

Labradors

Uses

Labrador dogs were first bred in the Canadian province of Labrador to help fishermen with their nets. They would swim out and pull in the ropes. Because they are very intelligent they are also very popular as guide dogs and as guide dogs for the blind.

Appearance

Labrador dogs are generally very large with big heads and strong erect tails. They can be black, golden or chocolate in colour.

Temperament

Labradors are very intelligent and easy to train. They are affectionate and loyal to their owners. Because they are very calm, they are good pets to have with children.

Treatment

Labradors should not be over-fed since they have a tendency to get fat. Since they like at least two walks a day they are not good town dogs and would be happier in the country.



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Spain



Geography

Spain is Western Europe's second largest country. It is situated in the South Western corner of Europe between France and Portugal. On one side of it is the Mediterranean Sea and on the other the Atlantic Ocean.

Climate

The temperature varies between 31°C in July, and 9°C in January. The centre of Spain is generally hotter than it is on the coast. It does not rain very heavily in Spain but it is more likely to rain in Spring and Autumn.

Tourism

Spain is one of the most popular places to go on holiday. It has beautiful beaches and many hotels which are particularly popular with the British. Spain also has many beautiful old towns and a number of Roman ruins left over from when Spain was part of the Roman empire.

Industry

Spain grows many of the vegetables and fruit that we see in our supermarkets. They also make cars and tractors and many electrical goods.



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Castles



Purpose

A castle was used for many purposes. It might be a home for a medieval lord but a rich lord might own many castles and move from one to another. Often soldiers would be based there to protect the countryside, though sometimes the lord didn't trust the locals and the castle was intended to scare them. It might also be used as a courthouse, a prison or even as a storehouse for food.

Materials

Very early castles were built of wood and earth, particularly if they had to be put up quickly. Later on they were always built of stone, in blocks that were so heavy and carefully put together that a surprisingly large number survive even today.



Design

Most medieval castles were divided into two parts, the motte or keep and the bailey. The keep was always the strongest part. It was often where the lord lived himself but it was also designed so that even if invaders got into the rest of the castle the keep could still be defended. Often it was on a hill made by piling up heaps of earth. The bailey was also defended by towers and strong walls but it contained stables, store rooms and sleeping rooms for the soldiers. Later on it might contain a banqueting hall and more comfortable rooms for the lord.

Defending the castle

Strong walls made it difficult for strangers to get in but if the castle was attacked then strong gates would be shut. Many castles had moats, (big ditches full of water), all round the walls. The defenders would fire arrows onto the attackers and drop rocks and rubbish on their heads.

Sample Book Reviews

Ottoline and the Yellow Cat by Chris Riddell

The story is about a little girl called Ottoline, whose parents are collectors of just about everything. They are away most of the time so she lives with a character called Mr. Munroe, who is covered in hair and apparently came from a bog in Norway. Her parents send her lots of postcards and there are some lovely pull-out ones at the end of the book.

There are teams of people who come in to look after Ottoline – cooking, cleaning, putting her to bed etc. She goes into the laundry in the flats to do her washing one day and befriends a large bear, who pinches socks.

Fancy dogs are being dognapped and Ottoline and Mr. Munroe decide to try and solve the mystery. Mr Munroe (who looks like Cousin It in the Addams Family) tries out different 'disguises' (glasses and hats) but it is always perfectly obvious it's him by the hair!

They eventually find the dogs in a warehouse and work out that it is really a scam masterminded by a yellow cat and a parrot. The parrot sells the dogs as lapdogs, they give him information about the owner's house and then run away, after which the cat burgles the house.

In the end the dogs are returned to the owners, the cat and parrot are sent to a petting zoo by the Pet Police and Ottoline's parents return home.

Lovely characters, quirky but gentle humour, wonderful illustrations and attention to detail – a book you want to keep. I think it could be enjoyed by all ages, really, as there are things like the dog poker school picture that adults would appreciate. Although there is more text than you might expect, it's good fun and not hard to read.

Forever Family by Gill Lobel

This is a story about a young girl called Pearl and her mum, who live on a narrow boat. Her mum drinks a lot and has emotional problems, so Pearl is sent to live with a foster family. Although she is reasonably settled and makes a new friend at school, she misses her mum and her former life, and one day she is seen trying to steal a book from the school library. She is just an unhappy girl and the book reminds her of her mum. As she is so ashamed, she decides to run away.

