

Children's Book Week, Then and Now

2014Children'sBookWeek_then

To celebrate Children's Book Week this year, we're reflecting on some of the favorite books we read as kids. We may not remember all the details of stories read decades ago, but there are images, passages, and feelings that have stuck with us through the years. Interesting to note that many of the titles we chose as our favorite childhood reads, are books that were first published before we were born. So who turned us on to these memorable stories? A parent? A teacher? A librarian? Do you find any of your childhood favorites among the ones we feature here?

2014ChildrensBookWeek_now

My Side of the Mountain initially interested me because I always loved nature and animals. While reading it, I remember feeling empowered and inspired to imagine that I, just a child, could live in the wilderness on my own. ? Kathy

Harriet in *Harriet the Spy* seemed real to me - not as chirpily cheerful or melodramatically tragic as many other child characters in books I was reading. She didn't always say or do the right thing, and she was nosy and selfish - but she mostly redeemed herself in the end. I could relate to her imperfections! ? Ellen

I loved the *Little House* series because of Laura Ingalls Wilder's descriptions of pioneer life and the warmth of her family. My grandparents lived on a rustic farm with cows, pigs, chickens, and a protective border collie named Shep. The Little House books kept me connected to my grandparents on that farm, even though I lived in a city far away. - Mary

As a young girl who loved animals, but especially horses, *Black Beauty* became one of my all-time favorite books. A fictional autobiographical memoir told from the point of view of a horse, the story describes Black Beauty's difficulties and experiences with humans, who often failed to recognize the unconditional love and loyalty that he was so willing to share. This book gave me a sense of responsibility, respect and compassion for all living creatures. I found it sad, hopeful, and in the end, comforting. ? Janet

Ballet Shoes was an oasis for me as a young ballet student. Each of the young protagonists (Pauline, Petrova, and Posy) were able to follow their passions, with the support of a collection of knowledgeable and caring adults who understood the importance of having Big Dreams. The urban London setting was thrilling - and the European characters inhabiting the book made me eager to reach out and explore the world. I can't help but think this book planted the seed for all the wonderful experiences I've had in life, thus far. I've travelled overseas, performed professionally in the theater, and now support the Big Dreams of my own children (which currently include being superhero millionaires who do charity work)! ? Christina

As a child, I loved camping with my family and spending time by the water. The idea of suddenly finding myself alone on an island was both thrilling and terrifying. I admired Karana's courage and tenacity and wondered if I could have managed to survive on my own as she had. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* also gives a personal perspective on living in and out of sync with the ebb and flow of nature. As an adult, I have experienced several island camping adventures, satisfying my desire to enjoy time by the water. But I was content that I did not have to hunt any further than my backpack to find my own food. ? Lisa

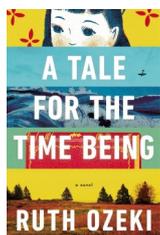
Watership Down is a mixture of the best elements from *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Odyssey*. Since reading it at age 11, I haven't been able to look at hedges, meadows or overgrown alleyways without wondering what sort of tiny, cosmic dramas are unfolding beyond our vision. Truly inspiring. (Because of *Watership Down*, I got a cool looking rabbit on my arm as my first tattoo when I was 21.) ? Josh

I read *Little Women* several times between the ages of 9 -11 . Growing up with lots of cousins, most of whom were female, I found it easy to identify with Jo March and her family. Plus, the story has some sadness, romance and drama! This book made me an avid reader. ? Pat.

I think the idea of private spaces with little adult interference, like the ones in *The Secret Garden* or *The Boxcar Children*, is super appealing to kids. I was lucky enough to grow up in a house in the country with lots of land and tree cover perfect for creating little hideouts. So the idea of discovering and cultivating a secret garden was both relatable and compelling to me. ? Aubrey

Posted by Lisa C. on May 14, 2014

A Tale for the Time Being



[view in catalog](#)

This cross-cultural gem of a novel tells the story of two women: one, Nao, a young Japanese schoolgirl; the other, Ruth, a middle-aged writer who lives in a rainforest town near Vancouver, Canada. Their lives intersect when Nao's *Hello Kitty* lunchbox lands as jetsam on the beach of the tiny town. Inside are letters, a WW II kamikaze wristwatch and most precious, Nao's diary, wrapped in layers and layers of plastic bags, so it is entirely legible.

