

Forty-One Books to Read Before Key Stage Four

Our reading list is grouped by what each book helps you think about, rather than by age or reading level. Some are picture books, some are graphic novels, some are poetry. All of them are here for a reason.

Read them in any order. Start anywhere.

How do you be a good friend?

Caring friendships

■ How to Mend a Friend

Karl Newson

Some friends want a hug. Some want to be left alone. Some want to shout. A gentle rhyming picture book about the fact that there is no single right way to comfort someone.

■ Dragon Mountain

Katie Tsang & Kevin Tsang

Billy is packed off to a language camp in China and hates every minute of it, right up until he finds a dragon inside the mountain. Four children who barely know each other have to start trusting one another.

■ The Unforgotten Coat

Frank Cottrell Boyce

Two brothers arrive at a Liverpool primary school from Mongolia, and a classmate appoints herself their guide. About arriving somewhere new, and about what happens when someone disappears.

What do you do when you fall out with someone?

Communicating well, managing conflict with kindness, saying what you need

■ On Sudden Hill

[Linda Sarah](#)

Birt and Etho build extraordinary things out of cardboard boxes, just the two of them. Then Shu turns up and wants to join in. About making room for a third person.

■ Where?

[Jordan Collins](#)

The author wrote this as a slam poem at fourteen, after a lifetime of being asked where they were really from. The answer travels out through stars and deep time before it comes back to earth.

■ Not My Fault

[Cath Howe](#)

Sisters Maya and Rose have barely spoken since the accident. A week away with school throws them together whether they like it or not. Told from both sides, so you see how differently each of them remembers it.

■ The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle

[Victoria Williamson](#)

Reema has come to Glasgow from Syria. Caylin is angry, alone and stealing to get by. An injured fox on the waste ground brings them into the same story.

What if someone's life looks nothing like yours?

Respect for people different in character, personality, background or beliefs

■ The Island

[Armin Greder](#)

A man washes up on the shore and the islanders have to decide what to do with him. A stark, wordless-feeling picture book for older readers about how quickly fear of a stranger takes hold.

■ Frankie's World

[Aoife Dooley](#)

A graphic novel. Frankie knows she is different from everyone at school and sets out to work out why. Drawn from the author's own late autism diagnosis.

- **Cameron Battle and the Hidden Kingdoms**

[Jamar J. Perry](#)

Cameron opens the book his parents told him never to open and is pulled into Chidani, a hidden kingdom he is supposed to save. Adventure built on Igbo mythology.

- **The Lost Homework**

[Richard O'Neill & Kirsti Beautyman](#)

Written by Richard O'Neill, a Romani author and storyteller, drawing on Traveller family life and the way a community pulls together when something goes wrong.

- **Anisha, Accidental Detective**

[Serena Patel & Emma McCann](#)

Anisha's aunt's wedding is hours away and somebody is trying to wreck it. Fast, funny, and full of a big noisy family.

- **Heartstopper, Volume 1**

[Alice Oseman](#)

A graphic novel. Charlie and Nick are put next to each other in form and a friendship starts that turns into something more. Gentle, funny, and quick to read even if reading is hard work.

Who decides what people like you are like?

What a stereotype is, and how to challenge one

- **Birdie**

[J.P. Rose](#)

A Yorkshire mining village in 1952. Birdie has grown up in a children's home and arrives to live with a great-aunt who treats her as an outsider. Hiding from bullies down the pit, she meets the last working pit pony.

- **Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet**

[Zanib Mian & Nasaya Mafaridik](#)

Omar is starting a new school, his imagination is running away with him, and there is a bully to deal with. Very funny, and honest about being a Muslim child in Britain.

- **Everybody Travels**

[Kristin Roskifte](#)

A seek-and-find book in which every single person on the page is going somewhere, for their own reason. Hundreds of tiny stories to spot, and a reminder that everyone around you is in the middle of something.

- **The Girl Who Stole an Elephant**

[Nizrana Farook](#)

Chaya steals the queen's jewels to help her village, then has to steal the king's elephant to get away. A chase through a kingdom inspired by Sri Lanka.

■ **Picture Perfect**

[Serena Patel & Louise Forshaw](#)

Sonal needs a photograph of her whole family for a school project, and nobody will stay still long enough. A camping trip, no phones, and the discovery that no family is as perfect as it looks from outside.

Published in a dyslexia-friendly edition.

What do you call this feeling?

The range of emotions, and the words for them

■ **My Heart is a Poem**

[Various poets](#)

Twenty poets on every kind of feeling, from bursting excitement to the sort of embarrassment nobody admits to. Each poem illustrated in its own style. Made to be read aloud.

■ **An Emotional Menagerie**

[Various poets](#)

Twenty-six feelings, one for each letter of the alphabet, each given the shape of an animal. Poetry that puts a form to things that are hard to describe.

■ **The Fantastic Book of Feelings**

[Marcia Williams](#)

Non-fiction, told in comic strips. Works through the feelings everybody has and what you might do with them.

What makes a good day?

Hobbies, interests, being part of things, and helping other people

■ **Roar Like a Lion**

[Carlie Sorosiak & Katie Walker](#)

Non-fiction. Advice for difficult moments, borrowed from animals: how to be brave, how to rest, how to keep going when you would rather not.

■ **The Incredible Record Smashers**

[Jenny Pearson & Erica Salcedo](#)

Lucy decides that breaking a world record will put things right at home. Funny and warm, about a mum who is unwell and a daughter determined to fix it.

