

# Christmas Holiday Reading List 2020

Christmas is a busy and exciting time, but we still believe it is vitally important that children read a little every day. If your son is 'stuck' for a new book to read, or you want ideas for Christmas presents, here are a few suggestions that may help. This list is for boys in Middle and Upper School and the titles range from the easier reads at the top of the list to those at the bottom that are more suited to more mature readers.

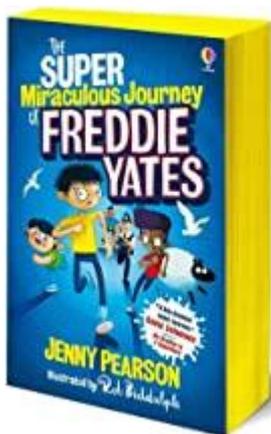
## Life of Riley: Beginner's Luck by Simon James Green



will surely empathise.

After a traumatic run-in with the fortune teller from a visiting funfair, caused by an unfortunately-timed sneeze, Riley finds himself cursed. His life quickly becomes a catalogue of disasters – from accidentally supergluing himself to his classmates to flooding his house and losing Class 4's pet rabbit – Riley knows the bad luck is out to get him. Enter new kid: Brad Chicago. He's super-cool, well-groomed and stylish, and for some reason he *wants* to be Riley's friend. Can Riley get rid of the curse before Brad discovers he's a walking disaster? This lovely book, which has been shortlisted for the Blue Peter Award, made me laugh out loud. Riley is not a stereotypical 'boy' (he loves musical theatre, not football) and he can be a bit of a hypochondriac with a tendency to exaggerate. But he is a beautifully drawn character, with whom many boys

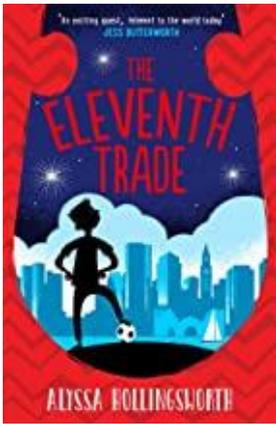
## The Super Miraculous Journey of Freddie Yates by Jenny Pearson



take you where you think they will, and this laugh-out loud story is also very moving as Freddie discovers that some things just can't be explained and, sometimes, what you're looking for has been with you all the time.

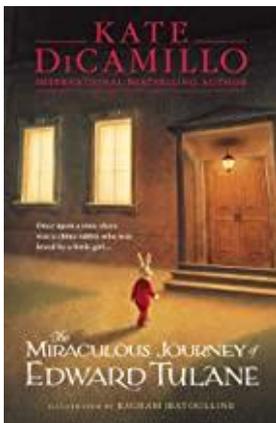
One of my favourite books of the year, this was – sadly – one of those books caught up in the first lockdown. It was published at the end of April, but all the planned author events were cancelled and, of course, the bookshops were closed. Nevertheless, it has now been shortlisted for the prestigious Costa Book Award and, I hope, will have its day in the sun! When he discovers his biological father might be alive and living in Wales, 11-year-old Freddie Yates ropes in his two best friends on a top-secret mission to find him. Yet his secret summer holiday adventure becomes somewhat surreal as Freddie is forced to negotiate onion-eating competitions, exploding toilets and the indignity of appearing on national television dressed up as Supergirl. But journeys - and stories - don't always

## The Eleventh Trade by Alyssa Hollingsworth



Back in Afghanistan, before the Taliban came, Sami's grandfather was a famous musician. People would come from miles around and pay thousands to hear him play the *rebab*. Now Sami and his grandfather are refugees living in Boston. The *rebab* is their most valuable possession and a reminder of home. Then one terrible day, the *rebab* is stolen. Sami's grandfather is devastated. His last link with home is gone and with it, his livelihood. Sami resolves to get the *rebab* back as a surprise for Eid. When he finds it for sale for \$700 he begins to trade the few possessions he has - and as he does, he finds, to his surprise, that there are all kinds of people willing to help. This book, which has won the UKLA Book Award for ages 7-10+, combines an appealing plot with authentic coverage of topics such as asylum, prejudice and grief. Its twin themes of empathy and personal responsibility could not be more important.

