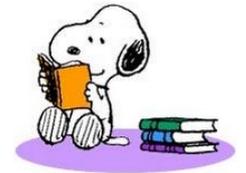




# RGS: Bonkers About Books!

February 2022



I hope you all had a good half-term and managed to enjoy plenty of reading in amongst everything else you've been doing. I have to admit that I spent a good deal of the holiday curled up with a mug of hot chocolate and a book or two - when it's windy and rainy, I become an indoor girl!

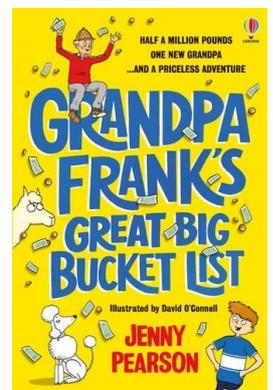
I'm also pleased to see that authors are beginning to head back into book stores and schools again, and it was lovely to see that some of you have ventured to Waterstones in Durham to meet authors. I am thrilled to be able to start organising in-school author events again and have news coming in the next few days!

As ever, I'm always keen to know what you are reading so feel free to tell me when you see me round school and why not write a review for the next edition of the news letter?

Happy reading! **Mrs W**

## Grandpa Frank's Great Big Bucket List - Jenny Pearson

Frank Davenport was named after his father, his grandfather, and probably his great-grand father; however, unlike his father, he doesn't spend his days involved in dodgy deals and running from people he owes money to. He spends his time on his own as he's just moved schools (after the family had to relocate quickly to avoid the loan sharks). He isn't looking forward to the summer holidays with no friends to spend it with, that is until Mr Foster from J L Winterson solicitors turns up on the doorstep with news: Nora Louise Davenport (the step-grandmother he didn't know he had) has left the sum of £462,000 to Frank Davenport. Frank's dad is incredibly excited until Mr Foster announces that the money has been left to Frank John Davenport and, in the blink of an eye, the eleven-year-old has become incredibly rich. He has also been entrusted to use the money to look after the grandfather (Frank), he didn't know he had. Whilst his parents argue about the mistake (they believe it should have gone to Frank James Davenport), Frank makes his way to Autumnal Leaves Residential Home where his grandpa lives. There he finds a man who is miserable and obviously still missing his dead wife. Frank decides that the only way to help his grandfather is to create a bucket list of things for them to do together. But can Frank bring some happiness back into to his grandfather's life and can he bring his father and grandfather back together again?



Grandpa Frank is a grumpy man who is clearly mourning his wife and doesn't particularly relish the intrusion from this eleven-year-old who doesn't seem to accept that his grandpa just wants to be left alone to be miserable in his grief. His innocence in his ideas and his approach to the bucket list project is perfect and leaves his grandpa with no choice but to get involved - sometimes I wish the innocence we had in our childhood didn't have to leave us.

In amongst the laughs and the adventures, Jenny manages to perfectly weave some weighty and often difficult topics: dementia, family conflict and financial troubles are all issues that can have a big impact on children's lives and the book will help them to make sense of them.

With illustrations from David O'Connell, **Grandpa Frank's Great Big Bucket List** is a book for children of all ages, for those who are young and those who are still young at heart. It's a book for those who need to laugh and a book for those who need to remember how to live again - in short, it's a book that everyone will enjoy.

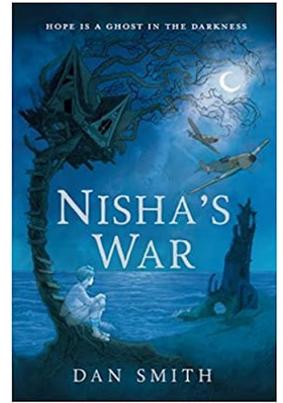
## Free Books!

