



**THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AND RESOURCE CENTRE PRESENT THE
SUMMER READING CHALLENGE 2026**

For students entering Year 8 in September 2026

Dear Reader,

We are now launching our Summer Reading Challenge 2026. The Summer Reading Challenge is designed to promote independent reading and exploration of literature from a range of genres.

Independent reading has been identified as the greatest marker of academic success in education. While we often feel as though there is little time for reading, it has incredible benefits, both in terms of our knowledge and skills, but also in terms of our emotional enrichment as well.

All pupils entering Year 8 in September 2026 are required to read at least three of the books that are recommended here. They should be available at local libraries and can perhaps be ordered there. We also know that some students may wish to swap and share titles with each other.

We have compiled this list from various sources, including new titles, recommendations and student voices. Sharing reading with others is also great practice, which is why we are asking you to read several from this list. We hope that you like the range of books on offer this year and look forward to hearing which ones were selected and enjoyed.

Which books do you plan to read?



RMS VISITING WRITER: ABIOLA BELLO

We were so excited to welcome Abiola Bello to RMS this year to present a range of her novels and speak about her life as both a writer and the founder of publishing company *Hashtag Press*, which works to give a platform for traditionally underrepresented writers. For our Year 7 group, Abiola spoke about writing for young people, including her series of *The Breakfast Club Adventures* (written in collaboration with Marcus Rashford). She is also the author of the popular Emily Knight series, in which young superhero Emily has to take on figures from the warrior world. Many students also opted to pick up 'Super Sunny Murder Club', which is a collaborative work that features Abiola Bello as a short story writer.

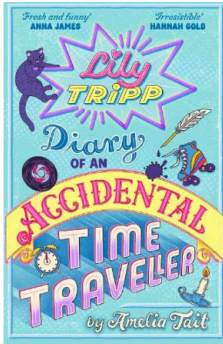
RMS VISITING WRITER: ELLE MCNICOLL

Elle McNicoll was the first of numerous writers who visited RMS this academic year. Elle McNicoll spoke energetically about her experiences as a neurodiverse children's writer who wants to ensure that neurodiversity becomes increasingly more well-represented in books for young people. You are invited to read any of Elle McNicoll's books, but two that we spoke about were *A Kind of Spark*, which is now a popular TV series. Addie, an autistic teenager, decides that it is important for her Scottish town to honour the women who were put on trial for witchcraft centuries ago, as she realises that they were likely not witches at all, but other women with neurodifferences. Her more recent novel *Wish You Were Her* tells the story between film star Allegra and her rivalry with bookseller Jonah. Then, Allegra begins to share emails with an anonymous bookseller, so different from Jonah, and she begins to fall for the person on the other end of the computer...



RMS VISITING WRITER: AMELIA TAIT

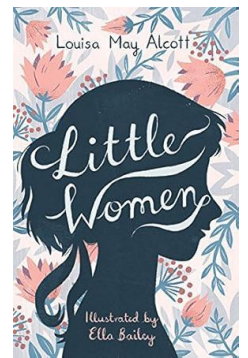
Amelia Tait visited RMS at the end of the academic year as one of our visiting authors for the National Year of Reading. She has been a freelance writer for many years, but visited us to promote her debut children's novel - *Lilly Tripp's Diary of an Accidental Time Traveller*. This is a light-hearted tale of teenager Lilly Tripp who is thrown into a different historical time period every new year. Each time Lilly experiences a new period of time - whether it is Ancient Rome or the 1970s, she finds that her family, best friend, her crush have all also arrived - but each time - they always believe that they have lived in the past. Unfortunately for Lilly, each time period also contains her arch-rival and Lilly is forced to navigate teenage complications while battling with the challenges of continuously adapting her whole life to a new era.



OUR CLASSIC READ: LITTLE WOMEN BY LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

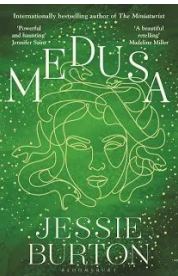
This is one of the best-loved children's classics of all time (and so moving that in F.R.I.E.N.D.S Joey Tribbiani has to put it in the freezer because it upsets him too much) and its impact has lasted throughout the last 150+ years.

Little Women is the story of four sisters, growing up in the colonial US in the nineteenth century. The four are united as a family, but all four are extremely different personalities. There is Meg, the mother figure of the family, Jo, the independent aspiring writer, Beth, who is devoted to caring for others, and Amy, the youngest and most precocious of the family. Readers throughout time have fallen in love with the March sisters and their journeys and adventures.



MEDUSA: THE GIRL BEHIND THE MYTH – JESSIE BURTON

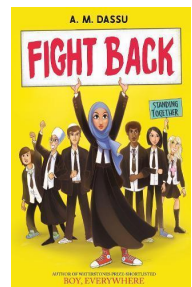
The myth of Medusa – with snakes for hair and eyes that can turn one to stone – has been passed down for thousands of years, and is as powerful a tale now as it has ever been. But in this version of the tale, the story of Medusa is flipped so that young readers are introduced to her in a completely new light. Jessie Burton's retelling of the ancient Greek myth is incredibly powerful. We see Medusa not as the villain of the tale, but the wronged and mistreated victim of cruelty. It is a book that challenges us to question the versions of events that we are told and to begin to understand the different sides to any story. Jessie Burton brings one of the most popular characters in mythology back to life once again for a new telling of her tale.