■ The Invisible

Tom Percival

Isabel's family can no longer afford to stay in their home. A picture book about the people a community stops noticing, and what changes when somebody sees them again.

■ I Am the Subway

Kim Hyo-eun

The Seoul underground tells you about the people it carries. Quiet and beautiful, with a whole life sketched in a few lines for each passenger.

■ Do Something for Someone Else

Loll Kirby & Yas Imamura

Non-fiction. Real children around the world who noticed something wrong and did something about it, mostly starting very small.

How do you say what's going on for you?

Talking about emotions accurately and carefully

■ Why Do I Feel Like This?

Shinsuke Yoshitake

A child collects up every worry and question they have about feelings and turns each one over from every angle. Odd, funny and reassuring.

■ Ruby's Worry

Tom Percival

Ruby's worry starts small and grows until it is the only thing she can see. It only begins to shrink when she says it out loud.

What helps when everything feels too big?

Getting past anxiety and other barriers, and what to try when you do

■ Charlie Changes Into a Chicken

Sam Copeland & Sarah Horne

Charlie's brother is in hospital and Charlie is so worried that he has started turning into animals, at the worst possible moments. Very funny about something that is not funny at all.

■ The Worries

Jion Sheibani

Worries that take shape as monsters you can actually see and argue with. Heavily illustrated and quick to get through.

- **Runaway Robot**

[Frank Cottrell Boyce & Steven Lenton](#)

Alfie lost a leg in an accident. At the airport lost property office he meets Eric, an enormous and badly out-of-date robot who has lost considerably more.

- **Aaron Slater, Illustrator**

[Andrea Beaty & David Roberts](#)

Aaron loves stories, but letters will not behave on the page for him. He finds a different way to tell them. Written in rhyme.

- **Call Me Lion**

[Camilla Chester](#)

Leo has selective mutism. He cannot speak at school, but he can dance. A new neighbour arrives and things start to shift.

- **The Boy in the Jam Jar**

[Joyce Dunbar & John Shelley](#)

Dylan's hearing is getting worse and all he wants is for things to go back to how they were. Written by an author who knows this from the inside, and set out in short chapters for readers building confidence.

- **I Talk Like a River**

[Jordan Scott & Sydney Smith](#)

A boy who stammers has a bad day at school. His father takes him down to the river and gives him a completely different way of thinking about his own mouth.

What do you do about someone who won't leave you alone?

Bullying, and the mark it leaves

- **Wonder**

[R.J. Palacio](#)

Auggie has a facial difference and is starting mainstream school at ten. What makes it work is that you hear from the people around him too, including the ones who behave badly.

- **All the Things That Could Go Wrong**

[Stewart Foster](#)

Alex has OCD. Dan has been making his life a misery. Then the two of them are made to build something together, and you hear it from both sides.

- **Cyborg Cat: Rise of the Parsons Road Gang**

[Ade Adepitan & Carl Pearce](#)

Based on the author's own childhood. Ade arrives in 1980s London from Nigeria, wears a leg brace, and sets about working out where he fits.

- **Cloud Busting**

[Malorie Blackman](#)

Told entirely in poetry. Sam went along with everyone else against Davey, and now has to live with what that cost.

- **The Song from Somewhere Else**

[A.F. Harrold & Levi Pinfold](#)

Frank is being bullied. Nick, the boy everybody avoids, steps in and helps her, and his house turns out to contain something strange and beautiful.

- **Max and the Millions**

[Ross Montgomery](#)

Max is deaf and does not fit in at boarding school. Then he discovers a tiny civilisation growing on the floor of the caretaker's room, and it needs him.

How this list fits our curriculum

Reading is one of the main ways we teach the things schools are required by law to cover. Between them, these forty-one books contribute to every framework below.

Relationships, Sex and Health Education

The statutory framework set by the Department for Education, mandatory from September 2026. This list covers caring friendships, respectful relationships, general wellbeing and mental wellbeing, including the new 2026 content on coping strategies for anxiety.

PSHE

Personal, social, health and economic education, including Living in the Wider World — community, helping other people, and taking an interest in the world beyond your own.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Spiritual through poetry, wonder and reflection; moral through stories about consequences and doing the right thing; social through friendship and conflict; cultural through books set in and drawn from many different communities.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Every student should be able to find themselves in a book, and to meet people unlike themselves. Representation across this list is deliberate rather than incidental.

Protected characteristics — Equality Act 2010

Race and ethnicity, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage; religion and belief; disability, including autism, dyslexia, deafness, stammering, selective mutism and physical disability; sex; and sexual orientation.

Fundamental British values

Mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and individual liberty — particularly through the books about challenging stereotypes and standing up for people.

Independent School Standards

Part 2 requires us to actively promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and to encourage respect for other people with particular regard to the protected characteristics.

National Curriculum English

Reading widely and often, across fiction, poetry, non-fiction, picture books and graphic novels, and developing the vocabulary to talk about what you have read.

Each section of this list is matched to specific statutory outcomes in our curriculum mapping, which is available to parents, carers and inspectors on request.

Reading is not the only way we teach any of this. It works alongside our relationships and sex education lessons, our weekly social and emotional learning, Focus Friday, and the everyday relational practice of the school.

MORE THAN ED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

These books sit alongside our English curriculum and our work on relationships, wellbeing and understanding other people. Staff choose from this list to suit each student's reading and interests.