Summer Holiday Reading List for Boys Entering Year 8

Books marked with an asterisk (*) will be the first to be discussed as part of the Year 8 Book Club, ‘A Good Read’ next term. This Year 8 club meets fortnightly to discuss books that are thought-provoking, important, perhaps a ‘classic’, certainly a ‘good read’. Each meeting is led by a different member of staff, but is not a lecture or even a tutorial. It is a discussion – where the boys’ views matter. That means that the student needs to read the book – or a good portion of it – before attending the meeting. Full details of dates and staff leaders will be sent out at the beginning of September, but why not get ahead now by reading one or more of these books?

Joe All Alone by Joanna Nadin
When thirteen-year-old Joe is left behind in Peckham while his mum flies to Spain on holiday, he decides to treat it as an adventure, and a welcome break from Dean, her latest boyfriend. Joe begins to explore his neighbourhood, making a tentative friendship with Asha, a fellow fugitive hiding out at her grandfather’s flat. It’s only when the food and money run out, his mum doesn’t come home, and the local thugs catch up with him, that Joe realises time is running out too, and he must make a decision that will change his life forever. If it’s possible for a book to be both grim and heart-warming at the same time, this is it.

The Goldfish Boy by Lisa Thompson
Matthew is trapped in his bedroom by crippling OCD, spending most of his time staring out of his window as the inhabitants of Chestnut Close go about their business. Until the day he is the last person to see his next door neighbour’s toddler, Teddy, before he goes missing. Matthew must now brave his fears to turn detective and unravel the mystery of Teddy’s disappearance. Perfect for fans of books such as The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time (and a candidate for either the ‘Detective’ or ‘Modern Life’ boxes in your Book Bingo sheet!).

The Winter King by Bernard Cornwell
Followed by Excalibur and The Enemy of God
Uther, the High King of Britain, is dead. His only heir is the infant Mordred. Yet each of the country’s lesser kings seek to claim the crown for themselves, and while they squabble and spoil for war, a host of Saxon armies is gathering, preparing for invasion. But no one has counted on the fearsome warlord Arthur… This brilliant re-telling of the Arthurian legend is my personal favourite of Bernard Cornwell’s books, although you may find the first 50 pages a little confusing as you grapple with the Anglo-Saxon names. Persevere – it’s worth it!

Keeper by Mal Peet
I was looking for a decent sporting story to help you with the Book Bingo, and decided I couldn’t go far wrong with anything from the brilliant Mal Peet. This award-winning book was his first novel, and the first of three books featuring Paul Faustino, South America’s top football journalist. Here, Faustino is interviewing the man they call El Gato “the Cat”, the world’s greatest goalkeeper as he tells the incredible story of the mysterious Keeper, the man who helped him rise from poor
logger’s son to World Cup-winning goalkeeper. It’s actually much more than a football story; it’s magical and mystical, with something to teach everyone.

**The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents** by Terry Pratchett
This Carnegie Medal-winning book is a brilliant spin on the Pied Piper fairy tale, from a comic author who needs no introduction. Maurice is a talking cat who leads a band of rather special rats from town to town to fake invasions of vermin. Keith, in cahoots with Maurice, turns up with his flute and leads the rats out of town for a hefty reward. It’s a scam that works perfectly until they arrive in the town of Bad Blintz and their ruse is discovered… A warning: once you fall for the author’s unique sense of humour (for example, the mice take their names from discarded packaging, so we have heroes called “Big Savings” and “Best Before”!) then you may be sucked into the Terry Pratchett world for ever more!

**Salt to the Sea** by Rita Sepetys
It’s early 1945 and a group of people trek across Germany, bound together by their desperation to reach the ship that can take them away from the war-ravaged land. Four young people, each haunted by their own dark secret, narrate their unforgettable stories. This inspirational novel, winner of this year’s Carnegie Medal, is based on a true story from the Second World War. When the German ship the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was sunk in port in early 1945 it had over 9000 civilian refugees, including children, on board. Nearly all were drowned.

**Half a King** by Joe Abercrombie
Followed by *Half the World* and *Half a War*
When a boy recommended this series to me earlier this term I wasn’t sure what to expect as the author is better known as the author of fantasy novels for adults. ‘The Shattered Sea’ is his first trilogy for YA readers and I thought it was terrific. It features strong characters, epic events, a quasi-Viking setting that lends itself to touches of magic…everything indeed that I would want in a good fantasy series!

**And Then There Were None** by Agatha Christie
A classic murder mystery from a master of the genre. This was her 26th title, but one of her best and most ingenious. If you watched the BBC version, you’ll realise that it is quite dark, but I still think this book would be a good place to start if you are interested in trying something from this classic author. If you want something a little less scary, you may prefer to try one of her classic Hercules Poirot mysteries such as *Murder on the Orient Express.*

**Wolf of the Plains** by Conn Iggulden
Followed by *Lords of the Bow, Bones of the Hills* and *Empire of Silver*
A man without a tribe on the harsh Mongolian plains is at great risk, so the young boy abandoned with his siblings struggles to survive by gathering together a group of outsiders like him. Hunted and alone, he dreams of uniting the tribes into one nation, under his leadership. He will become Genghis Khan. A dazzling mixture of fact and fiction, this is a thrilling read – fairly bloodthirsty, but not gratuitously so.

*Lion* by Saroo Brierley
Five-year-old Saroo lived in a poor village in India, in a one-room hut with his mother and three siblings... until the day he boarded a train alone and got lost. For
twenty-five years. This is the story of what happened to Saroo in those twenty-five years. How he ended up on the streets of Calcutta. And survived. How he then ended up in Australia. And how, at thirty years old, with some dogged determination, a lot of luck and the power of Google Earth, he found his way back home. First published under the title A Long Way Home, Saroo’s memoir was an international bestseller before being made into the recent film called Lion. It’s an incredible story – you couldn’t make it up really!

*The Lost Continent* by Bill Bryson
Bill Bryson is not everyone’s cup of tea: some will find him eye-wateringly funny; others may find him a little arrogant or unkind. This was the first of his travel ‘memoirs’ and, while his style may have become more sophisticated in later works, the observations he makes about small town America seem as pertinent today as they did when the book was first published nearly 30 years ago. Given the recent talk about ‘Trump’s America’, I suspect you will find – amongst the humour – some deceptively sharp observations that will interest you. It’s something that Mrs Arthur would like to explore when she discusses this book in a meeting of ‘A Good Read’ next term.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque
In 1914 a room full of German schoolboys, fresh-faced and idealistic, are goaded by their schoolmaster to troop off to the ‘glorious war’. With the fire and patriotism of youth they sign up. What follows is the moving story of a young ‘unknown soldier’ experiencing the horror and disillusionment of life in the trenches. War is always with us, somewhere in the world, so this classic anti-war novel, written many years ago, still feels powerful and relevant. I encourage boys to try it and to sign up for the discussion next term.