### **The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane** by Kate DiCamillo



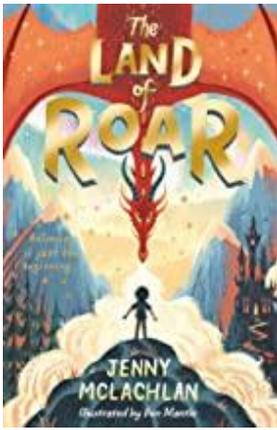
It has been such a bumper summer and autumn for new books that there are only two 'old' books in this list. This one was recommended to me by a Year 5 boy (thank you Arnav!) and when I read it I was shocked that I had not had it in the library before! As the wonderful author Abi Elphinstone wrote, "If ever there was a story for these troubling times, this is it.". It is the story of Edward, a rather vain and self-centred china rabbit, who accepts the love of his owners as his 'due' but is himself incapable of empathy. As Edward is lost and found by different owners, his hard heart begins to soften... This beautiful tale of love, loss and hope contains some quite dark subject matter, and the author does not shy away from quite sophisticated language, so it's a book I particularly recommend for reading with parents.

### **The Night Bus Hero** by Onjali Q Raúf



Since the astounding, multi-award-winning success of her debut novel, this author has gone from strength to strength. As with her previous two books, this one taps into serious contemporary issues whilst remaining totally age-appropriate and appealing. Hector is a 10-year-old bully, who likes nothing better than making his friends laugh as he belittles his contemporaries and terrifies the younger children. When he picks on a new victim – a homeless man called Thomas – matters begin to spiral out of his control. Does Hector have the courage to step out of his 'role' and become a hero instead? This is a fascinating mystery/adventure which simultaneously explores the themes of homelessness and bullying, whilst celebrating the power of kindness, and the potential everyone has to make positive changes in their lives.

### **The Land of Roar** by Jenny McLachlan Followed by *Return to Roar*



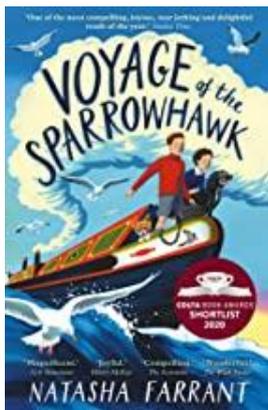
I somehow missed this book when it first came out, and it took the recent publication of the sequel to prompt me to read it – and I'm very glad I did! When Arthur and Rose were little, they were heroes in the Land of Roar, an imaginary world that they found by climbing through the folding bed in their grandad's attic. Roar was filled with things they loved – dragons, mermaids, ninja wizards and adventure – as well as things that scared them (including a very creepy scarecrow. . .) Now the twins are eleven, Roar is just a memory. But when they help Grandad clean out the attic, Arthur is horrified as Grandad is pulled into the folding bed and vanishes. Is he playing a joke? Or is Roar . . . real? The charm of this book is, perhaps, the fact that the story elements are 'childish', but the plot allows us all – of whatever age – to bask in the power of the imagination.

### **Frostheart** by Jamie Littler



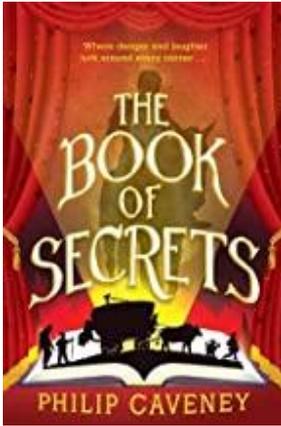
This debut novel, which was shortlisted for this year's Branford Boase Awards, seemed an appropriately titled book to go on a winter reading list! Way out in the furthest part of the known world, a tiny stronghold exists all on its own, cut off from the rest of human-kin by monsters that lurk beneath the Snow Sea. There, a boy called Ash waits for the return of his parents, singing a forbidden lullaby to remind him of them... and doing his best to avoid his very, VERY grumpy yeti guardian, Tobu. When a brave rescue attempt reveals he has amazing magical powers, he's whisked aboard the *Frostheart*, a sleigh packed full of daring explorers who could use his help. But can they help him find his family? Although a first-time author, Jamie Littler is a renowned illustrator, and the terrific black and white drawings throughout the book add to the appeal of this magical, snow-laden tale.