The story is told in alternating voices. One belongs to the trendy, irrepressible, somewhat risqué and thoroughly jaded Nao who is bullied in school and mocked as an immigrant from America (she spent most of her childhood in California). The other belongs to Ruth who incidentally has the same first name as the author. Ruth has moved to Canada from another island town, New York City, because her husband loved the peacefulness of life in rural Canada and had major health issues. Also, Ruth brought her aged mother there to die.

Ruth is fascinated by the diary. Because she is suffering from writer's block on her new novel, she totally immerses herself in the diary and in trying to track down Nao. Did Nao's diary begin its journey in the destruction and flooding caused by the great Japanese tsunami of March 2011? [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on May 7, 2014

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How To Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia



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Masked in the persona of a self-help book, this novel is really a love story and a tale of the ambitious struggle of a rural bumpkin to get ahead in a world madly developing at all costs. Unlucky enough to nearly die from hepatitis as an infant, because he is his mother's favorite, he is saved and the family soon follows the first theorem to worldly success in Asia: move to a big city.

Each chapter summarizes in the title that chapter's method of achieving worldly success; for example, the second chapter advises, "Get an education." Though normally the eldest son in this unnamed Asian country (probably Pakistan) would be pushed to study, in this family the narrator was lucky because his older brother was already learning a trade. And being bright, he succeeded at school despite contradicting

a teacher who gave out false information. For in school, you never pointed out the failings of a teacher.

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Posted by Dory L. on April 29, 2014

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Bark



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No one else does wry humorous stories full of punch the way Lorrie Moore does. In *Bark*, her newest collection, she examines modern life after divorce and the difficult art of parenting teens. In the opening story "Debarking" she describes the dating life of a newly divorced man, Ira Wilkins. He meets a zany pediatrician Zora at a dinner party, and they begin seeing each other. Unfortunately, this also involves contact with Zora's teenage son—the zip-lock mouthed, Bruno. Does it give Ira the willies that Bruno and Zora have an uncomfortable habit of sitting close and touching? Yep. Yet Ira plows on with a romance that is hardly reciprocated. His confidence is down so he allows Zora and Bruno to take advantage of him—he buys them meals, movie tickets, etc. They even take the rest of his birthday cake home after a lackluster celebration because Bruno needs it for his school lunch. This can't end well and it doesn't but what fun happens along the way.

More eerie is "The Juniper Tree" a kind of new age ghost story where three women share their talents: art, dance, song with their recently deceased friend who still haunts her house. The first person narrator never made it to the hospital to see the friend, Robin Ross, and in fact came to this odd séance with no prepared gift. So on the spot, she sang a rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner." [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on April 22, 2014

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The Flight of a Painting of a Little Yellow Bird



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?Bad artists copy, good artists steal.? Toward the end of this novel, Hobie, the elderly painter of masterpiece copies, says this to Theo, his sorta-kinda adopted son. Is it ironic that Theo has stolen a famous painting, *The Goldfinch*? This long, convoluted, powerful novel tells the story of a young boy whose life was transformed at age 13 by this random act.

And a random bombing in the art galleries of New York?s Metropolitan Museum that killed his mother. Theo?s mom had left him to buy a present in the museum store when the bombing happened. After the blast, Theo crawls amid bodies on the floor to find one older man alive. With some of his last breaths, the man points to the painting and says, ?I beg of you.? Theo interprets this as a plea to rescue it. The dying man Welty also gives the boy an elaborate ring and the name of a business in Manhattan: Hobart and Blackwell. ?Ring the green bell.?

Thus begins the travels/travails of Theo. His dad, an alcoholic is alive, but in no shape to care for him. Ditto for his one surviving grandparent. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on March 25, 2014

[The Goldfinch](#)

[Art](#)

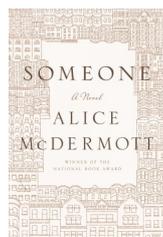
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Someone



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No one else writes with the lyric flow of Alice McDermott. Or covers childhood and adolescence with so much immediacy as though it were happening right now. When I surfaced for breaths while reading this novel, I had to remind myself that I wasn?t in a stuffy walk-up in Brooklyn listening to children play ball and jump rope in the street.

The novel tells the story of Marie Commeford as a child, teen, young woman and as an older woman with grown children of her own. Marie is the stubborn second child of Irish Catholics. Her brother Gabe is remarkably obedient and good, already in grade school, on a path for the priesthood, whereas Marie is rebellious, adventurous, and not one for rules.