When she is told that her mum has run away from hospital, she convinces herself that her mum is waiting on the boat for her, and makes her way there. When she arrives, there is someone else living on the boat: a children's illustrator called Amber. She has bought the boat and has also 'adopted' Pearl's cat, as she made her way back there from her new home.

Amber agrees not to tell the authorities about Pearl being with her, and takes her on a three-day journey to the special place where she is sure her mum will be waiting. Pearl becomes attached to Amber, who is very kind to her.

When they arrive at the special place, her mum, predictably, is not there. Amber then rings the Police and is promptly arrested, and Pearl is returned to her foster carer. Eventually Pearl's social worker intervenes and Amber is released without charge. She then goes on to foster Pearl and they live happily ever after...

As you might gather the book was a bit sickly sweet. The style reminded me of Enid Blyton, to be honest, but brought into the 2000's. The question is, is there a place for a 21st Century Enid Blyton? I think it would be most appropriate for 10-13 year old girls.

After the death of Alice Bennett by Rowland Molony

Sam's mum dies and this book is about how he copes with the grief that he and his family are feeling. When she was in the hospice his mum told him she would be alive in the next world. When he gets an odd text on the day she is cremated, he convinces himself it's from his mum. He starts texting messages to her and sends them to the last number his mum wrote down on a notice board in the kitchen. An Spanish lorry driver (who works for his dad and uncle's company) is curious and starts responding to the texts. In time he feels very guilty about it but feels he will hurt the boy more so he stops. Sam runs away to find his mum and eventually he meets Tony – the driver. Basically it's all a big misunderstanding, but turns out all right in the end – even though Tony ends up in hospital.

I've probably made it sound worse than it was! It is a well written and well paced story that is quite touching but not over sentimental. The cover is quite good and I think it would appeal to a fairly wide age range. Probably girls would take to it more than boys because of the subject, but if they got past the 'stigma' they might well enjoy it.

Vinny Drake is One

It's about kids thinking that the new boy in their class is a vampire. They keep going on about it, and the repetition can be a bit annoying. In a broader sense it's about acceptance and kids trying to fit in with an established group – about making judgements. The kids in the class actually bully Vinny quite a lot, though he goes along with it. The problem is that, although there is acceptance at the end, because he becomes more 'normal' physically (or they get used to him) there is nothing to suggest their behaviour is anything other than normal. As soon as he is acceptable another new boy arrives and they are going to start on him...

On the whole it's okay to read but I'm not exactly sure who it's aimed at and the moral (if it can be called that) is a confusing one!

Dead Man's Close (a Barrington Stoke book)

Well I suppose it's what it says on the tin – fiction with stacks of facts. It's all about Edinburgh and two children who go back in time and find out about the history of the city and bodysnatchers, then meet Robert Louis Stephenson. Personally I found it a bit too 'fact packed', to the point that the story seemed secondary to the historical accuracy, and I'm not sure how much people will want to know about Edinburgh if they don't live there or nearby. There's also a notebook section at the end which gives even more facts! I suppose it's trying to be a Horrible History type book, but I wasn't keen. Probably good for boys aged 8-12.

The Haunting of Death Eric

This was a weird book - like the Osbournes meets the Addams Family. It's about a rock singer who has a vampire friend who sells him her castle. The family move in and inherit the very persistent ghost of another rock singer. The only way to get rid of him, after they try many different things, is to carry out three tasks including getting a crowd of people to say they love him. Not very well written as it seemed to be trying too hard to be too many other things. I didn't want to read on at all. It had lots of strange pantomime-type tongue twisters which seemed pointless, too many clichés and bit of a lame ending. Sorry – didn't like it at all. Can't imagine why kids would either.

Hobgoblin Proxy

I started out being very confused by this book. It's the story of a girl who is a friend of a hobgoblin and therefore has some powers herself. It reminded me a bit of Lemony Snicket books in its language and style but as it went on I really enjoyed it. There was a rather unpleasant bit where the father is docking puppies' tails and ears, then she keeps the severed tails in a box and they continue to grow.

I enjoyed the style (even though it took a little while to get into) – it was fun and quirky and I think children would enjoy it. The characters are well developed and although it's fantasy, it's believable and enjoyable.

Probably suited to quite able readers as there are some odd words and phrases that take some understanding. One of those books that works on a couple of levels.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Having offered to arm-wrestle everyone else in order to read this book, I can't say I was disappointed.