### **The Voyage of the Sparrowhawk** by Natasha Farrant



Another of the Costa Book Award's shortlisted titles, this magnificent book was last week awarded the accolade of the Times Children's Book of the Year. It's a wonderful adventure story, set just after WWI, which manages to be fast-paced and exciting as well as emotionally compelling. It's the story of two orphaned children, Lotti and Ben, and their search for the family they've lost. Feisty and courageous orphans, unkind relatives, horrible boarding schools, rescued dogs, an exciting chase across England and then across the Channel...this book ticks every box for the perfect children's story. It was one of my top books of the year; perhaps it will be one of yours, too?

### **The Book of Secrets** by Philip Caveney



Not such a mainstream choice as the others on this list, but it was the memory of this author's hilarious *Sebastian Darke* series that drew me to his new, stand-alone 'medieval' comedy adventure. It's the story of an orphan called Boy, who has escaped from his master and is heading for the great city of Cherubim. He carries with him the Book of Secrets, which contains his late father's brilliant inventions, one of which could change the world forever. When brigands rob him and leave him for dead in the harsh desert sands, he is rescued by Lexi and her eccentric group of travelling players. It just so happens they are looking for a new leading man, so can Boy help them out by starring in their latest show? And can they help him out by tracking down the all-important Book of Secrets? There's mystery, excitement, a hint of romance, and Boy's stage debut is one of the funniest things I've read for a long time!

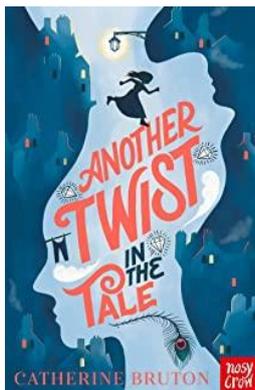
### **The Midnight Guardians** by Ross Montgomery



Set at Christmas during the early days of WWII, this is a thought-provoking historical novel, a hugely atmospheric fantasy, a moving story of family love and loss and an often funny, imaginative fairy tale full of stupid giants, hideously ugly fairies and extremely chatty bogies – all rolled into one wondrous novel. Col is reunited with his childhood imaginary 'guardians', who have crossed into the 'real' world to help him as the terrifying Midwinter King is becoming more powerful. Accompanied by the dapper badger Mr Noakes, the miniature knight, King of the Rogues, and the magnificent size-changing tigress Pendlebury, Col must race across England from the Peak District to rescue his sister from bomb-blitzed London. On the way he teams up with Ruth, an 11-year-old Jewish refugee from Germany, and together the children face many

dangers as they confront the realities of war and the even darker forces of the Midwinter King. Highly recommended!

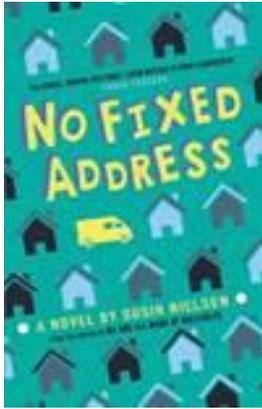
### **Another Twist in the Tale** by Catherine Bruton



2020 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the death of Charles Dickens, so – although rather late in the year! – it seems an appropriate time to try something by this great English novelist. Most of you know the story of **A Christmas Carol**, and that would be a good book to try to read if you would like to over the holiday. A gentle way in to Dickens' work could also be found in this terrific tale, which is a new 'sequel' to *Oliver Twist*. The author has imagined that Oliver actually had a twin sister at birth who, being a girl, was deemed less valuable and left to die. She was rescued by a young maidservant called Baggage and this is the story of what happened to her. It's a great tale, made all the more interesting for being set in this part of Victorian London –

