

The Sparx Reader Library

We are really proud of the books that we have selected for our ever-growing online library. We work with a range of publishers to choose high-quality books that reflect different learners' experiences. Just as importantly, these books are a great read, and many of them are award-winning. We use our data to find out what learners are reading and enjoying, and then this helps to inform our future choices for new books to add to the Sparx Reader library.



Books to make sense of the world

The Sparx Reader library has several books that the National Literacy Trust (2023) terms 'situation books'. These are books that cover real-life themes that can help learners to understand complex or confusing situations. These themes include divorce, starting a new school, and making friends. For example, 'Mud' is a coming-of-age story about a girl who moves house to live as part of a blended family with her dad, his girlfriend, and her children. To add to that, the new house is a sailing barge moored up on the mudflats of Essex.

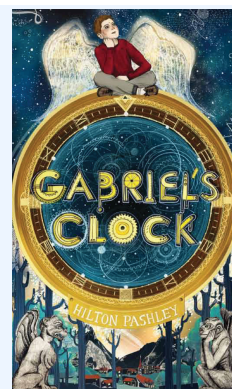
Books to go on an adventure

One of the joys of reading is that you can have exhilarating adventures anywhere in the world or in any reality. We know how much young people love adventure books, and there is a wide range of them in the Sparx Reader library. Learners can go down into the secret tunnels with Griffen (The Jewelled Jaguar); join Elinor in her flying bedroom (The Flying Bedroom); or solve crimes with Sherlock Holmes.

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I read Gabriel's Clock. It was about a child who's actually the only half angel half demon, so they go on an adventure and he eventually discovered his wings and the more I read the more I really got into it.

George, Year 7 learner



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Books to make sense of ourselves

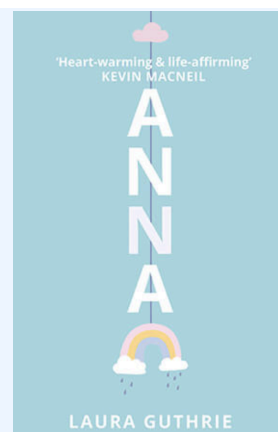
Childhood and adolescence can be a challenging and exciting time, as young people start to explore who they are and what they like. It can also be a time when young people realise they may see the world differently to others, or that others see the world differently to them. Books offer young people a window into others' thoughts and ideas, as well as a mirror for their own experiences and feelings. At Sparx Reader, we want every young person to see themselves as a reader, and so we have chosen books with themes such as neurodiversity, mental and physical health conditions, friendships and relationships.

Book recommendation: Anna by Laura Guthrie

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It's a retelling of Pollyanna, which was a 19th century text, and it's been revamped and changed for a modern audience. It delves into neurodiversity and disability and it's handled in a very sensitive way. It's approachable and accessible to many different learners.

Matt, Sparx Reader Content Creator



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Books to understand diverse voices

The Sparx Reader library includes several titles which have strong characters from ethnic minority backgrounds. For example, 'Emily Knight I am...' features the title character, Emily Knight, who learns to master her magical powers, written by British-Nigerian author Abiola Bello. The Sparx Reader library promotes diversity and inclusion by including authors and characters from different national and ethnic backgrounds. 2 in 5 children and young people say they find it hard to find books with characters and people like them (National Literacy Trust, 2022), and so in the Sparx library we wanted to find books with diverse characters doing a whole range of things, from playing football (Baller Boys), to saving the planet (Secrets of an Undercover Activist).

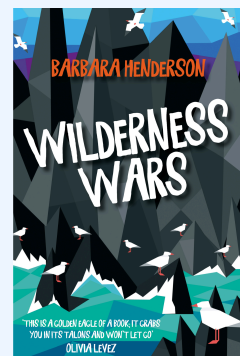
Books to understand global issues

In addition to our titles which help learners to make sense of events in their own lives, the Sparx Reader library also has books with important global themes, such as climate change, war, and refugees. For example, 'The Song that Sings Us' is a book for learners with a reading age of 12-14, and covers themes of humans' relationships with animals and caring for the natural world. 'The Blue Book of Nebo' tells the story of a boy and his mother who are living in a post-apocalyptic world following a nuclear disaster, while sensitively covering themes of family and belonging. It also won the Yoto Carnegie Medal in 2023.

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I really enjoyed Wilderness Wars. It's about a group of people that went to a Scottish island that hasn't been lived on yet, they were building a holiday resort and nature was fighting back...that was really cool. They had all sorts of issues, their storeroom was covered in rats, they kept getting issues with tidal waves and things like that. It was really interesting. The kids tried to explain that actually nature was fighting back, but the parents were like 'no'.

Cassie, Year 7 learner



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Books to visit new places

Several of the Sparx Reader books are set in countries around the world, from Korea to South Africa to Brazil. These books also span a wide range of genres, such as adventure, fantasy, historical fiction and situation books. These books can widen learners' knowledge of the world as they find out what it's like to be stranded in the jungle ('Alone'); join Aisha and her family on a road trip through Malaysia ('The Cats We Meet Along The Way'); or even make a new life on Mars ('Lost on Mars').

Book recommendation: Alone by D.J Brazier



It's about a young boy who becomes stranded on a desert island, and what I really like about it is it shows what it means to be a human being. The only thing that he has in him is the desire to survive and to go back to those simple comforts of a home and being connected with people. It's such a deeply inspiring book, I think, for anyone to just keep going through the hard times.

Emily, Sparx Reader Content Creator



Books with historical views

Some of the titles in the Sparx Reader library are books written in the 18th, 19th or early 20th century, when views about people and places were different to the ones that we hold now. This means that characterisation and descriptions of women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and people from different social classes or nationalities are described in ways that would not be appropriate now.

There is much online and offline debate about these sorts of books. Should they be banned? Should they be removed from school curricula? Should learners only be directed toward more recent books that do not contain these historical views? How should teachers, parents and librarians address these issues with children and young people?

We do not opt to censor the original content of these books and we have included a disclaimer, telling learners when they were published, and indicating that elements of the book may represent views of the time. Schools should also consider on an individual basis how they could address these issues with their learners. As Sparx Reader gives teachers visibility of what learners are reading, they are empowered to have these conversations.

Hi-Lo texts and Young Adult books

We have a selection of high-interest-age, lower-reading-age books aimed at learners who are reluctant readers or don't usually read for pleasure. These books can build reading confidence and act as a bridge to wider reading. These books may also be beneficial to learners for whom English is a second or other language. Each of these book selections includes question content designed to engage the student and maintain motivation.

Conversely, Sparx Reader offers confident readers a broad selection of books, some of which are Young Adult titles with more challenging ideas, or stories told from multiple perspectives or different timelines. The book selection includes diverse titles from award-winning authors, encouraging insight into the lives of characters with different backgrounds and stories.

References

National Literacy Trust. (Feb 2023). Library Lifeline part 12: Using situation books to support pupils and strengthen their capacity for empathy. Retrieved from: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/blog/library-lifeline-part-12-using-situation-books-to-support-pupils-and-strengthen-their-capacity-for-empathy/>