The story is narrated by Death.

Liesel Meminger is a German girl of about 12 whose young brother dies in front of her by the side of the train tracks as War rages. At this time she 'steals' a book about gravedigging, while her brother is being buried, although she cannot read it. Her father was branded a communist and taken away, then her mother disappears. She is sent to a foster family in a town called Molching, outside Munich.

The matriarch of the family throws lots of insults at her and her 'papa', and sends her out to pick up the laundry that they rely on for income. As the war progresses more people cancel their order and money is short. Papa is a decorator, whose has increasingly little work, and who plays the accordion (sometimes for money in bars). He is very kind to Liesel and stays up with her when she wakes in the night with nightmares. Soon he teaches her to read, using the gravedigging book, and this is their 'little secret' that isn't shared with mama.

One day a young Jewish man called Max turns up – his father had saved papa's life and he had vowed to return the favour. They hide him in the basement, where he stays for a very long time and he paints and writes. He and Liesel become friends and he writes a book for her.

Liesel has a friend called Rudy and together they get into all sorts of mischief – including scrumping apples and 'stealing' books from the mayor's house. In actual fact the mayor's wife leaves the window open for them as she realises how important the books are to the girl.

When the Jews are marched through the town one day, papa gives one of them a piece of bread and so gets beaten by soldiers. He then fears for Max's safety, so Max leaves. Papa is sent away to work, eventually to return with a broken leg, thereby getting an office job. In the end, Max returns to Molching in another parade of Jews and Liesel gets beaten this time, for walking with him. Eventually Liesel is left alone as she is reading Max's book in the basement when the bombs fall on Himmel Street and she alone survives. She goes on to have a long and happy life though!

The book is about the relationships between the people of the town, how the war affected them and of a young girl growing up in a crazy world. It is also a book for people who love books.

It is beautiful. The language, metaphors etc are stunning and the writing style is well paced and compelling. It is funny, moving and thoughtful. It shows that not all Germans were Nazis and that they were normal people struggling with things that were outside their control.

In terms of being a children's read – it has a number of insults and swear words, though I don't think they are used gratuitously. Obviously it is quite a long book and the theme could be considered difficult. I would have said that it would be appropriate for about 15+?

2 Power – The Korski Code by Pete Johnson

This is an odd book. The story is about twins who don't really get on. They live in a grotty hotel with the aunt and uncle as their parents were killed in a car crash. They suddenly realise that they can communicate telepathically with each other and, judging by the blurb, they are going to go on to have a series of adventures. They also get 'superhuman' powers (although they are not really that exciting – they just run faster and have extra strength, now and again).

The storyline was totally unconvincing and I didn't feel anything for the two characters at all. There are also strange cartoons throughout, which are completely pointless.

The story is basically about how the children want to make a fortune and so go looking for buried treasure. They find a pair of glasses and apparently the prescription for these gives map coordinates of stolen jewels – hmm...

There is a kidnapped professor and a bad guy with lots of aftershave. By the end of the book they have solved the mystery and become heroes, so their aunt and uncle are a little bit nicer and also they get to keep a scruffy dog they found.

Maybe it's a kid thing or maybe it's just not a very good book.

The Book of Story Beginnings by Kristin Kladstrup

This book took me several goes to get into, but, once I did, it was quite an absorbing book as the story kept the reader's interest.

Unfortunately, when you try and explain the story, it sounds far more naff than it actually was to read. There's a lot of family and relationships stuff as a fairly obvious subtext – just because you see people arguing, it doesn't mean they don't love each other and can't work things out.

A young girl's great-aunt Lavonne dies, leaving her family a house in Iowa. There's a mystery surrounding Oscar, Lavonne's brother, who disappeared without trace nearly 100 years before. Lavonne says she saw him row out to sea from the house, but they are miles from the ocean. Lucy and her father find that Lavonne was interested in magic and that there is a magical book in the loft. Oscar wrote the beginning of a story in there, about a boy who imagined an ocean and rowed away. Lucy then starts a story about a girl whose father is a magician and her father transforms a cat back into a boy (Oscar, her great-uncle) and himself into a crow. There then follows a strange adventure where Oscar and Lucy go in search of her father to an island where a king loves cats and a queen loves birds and ne'er the twain shall meet!