Many thanks to Mrs Browne in Senior School for sharing this link below with me which provides free access to ebooks via a library membership: [eBooks, eAudiobooks and Digital Magazines | Newcastle City Council](#)



## Nisha's War - Dan Smith

It's 1942 and WWII is raging. Nisha and her amma (her mum) have managed to escape the Japanese invasion of Singapore and have landed in Northumberland, far from their home in Malaya. They have arrived on the small island off Northumberland, Barrow Island, the childhood home of Nisha's father (although he has not returned with them). They are to move into the family home to live with Nisha's grandmother. However, as soon as they arrive, Nisha's amma is struck down with malaria and becomes dangerously ill, leaving Nisha to get used to life on the island alone. Everything is different for Nisha and her formidable grandmother imposes several rules on her, which include never going near The Weeping Tree which lies on the edge of the grounds of the house; however, when she meets Twig at the tree, and he tells her he can help to keep her amma and papa safe, she jumps at the chance. She just has to find three treasures and bring them to the The Weeping Tree before the full moon turns from gold to silver. Now all Nisha needs to work out is what the treasure are and how to get them in time.



The book starts with Mother and Daughter arriving at the station having clearly had a long and harrowing journey to reach this point. As the reader, you want to know more about them but Dan keeps them slightly at a distance by withholding their names, almost reflecting the feeling of detachment, strangeness and separation they must be feeling - it made me instantly want to know more about them. The writing is immediately gorgeous and slightly haunting, and this continues throughout the book.

Nisha has clearly been through a traumatic event in the run-up to their arrival at Barrow House and often finds it difficult to speak. She is so far from home in a place that couldn't be more different from the warm, aromatic life she lived in Malaya. She finds everything cold and grey, including the old house itself which has an eerie quality to it, from the rattling windows to the sudden coldness and the feeling that someone is there. She is quiet and timid at first, but family is clearly everything to her and she is desperate to do anything she can to help her mum get better and to ensure that her father makes it to England. She has an inner strength that seems to creep up on her, whether it's when encountering the formidable and very spiky Mrs Barrow (she is incredibly closed off and clearly dealing with something) or whilst being talked about in the village when she is getting the shopping for Mrs F, the housekeeper - her Anglo-Indian heritage is not something the locals are used to seeing. She is a character I was invested in from the very first page, and I have to admit that I am still thinking about her, even though I have finished reading the book.

I also very much liked the use of 'Nisha's Truths' or her diary, as a way to tell the back story. Interspersed throughout the book, they help to explain Nisha and Amma's journey and almost act as a story within the story - I found myself hanging on both plots which are obviously linked and woven together.

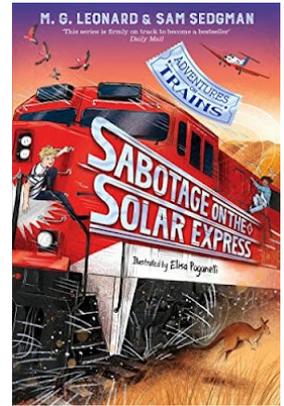
Living in Newcastle, seeing where Dan sets his books is always something I look forward to and **Nisha's War** was no exception. A small island off the coast of Northumberland, accessible via the causeway at low tide and cut off at other times... I knew exactly where they were and delighted in being able to picture it as the descriptions were revealed on the page. I now plan to head up there over the Christmas holidays to follow in Nisha's footsteps! I know I won't find The Weeping Tree but I shall imagine it perched precariously on the edge of the island.

The atmosphere Dan creates is evident from the very beginning and his use of description helps to build the suspense and the feeling of the unknown that lurks. The warmth of characters such as Mrs F and Joy are offset by the coldness of the house and the ghostly, almost eerie feeling that can make the hairs on your arms stand on end at times. And the ending ... Oh wow! utterly gripping and unputdownable!

I always find that the sign of a good book is one that invokes emotions in the reader, and oh boy did this do that! I was completely invested in everybody and will openly admit that I cried at times. **Nisha's War** is a glorious triumph of a book and, hands down, Dan's best book yet. It's a powerful and emotive story with love and family at its heart. I guarantee it will make you think and that you won't be ready to say goodbye to the characters, or the island, when you reach the final page.