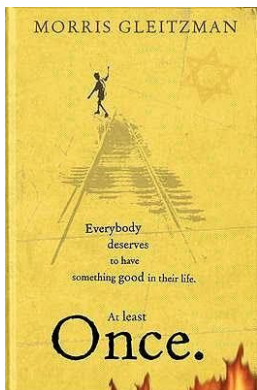


FIGHT BACK – A M DASSU

When a terrorist attack horrifies Aaliyah's community, she finds that the world in which she has always felt safe has changed overnight. As the community responds to the horror of the attack, Aaliyah starts to realise that people see her differently – just because of her religion.

Soon, Aaliyah finds herself the target of bullying and insensitive comments and she decides to respond. She begins to wear a hijab and, supported by her friends, Aaliyah starts to fight back against the Islamophobia that is spreading through her community by showcasing her true values. *Fight Back* has been on our reading challenge for a few years now, but has always remained a very popular text.





BOOKS ABOUT BOOKS - *ONCE* - MORRIS GLEITZMAN

This novel is the start of Morris Gleitzman's seven-part series focused on Felix, a young Jewish child growing up in Poland during the second-world war. Felix's parents are bookkeepers and, when the Nazi occupation of Poland begins, they hurry to get Felix to safety in a Catholic orphanage, hoping that he will be able to hide there.

However, when the Nazis arrive at the orphanage and begin burning books, Felix decides to flee and try and find his parents again. He runs away, meeting Zelda, newly orphaned after the death of her parents. Together, Felix and Zelda attempt to navigate their way through the most dangerous of journeys, confronting the unimaginable horror of the Holocaust. It is a heartbreaking reading experience, but an award-winning children's novel about a devastating period in the history of humanity.

SUPPORT WITH READING - *ESCAPE* - SOPHIE MCKENZIE

This high-tension thriller is recommended for those who require additional support with reading and literacy. It is short, with dyslexia-friendly font and layout. The aim of Barrington Stoke books is to provide age-appropriate reading content to readers that require a little more support with reading.

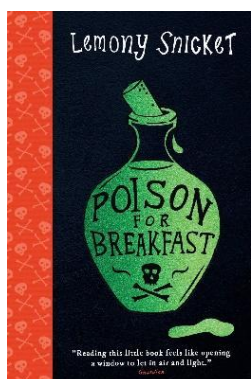
Bernice is excited about visiting a sea-life sanctuary on a school trip when it turns into a nightmare. When her friends break the rules and behave recklessly, they and Bernice find themselves plunged into the freezing waters in Shark Bay. Bernice's love of the ocean and marine life might be the only thing that can save them as the sharks come ever closer.



POISON FOR BREAKFAST - LEMONY SNICKET

Mrs Fryer has read *Poison for Breakfast* with an RMS reading club who then clamoured for a similar book as it was so fun. The trouble is that even Mrs Fryer, with her extensive knowledge of YA literature, has struggled to find another because, *Poison for Breakfast* is a uniquely funny and darkly comic novel.

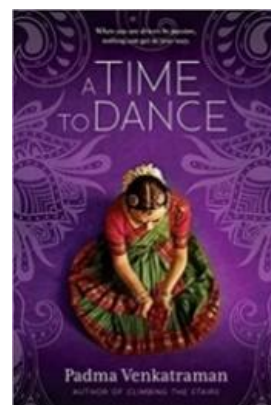
Written by Lemony Snicket, most famous for *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, this is the tale of the day that he received a note to say that his breakfast had been poisoned. Instead of panicking, he decides to try and find out exactly how and why his breakfast was poisoned. Through his investigation, he begins to think all the mysteries of life and death and the questions we may have. It is an easy read – but one that is likely to make you laugh, and want to read it over and over again!



A TIME TO DANCE - PADMA VENKATRAMAN

Padma Venkatraman is the author of *The Bridge Home*, which we have used as our Year 7 novel this year. We love her writing and her characters - they are strong, determined and resilient.

While *The Bridge Home* is a prose text, *A Time to Dance* is a verse novel, meaning that it is written in poetry. It tells the story of Veda. Veda is an incredibly talented and passionate classical Indian dancer who evokes the beauty of bharatanatyam dancing. However, when she is involved in a car crash that leaves her leg amputated, Veda does not know what her future holds for her. She is soon sure of one thing though – that she will uphold her dream to dance, no matter what. An inspirational story about following your dreams.



2026 NEW RELEASE - *ALWAYS ANGEL* - KIMBERLY WHITTAM

Angel has never seemed able to cope at school. Somehow, even though she wants to do well, she finds it difficult to control herself. She is in detention all the time and can't seem to stop herself being rude to her teachers and to others.

Really, Angel wants to be good - and to do well at school. But now, everyone just seems to expect her to mess up all the time. How can you do well if everyone thinks you are going to fail? She just can't seem to stop making terrible decisions. Then the school decides to run a baking competition and Angel wonders whether this could be her chance to make a difference. This is a new release from writer Kimberly Whittam, author of the popular novel *Quiet Storm*.

