

Tales From the Reading Hub

Students at Archbishop Beck take on the reading challenge.

Students at Archbishop Beck have been reading and recommending their favorite books to one another. Challenged to read a range of different books and write a review; students across all year groups were quick to get involved.



Here are a few of the chosen reviews:

The Old Man and The Sea
By Ernest Hemmingway

A Book Review by Isaac Bennett Year 11

'The old man and the sea' is a book set in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Havana; a place whose water is rich in opportunity to catch abundant fish and dolphins. The plot is about a decaying old man named Santiago who hasn't caught a fish in eighty-four days- causing him to be on the edge of starvation. Santiago's starvation leads him to have to rely on Manolin (a young boy, who's learning the practice of fishing). In an attempt to break his unlucky streak Santiago ventures past the regular fishing area into the sea where he tries to catch the largest fish he's ever encountered.

I would recommend The Old Man and The Sea as it is an elegantly crafted novella which earned Hemmingway the Nobel Prize in literature. The Old Man and The Sea teaches us about the importance of respecting our opponent in competition whilst still being able to compete with them without hesitation and that humans must respect nature whilst having to harm it to survive. The Old Man and The Sea also makes an important comment on our hopes and aspirations through laborious times; the hope for a distant paradise is common throughout many people, which Hemmingway shows with great emotion and subtlety in the character of Santiago. Furthermore, Hemmingway's writing poignantly captures the dreams and reminiscing of a tired old fisher; making Santiago a relatable and compelling character as he strives to do the only thing he knows how to do-fish!

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig

A book review by Jessica Bilby

The Midnight Library is a book written by British author Matt Haig which follows protagonist Nora Seed, a young woman filled with regrets, as she explores the infinite possibilities of life. After finding herself stuck with many regrets and losing what she feels is all she has left, Nora decides to end it all and, on doing so, wakes up in the midnight library, a place between life and death. Surrounded by books containing the endless possible lives she could've lived, Nora is given a chance to undo her biggest regrets and find the perfect life for her.

The main themes throughout The Midnight Library include choice and regret, philosophy and the meaning of life. This novel discusses choice and regrets through the concept of a library, filled with parallel lives, as well as through the thoughts and feelings of the main character. The meaning of life is a theme also repeated throughout the Midnight Library as Nora Seed searches to find a worthwhile life through terms often influenced by Western philosophers.

I found the concept of this book very intriguing and enjoyed that it included 'real-life' themes and problems. At points, this book goes into a lot of depth which I appreciate but found to be a little repetitive by the middle of the book, when an idea was already clear but kept being developed further. I also thought that a lot of time was spent developing and focusing on the plot and not on the emotional development of Nora, which overall took away from the realness of her character. I liked that the author drew from personal experiences when writing this novel as I believe it makes it a more

relatable book to read. Overall, I enjoyed The Midnight Library and would recommend it to both teens and adults.

Clockwork Angel by Cassandra Clare
A book review by Keira O'Byrne Year 10

Clockwork Angel is a novel in the Shadowhunters series. When Tessa Gray crosses the ocean to find her brother, she arrives in England during Queen Victoria's reign, and something terrifying awaits her in London's Downworld, where vampires, warlocks, and other supernatural beings stalk the gas lit streets.

The main characters of this book include a group of teenagers; Tessa Gray, William Herondale, James [Jem] Carstairs (My personal favourite), Charlotte and Henry Branwell, Sophie Collins and Jessamine Lovelace. One of my favourite parts of this book is the way in which the characters interact with each other. The strong love and friendship that Will and Jem have, is amazing and even though I'm not a massive fan of love triangles, this book does it well with both Will and Jem falling for Tessa. As the two boys are also best friends and don't want to see the other unhappy, falling for Tessa is complicated.

Clockwork Angel is the first book in the trilogy written by the fantasy author Cassandra Clare, one of my personal favourite writers as I love her Shadowhunter books. This book is set in a fantasy world filled with any type of mythical creature you could think of, from warlocks to vampires. The centre focus of this book is finding out who Tessa Gray is. Tessa is an American who comes over to England to look for her brother only to be misguided by two old ragged witches, who lead her to an old house, letting her believe her brother is there. The witches however, have ulterior motives as they believe Tessa has magical powers that can transform them. Throughout the book, she has an identity crisis never knowing whether her face is actually hers or just someone else's. Yet Tessa with the help of her friends overcomes it and strengthens her powers.

When I first read the book, I was shocked at how much more I liked it over Cassandra Clare's other books (even though I love them too). I have recently finished the trilogy and the epilogue of the last one is extremely heart-breaking as Cassandra knows how to write a good ending. In all the instalments she leaves the reader on a cliff-hanger. When I finished Clockwork Angel I immediately picked up the second one and started to read it. Yet if I was going to be critical, it would be over the fact that I remembered the characters more than the overall plot but it was still amazing!

The Starlight Watchmaker by Lauren James

A book review by Evelyn Cooney Year 8

The Starlight watchmaker is a fantasy tale about a school where the wealthiest students from all over the galaxy come to an elite academy to be educated. The book is a thrilling novel by Lauren James. It shares the story of a lonely watcher maker who meets a duke from another planet when

asked to fix his time travel watch only to find the dangerous energy has been stolen. I really like this book because it is exciting and the fantasy features are amazing. I also love that no one is the same and there is an endless world of possibilities. To conclude, I would recommend this book to anyone aged 10-13 and anyone who likes fantasy fiction.

Champions, All by Marc Collins

A book review by Harry Vaughan

In this novel a fearless commander leads a squad of enhanced super soldiers alongside a female unit to defend an evil tyrant in the year 40,000. For me, it's an interesting tale with lots of excitement and action. I would definitely recommend this book to a friend and I think that they would enjoy it as I thought it was a real page turner. I would rate it 9/10!

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

A book Review by Mia Owens Year 7

My favourite book is The Hunger games. I like it because it is a book that builds up suspense then the end product is amazing. It is also packed with action which I love. It is a dystopian fiction novel which makes me love it even more. I would definitely recommend this book.

Alex Rider – Storm Breaker by Anthony Horwitz

A book review by Liam Russell Year 8

In the book Alex Rider has discovered that his uncle is a spy. He is then recruited by the agency after his uncle is killed. Alex then goes undercover as another child where he goes to the home and factory of Yassen Gregorovich who wants to make a computer called "Storm Breaker". However, when he puts them online a deadly disease spreads. This is the moment when Alex has to come to the rescue. Alex does manage to succeed in his mission but he nearly dies in the process. At the end of the book, Alex returns to his home where the house keeper looks after him. I really enjoyed this book as it is filled with action and tension. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes fiction thrillers.

If you are reading a book or have been particularly impressed with a book you have read recently, why not write a review that can be shared here. The new Reading Hub has new books each month and we are always looking for ideas for new books to add to our library.