## Sabotage on the Solar Express—MG Leonard & Sam Sedgman

Hal and his uncle Nat are back in **Sabotage on the Solar Express**, which is set in Australia as Hal and Nat have been invited to be part of the launch of the Solar Express, the train that won a global competition to build a futuristic train run by tech entrepreneur and millionaire August Reza. We first met August and his daughter, Marianne on The California Comet and Hal isn't thrilled to see her again, as they didn't leave things on the best terms when they parted ways in America. However, Marianne is convinced that something feels wrong about the trip and this is backed-up when an elaborate and expensive model of the Rocket is delivered to August but nobody seems to know who it is from. Marianne is determined and eventually convinces Hal to help her discover exactly what is happening. The day of the maiden voyage dawns and everybody is excited and raring to go. After the press conference, the guests, including Boaz (the teenage designer of the train), the Rezas, and Hal and Nat, board the Express but the journey is barely under way when they discover that the train has been sabotaged! Suddenly, Hal and Marianne have to discover who has done this as well as try to stop the train before disaster strikes. Can they do it or is everybody on board in jeopardy?

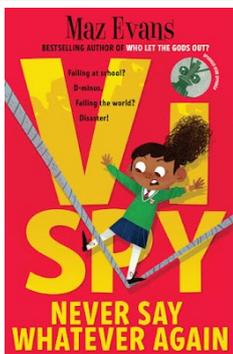


Part of what I love about this series is the setting: both the different countries visited as well as the trains. I love to read the descriptions of the landscapes but am especially enamoured by the images created of the trains (and Elisa Paginelli's illustrations only help to enhance this). The book makes me want to take a journey on a similar train; to enjoy long lunches with unmissable views of wonderful landscapes and to wake-up in a completely different place - the dangerous situations Hal and Nat find themselves I would be happy not to encounter but they definitely make the books incredibly exciting! On a cold, dull January day, it was wonderful to be able to imagine I was zooming through Australia, with the sun beating in through the windows!

Hal and Nat make a perfect duo and I love the relationship that has built between them; there is a mutual respect between them that is based on trust and the fact that Hal is a child isn't an issue. In **Sabotage on the Solar Express**, I feel that Hal takes more of a lead than Nat and I like the slight change here. Hal's notebook and illustrations remain key in his ability to discover what is going on and tie in the book's illustrations perfectly.

I have to say that I think **Sabotage on the Solar Express** has to be the most gripping of the series so far and I found it impossible to put the book down (I was going to go for a run this afternoon but was far too gripped on the plot to even contemplate getting changed, let alone leave the house!). The plot moves quickly, especially once they board the train and I still hadn't guessed who the saboteur was when Hal came to make his announcement! I don't want to give anything away so I won't say anything more but ... wow! Hold onto your seat with this book as you are in for one heck of a journey!

## Vi Spy Never Say Whatever Again - Maz Evans

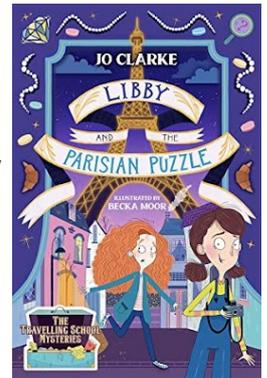


For those of you who remember me reading Vi Spy to you last year during lockdown, you'll be pleased to hear that she's back! Vi is studying at Rimmington Hall but she isn't doing very well, and unless things improve, she runs the risk of being thrown out at the end of the year (this is made worse by the fact that Russell is doing exceptionally well). Vi decides that she has no other choice but to try to successfully track down Umbra and finally reveal who Umbra is. But can she do what she couldn't do in book 1? Will Umbra's identity be revealed? Will Vi succeed at Rimmington Hall? Will Easter and Robert ever be able to be together without fighting? You'll just have to read the book to find out!

Action-packed, fast-paced and laugh-out-loud funny, with an ending that will leave you immediately wanting to get your hands on book 3 (even though I don't think it's actually been fully written yet!) so you can see how the series ends. My early copy of the book has already caused huge excitement in school and now you can get your hands on your very own copy!