Her dad takes her on walks to speakeasies and encourages her fiery temperament; her mother tries to discipline her and tamp down her rebellious spirit. Saturday mornings, she runs to her best friend Gerty?s house and buries herself in her mother?s lap, but Gerty?s kind mother dies in childbirth. This tragedy convinces Marie to refuse to learn how to cook. Gerty had learned and look what happened to her. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on March 19, 2014

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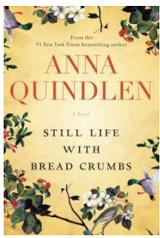
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Still Life with Bread Crumbs



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“Make it new!” Ezra Pound once said about writing and art. Quindlen’s seventh novel explores a New York City woman photographer doing just that by relocating temporarily to a small town upstate and taking entirely different kinds of photographs. Rebecca Winter has just turned sixty, gotten divorced, and her 20-something-year-old son hardly needs her anymore.

One of the first people she meets in this unnamed town is Jim Bates, a blond, pink-cheeked roofer, who blushes easily and is very kind. The first thing he helps her with is getting rid of her attic raccoon which he immediately shoots—saying it’s the only way to truly get rid of a coon because otherwise it will keep coming back.

Rebecca always fusses about money. Money only dribbles in from a famous photograph from decades ago, the one that gave this book its title. Rebecca shot the picture after one of her ex’s myriad dinner parties that she always had to clean up after. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on March 10, 2014

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Life after Life



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Oh my, what happens when a novel’s lead character dies on the fourth page? Alas, Dr. Fellowes never made it to Ursula’s birth (at least not this time around)—he was busy treating a man trampled by a bull. This novel made many “best book” of the year lists. On a cold winter’s night in 1910, a baby girl was born to the Todd family, but alas poor Ursula was born blue. Then she is born again and the family cat, Queenie, smothers her (not necessarily on purpose.) She’s born again and drowns while swimming in the sea with her older sister Pamela.

But in between all the births and deaths, (her younger brother Teddy, has his own run-ins with nasty accidents and reincarnation), a lot happens to the Todd family. Hugh, the father, is a banker, and his wife Sylvie, a rather uninvolved mother. In a style and format all her own, Kate Atkinson has reimagined the historical novel. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on February 21, 2014

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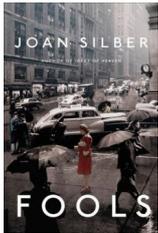
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Dorothy Day's Circle of Friends



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I've read other books by Joan Silber, and I think she is a writer who deserves a bigger audience. If you're a fan of historical novels, you will enjoy this book. It's less a novel than a collection of interrelated stories centered on friends of Dorothy Day (or were related to her inner circle). She was a famous Catholic worker who fought hard for the poor.

The first story revolves on a group of young 20-somethings in Day's New York circle about the time she was getting serious about Catholicism. (She was an adult convert.) In the title story, a young vivacious woman named Vera, loves her life surrounded by smart, interesting people, one of whom she marries. Silber captures the feel of New York City during this time, the freedom young adults experienced living together, going to political meetings, working their day jobs but also doing creative things on the side. Vera is a sign painter until her employer insults her and then eventually fires her without cause.

Although in love with her husband, Joe, Vera is drawn to Day's boyfriend, Forster, who is also the father of Day's child. A chance meeting in a park brings Vera and Forster together when they discover the corpse of a poor man who froze to death on a bench. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on February 12, 2014

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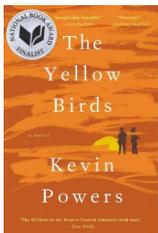
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The Yellow Birds



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I'm not one for war novels, but this little gem hooked me from the start. The writing is stellar and the characters speak and act with a naturalness that only comes from actual combat experience.

Kevin Powers, the author, is an Iraq War veteran. The story he has written about his experiences is heart-breaking. The narrator, 21 year old Private Bartle, had literary aspirations in school and received a lot of taunting from his friends, so he decided to prove his manhood by becoming a soldier. This mirrored the author's life who enlisted at age seventeen. At basic training, he meets, the pimple-faced newbie, Murph, whose mother begs Bartle to promise to bring him back from Iraq unharmed.

Of course, no experienced soldier would ever make such a promise but something about the woman reminds the private of his own mother, so he readily agrees. Big mistake. They soon get sent to Al Tafir where a series of bloody battles, including civilian deaths, jade both men. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on January 20, 2014

The Yellow Birds: A Novel

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War & Military

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