They meet various characters along the way, but eventually find her father, change him back, reconcile the king and queen and get home. Basically, everyone lives happily ever after – well, all except Oscar who's stuck in the future...

Believe it or not, I quite liked it and would recommend it as the writing style was good. I think it would be suitable for 10+, though older teens might find it a bit silly.

Name _____

Date _____

Sample Book Report

The Bad Beginning: A Terrible Tale

The writer's title includes the name of the book he or she is reviewing.

The writer engages the reader with a question.

Do you enjoy happy endings? If so, *The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket is a book you'll want to avoid. This is a story with a bad beginning, a bad middle and a bad ending. Why would anyone want to read such a thoroughly bad book? It's all in good fun!

The writer includes the title and author of the book in the introduction.

The writer provides a brief summary of the plot.

The Bad Beginning is a story about the suffering of three orphaned siblings at the hands of their uncle, Count Olaf. Although Violet, Klaus and Sunny are the inheritors of an enormous fortune, they cannot claim the money until they are older. For now, they must live with Olaf and cook and clean for him and his terrible theater friends. Why would such a cruel character take in three orphans? He wants to steal their fortune, of course.

The writer includes details about a problem the characters face.

The writer states his or her opinion about the book.

I can't tell you how the story ends, but I can tell you what I enjoyed most about the book. Snicket makes his readers laugh and want to continue reading, even in the most terrible situations. For example, he constantly warns his reader to put down the book because nothing good could possibly come of the orphans' unfortunate situation. He writes: "It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once..." Of course, Snicket's warnings only made me even more curious to find out what would become of the siblings in the end.

The writer provides examples from the book to support his or her opinion.

The writer gives reasons to explain why he or she recommends the book.

Will Olaf's evil plot win out? Or will these three crafty kids outwit him? If you're not afraid of a little misery and a whole lot of mischief, then I recommend you read *The Bad Beginning* and find out for yourself.

The writer recommends the book.

OAP Halts Wagon with Pram

An old aged pensioner managed to stop a ten ton wagon using only a pram, making the wagon reverse for three quarters of a mile through a park.

83-year old Mrs Norah Padstow was playing with her grandson, Wayne, in Jubilee Park, Dudley, last week when she saw a ten-ton wagon attempting to take a short cut along a pedestrian-only path across the park. Furious that he was breaking the law and putting children at risk, she pushed her pram in front of the wagon and refused to move. The driver, Mr Eric Smithson, argued with her for some time but eventually had to reverse all the way back to the ring road.

Mrs Padstow told our reporter, “I knew he wouldn’t knock me down if I stood my ground. Wagon drivers keep using the park as a short cut to avoid the traffic jams in the town centre but they shouldn’t do it and one day a child will get hurt!”

Mr Smithson was not available for comment.

Headline

OAP Halts Wagon with Pram

Paragraph 1

who

what

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where

Paragraph 2

more details

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Paragraph 3

comments

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Local school falls down hole

A school caretaker arrived at school last Monday to discover that most of it was no longer there – it had fallen down a hole.

Rhos J & I School caretaker, Mr Stanley Parry, arrived at school the Monday after half term to discover that most of it had disappeared into a large crater. Teachers and pupils were held outside the school gates while the School Hall and Infant Classrooms went the same way. The school will re-open next week in temporary classrooms on the school field while an enquiry begins as to what happened.

Mr Parry, still shaken by his experience, explained, ‘There was so much coal mining round here and no one really knows where some of the older shafts were. I reckon there was one under our school and it chose last Monday to collapse.’

Head Teacher, Mr Aled Hughes said, ‘It’s just as well there weren’t any children in at the time!’

Man leaves Baby on Bus

The last bus from Bilston arrived back at the depot last Friday with an unexpected addition – a six month old baby.

Bus driver, Mr Keith O'Hara, was making a last minute check of his bus before going home for a well earned rest, when he discovered a carry cot containing a six month old baby boy resting behind the back seat. Transport Authorities were all set to contact Social Services when a distraught Tracy White, 26, arrived in search for her infant son. Her husband admitted that he had been engrossed in reading a copy of this newspaper when he noticed that he had reached his stop. In his hurry to get off the bus, he forgot that he was responsible for the baby that evening.

Chastened husband, Dave, admitted, 'Tracey wasn't very pleased with me. I don't think she'll let me forget about it for some time!'

A representative of Midland Transport said, 'It's a change from umbrellas.'