## Libby and the Parisian Puzzle - Jo Clarke

Libby's mum is heading to Ecuador for work and, for the first time, she is going alone so Libby is being sent to Paris to stay with her Aunt Agatha at the school she runs. Travelling by train, Libby knows that her Aunt will be meeting her at the Gare du Nord, however, when she arrives, she is nowhere to be seen; fortunately, the lady in the carriage with her turns out to be Miss Browne who is due to start at the school as a teacher. The pair share a taxi and life at the boarding school begins. Daily life comprises trips to the major landmarks as well as projects and art activities. However, following one of these excursions, her aunt is arrested on suspicion of stealing a valuable jewelled brooch and it's up to Libby and her new roommate, Connie, to discover the truth of the theft before it's too late.



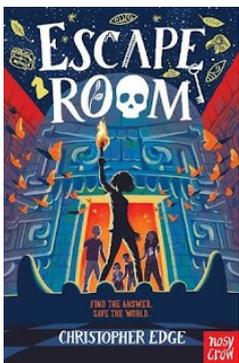
Set in Paris, **Libby and the Parisian Puzzle** did not disappoint when it came to leading me around one of my favourite cities! From a trip on a baton mouche to a day at Le Louvre, I felt as if I was wandering around the city with Libby and Connie. And oh, the food! Jo certainly knows how to make your mouth water! With frequent descriptions of hot chocolate, pastries and macarons, I can guarantee you will be craving a sugar fix at several points during the book (you may want to stock up before you start reading!). I love Paris and have been trying to head back for some time but, after reading this, I feel like I've had a fix to keep me going until I can head back in person.

Libby is wonderful character and you get to know her from the very first page. Naturally curious and delightfully chatty, she loves a mystery and is hooked on her Isobel Investigates books. She's nervous about being separated from her mum but loves the idea of being in Paris with her aunt (who wouldn't be excited about being at a boarding school in Paris where you spend your days exploring the city?!) and settles into the school quickly. This is undoubtedly helped by the arrival of her roommate, Connie, who appears nervous when we first meet her and has clearly been sent to the school in order to become more ladylike. Fortunately, Connie has other ideas and she and Libby become firm friends who are united in their quest to get to the bottom of the jewellery theft.

I should also mention the school: Mousedale's Travelling School. Imagine being part of a school where you move to a different place every term? Their time in Paris is spent visiting the major landmarks and experiencing life in the most beautiful city - every day would be an adventure. Different for Libby as she has never been to school but also nowhere near the same as school-life as we know it, I can only imagine how many readers will long to enrol at Mousedale's as they read the book, and I'm already excited to know where they will be next term!

**Libby and the Parisian Puzzle** is a perfect blend of mystery and adventure, combined with a great feast of French delicacies and lashings of hot chocolate! This is a series that is going to be a huge hit!

## Escape Room - Christopher Edge



As a reward for working so hard, Ami's dad books her into an evening at the ultimate Escape Room. Once she meets her teammates, Adjoa, Oscar, Ibrahim and Min, they begin what they believe is a game. However, after The Host tells them they've been chosen to save the world and they need to find the Answer, the puzzles and challenges the team face show them that this is so much more than a game. Can they navigate their way through the levels to find the Answer before it's too late?

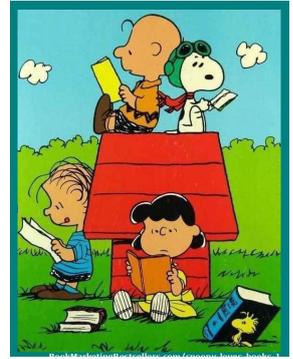
Ami is a strong, self-assured and determined character who will stop at nothing to power-on through the rooms in order to beat the game. She truly is unstoppable and her resilience is to be admired.

The setting, and the various rooms through which the team must travel are vivid and exciting, not to mention often rather scary! From dusty libraries to a deserted shopping centre with extinct animals, this is a truly imaginative experience and you will undoubtedly find yourself feeling like you are alongside Ami and the team in amongst the action.

## How can I help my child with their reading?

Reading needs to be seen as a fun activity and is one that the family can all do together.

I often suggest to parents that curling up in pyjamas with a mug of hot chocolate is a great way to get children reading, as is having 'family reading time' when everybody sits and reads together (either their own books or reading aloud to each other). Find a favourite place for reading (mine is on the sofa or in bed!) and make a regular time for reading - building the routine will help to build enjoyment and confidence.