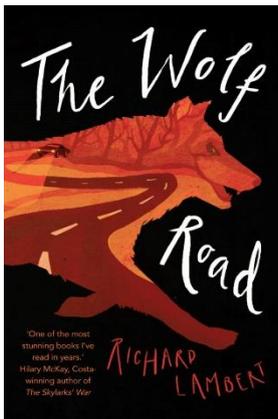
with references to Dulwich Village, Camberwell Grove, Lordship Lane and many other places! The setting is vivid, and the language is purposely 'Dickensian' - so very good for your vocabulary!

### **No Fixed Address** by Susin Nielsen



Felix hasn't always lived in a van. In fact, there was a time when his life was happy and secure. Living in the van over the summer had been a bit of an adventure but now, as winter begins in earnest, the novelty has most definitely worn off and Felix is beginning to realise that, although his mum is a great person, she may not be a great parent. But if Felix can win Canada's biggest junior quiz show, perhaps he and his mum can stop living in a car park... or is that just wishful thinking? The issue of homelessness is tackled with sensitivity and gentle humour in this terrific book, which recently won the UKLA Book Award for 11-14-year-olds and is highly recommended for Upper School boys. There are wonderful messages here about the importance of being non-judgemental and, above all, about the power of kindness.

### **The Wolf Road** by Richard Lambert



Lucas's life unravels when his parents are killed in a car crash caused by a dog. In an instant his world changes and now he has no choice but to move to the Lake District to live with his Nan, whom he's only met twice in his life. Lucas is sure the offending dog was, in fact, a wolf and it's not long before wolves start to infiltrate all aspects of his life - at school he reads *The Call of the Wild*, and a local farmer believes his livestock is being killed by a wild wolf. Lupine menace begins to encroach on Lucas's reality, as he wonders whether it's coming for him, to "finish off the family after Mum and Dad." This haunting tale of loss is also a gripping thriller that skirts the margins of fantasy. The author is also a poet, and his spare and lyrical language is wonderfully atmospheric. This is a

sad book, but there is humour and hope too; it would be perfect for thoughtful Upper School readers who enjoyed books such as *A Monster Calls*.

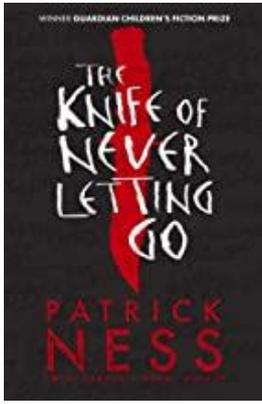
### **Things the Eye Can't See** by Penny Joelson



Many boys have enjoyed this author's previous book, *I Have No Secrets*, and once again she has created a page-turning mystery with a main protagonist who has unique difficulties – in this case Libby is visually impaired. A chance meeting and a secret message drags Libby into a dangerous mystery, but no one believes she can spot the clues. Her family worry about her and she knows there is no way they would let her get involved, but what if she's the only person who can solve the mystery? She needs to make them realise what she is really capable of, before it's too late. This is a terrific read that will appeal to anyone who enjoys a good thriller.

### **The Knife of Never Letting Go** by Patrick Ness

Followed by *The Ask* and *The Answer* and *Monsters of Men*



One of only two 'older' books in this list, and a book that almost certainly counts as a 'modern classic'. It's back on the list for Year 8s as the film of the 'Chaos Walking' trilogy will be released in January. As always, I strongly recommend that boys read the books first, so the film (whether good or bad!) doesn't spoil their experience of reading this terrific book. There are no women in Prentisstown, a human colony on another planet. The women all died when the Noise came - unleashed on the human settlers by the native species, the Spackle. Todd, the last boy in the colony, leads a life buzzing with other people's secrets and thoughts, until he discovers a tiny pocket in the swamp where Noise does not penetrate. The language at the start of the book can be confusing at first (with words like stayshun, confushun, spaks, horrorpilashuns, twixt and yerself) but persevere – it'll be worth it!