged Fritz is captured and sent to a concentration camp. This true story follows their different journeys during the ensuing war, the unimaginable difficulties they face and their daily acts of heroism to protect themselves and those they love.

Why this book was chosen: This absorbing story of the Kleinmann family gives readers a perspective of the Holocaust from those who experienced it first hand. While it includes details of some of the horrific acts perpetrated by the Nazis, it also highlights the extraordinary courage and endurance of those forced to live through those atrocities and offers wider reading for an essential topic that has contemporary resonance.

Note: Includes portrayal of concentration camp life and details about the Holocaust

Key themes: World War II, The Holocaust, family separation, anti-Semitism, courage, heroism

Titles for reading independently...



Category: Graphic Novel,
Translated Fiction

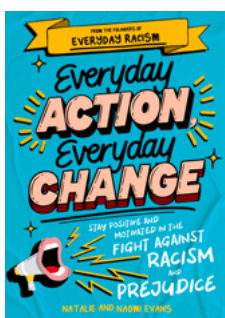
Genre: Real-life experiences,
coming-of-age

Cross My Heart and Never Lie by Nora Dåsnes, translated by Matt Bagguley

It's the start of the new school year and suddenly everything is changing. Tuva's two best friends are at loggerheads with each other: Linnéa has a boyfriend now and wants to talk about make-up, while Bao wants to keep building dens in the woods. Torn between them, Tuva wants things to stay the same, but also wants to be more grown-up. Then there's the new girl Mariam, who Tuva can't stop thinking about... Can she stay friends with everyone, or will she have to choose?

Why this book was chosen: This gentle coming-of-age story perfectly encapsulates the complicated feelings around changing friendships, first crushes and trying to understand what 'growing up' means. Translated from Norwegian, graphic novel elements combine with narrative storytelling and a diary style format. Relatable, engaging and with brilliant storytelling.

Key themes: Friendship, school, first crush, LGBTQ+



Category: Non-fiction

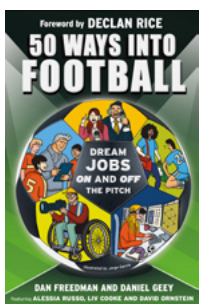
Genre: Self-empowerment,
understanding
the world

Everyday Action, Everyday Change by Natalie Evans and Naomi Evans, illustrated by Kelly Malka

How do you stand up to bullying? From racism and sexism to ableism and more, it can be incredibly difficult to know what to do when faced with discriminatory actions – whether it's you or someone else who is the recipient. This book has recommended actions and tips on what to do (and what not to do) in such situations, alongside contextualised real-life stories and ways of thinking differently about everyday experiences.

Why this book was chosen: A conversational book about handling different forms of discrimination, the topics are discussed in a positive and friendly way, making it accessible and relatable for young readers. It's an empowering book that supports the development of empathy and understanding, offering both new perspectives and practical advice.

Key themes: Bullying, tackling discrimination, developing empathy



Category: Non-fiction

Genre: Sports,
jobs/careers

50 Ways into Football by Dan Freedman and Daniel Geey

From journalist or social media manager to kit designer, groundskeeper or photographer, there are lots of different jobs that you can do in the sport that you love – whether football or something else. This book includes interviews with people who have those jobs, explaining what it involves, things you might need to know to get the job and even ways that you could get involved and get experience right now.

Why this book was chosen: This inspiring book introduces a truly diverse range of jobs and ways to work in the sports industry, far beyond the types of jobs you might expect to see. It is easy to dip in and out of and has lots to explore and discover. Inspiring and affirming for young people.

Key themes: Sports, jobs, careers

...or in pairs



Category: Fiction

Genre: Real-life experiences

Bird Boy by Catherine Bruton

Will's mum has just died and he has been sent to live with his Uncle Ian – someone he didn't even know existed until last week. Ian's home in the mountains is a world away from the city where Will lived before, but his love of birds is quickly reignited when he discovers a hidden osprey nest. As Will's complicated feelings about his mum become tangled up with the lives of the osprey, he makes a rash decision that risks changing his future forever.

Why this book was chosen: This emotional story touches on some challenging subjects (grief and trauma) but handles them beautifully. The nature conservation storyline and that of Will's new friend Omar, an Afghan refugee, compliment the things Will is processing and provide hope and solace.

Key themes: Grief, mental health, friendship, nature and birds, being displaced, young carers.



Category: Graphic Novel

Genre: Real-life experiences, animals

Saving H'non: Chang and the Elephant by Trang Nguyen, illustrated by Jeet Zdung

Chang is a young wildlife conservationist in Vietnam, passionate about helping all creatures, especially those who've been kept in captivity. When she witnesses H'non the elephant being treated badly by her owner, Chang desperately wants to help. Can she find a way to give H'non her freedom? And will H'non be able to survive on her own in the wild? Based on a true story, follow Chang and H'non's journey of discovery.

Why this book was chosen: The incredibly detailed, true-to-life illustrations of Vietnamese wildlife and mix of storytelling techniques – from traditional graphic novel panels to wordless pages – completely immerse readers in Chang's world. A book to be poured over and revisited, it provides a different and more mature reading experience to other graphic novels in the pack.

Note: Includes some depictions of animal cruelty

Key themes: Conservation and wildlife protection, resilience and determination



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