Here are some of my top tips:

- Before beginning the book, have a chat about the title, the book cover, the illustrations – what do you think the theme of the book will be? What does the picture on the front cover tell us? What does the title suggest?
- Modelling good reading is as important at home as it is in school – this includes enjoyment of reading as well as fluent and expressive reading and intonation – so it's important for parents to read to children. Reading aloud to your child allows them to hear correct use of punctuation, italics and bold type as well as expression, flow and intonation.
- When listening to your child read aloud, encourage them to use the punctuation (take a breath at full-stops, to pause at commas) as this helps them to slow down which, in turn, helps them retain what has happened in the book. Remember though, that reading isn't always about decoding a passage; developing fluent reading which helps children to read accurately is also important.
- When children come across a word they do not understand, you can help by modelling your thought process (eg: reading around the sentence, going back to the previous sentence to guess what it could mean. Using a dictionary to look-up the word is also good modelling).
- You can also check understanding of what your child has read (Can you tell me what happened in that chapter? Why do you think \*\*\* did that? What do you think will happen next? Why do you think this?)

## What should my child read next?

In short, books they think they will enjoy but should be aiming to read a variety of different fiction genres, as well as non-fiction and poetry. Avoid giving children books that are too advanced for them as they won't enjoy the book and will be more reluctant to read it. If in doubt, look at the Recommended Reading List for your child's year or ask in school as we are always happy to make suggestions.

**In school, we use reading VIPERS  
in comprehension and reading.  
The question ideas below can be used at home  
as well as in school**

## Reading Vipers

**V**ocabulary  
**I**nfer  
**P**redict  
**E**xplain  
**R**etrieve  
**S**ummarise



## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Vocabulary

Find and explain the meaning of words in context

#### Example questions

- What do the words ..... and ..... suggest about the character, setting and mood?
- Which word tells you that.....?
- Which keyword tells you about the character/setting/mood?
- Find one word in the text which means.....
- Find and highlight the word that is closest in meaning to.....
- Find a word or phrase which shows/suggests that.....



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## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Infer

Make and justify inferences using evidence from the text.

#### Example questions

- Find and copy a group of words which show that...
- How do these words make the reader feel? How does this paragraph suggest this?
- How do the descriptions of ..... show that they are .....
- How can you tell that.....
- What impression of ..... do you get from these paragraphs?
- What voice might these characters use?
- What was .... thinking when.....
- Who is telling the story?



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## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Predict

Predict what might happen from the details given and implied.

#### Example questions

- From the cover what do you think this text is going to be about?
- What is happening now? What happened before this? What will happen after?
- What does this paragraph suggest will happen next? What makes you think this?
- Do you think the choice of setting will influence how the plot develops?
- Do you think... will happen? Yes, no or maybe? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.



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## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Explain

- Explain how content is related and contributes to the meaning as a whole.
- Explain how meaning is enhanced through choice of language.
- Explain the themes and patterns that develop across the text.
- Explain how information contributes to the overall experience.

#### Example questions

- Why is the text arranged in this way?
- What structures has the author used?
- What is the purpose of this text feature?
- Is the use of ..... effective?
- The mood of the character changes throughout the text. Find and copy the phrases which show this.
- What is the author's point of view?
- What affect does ..... have on the audience?
- How does the author engage the reader here?
- Which words and phrases did ..... effectively?
- Which section was the most interesting/exciting part?
- How are these sections linked?



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## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Retrieve

Retrieve and record information and identify key details from fiction and non-fiction.

#### Example questions

- How would you describe this story/text? What genre is it? How do you know?
- How did...?
- How often...?
- Who had...? Who is...? Who did...?
- What happened to...?
- What does..... do?
- How ..... is .....
- What can you learn from ..... from this section?
- Give one example of.....
- The story is told from whose perspective?



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## KS2 Reading Vipers

### Summarise

Summarise the main ideas from more than one paragraph

#### Example questions

- Can you number these events 1-5 in the order that they happened?
- What happened after .....
- What was the first thing that happened in the story?
- Can you summarise in a sentence the opening/middle/end of the story?
- In what order do these chapter headings come in the story?



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