



## **My Favorite Children's and Young-Adult Books Eighty-One Masterpieces**

**by Gretchen Rubin**

I'm a huge fan of children's literature and young-adult literature. I read these books as a child, and I continue to read them as an adult. In fact, I'm in three—that's right, three—book groups where we discuss kidlit. I write about my love for this literature in my books *The Happiness Project* and *Happier at Home*.

People often ask me for recommendations, so I've made a list of my favorite books. *I love all these books*. Many of these books are towering classics of world literature; some are obscure and out of print.

I chose only books that I love so much that I could carry on a detailed conversation about them without re-reading them—and I eliminated any book written by my sister or a friend. I cheated by listing only one book by an author, even if that author has written many books that belong on the list—say, Elizabeth Enright or C. S. Lewis.

This list is weighted to books that I read in childhood, because I've loved those books the longest. But of this list, I will say—every book is a great, *great* book.

Of course, this list reflects my taste. You'll perceive that I love magic, and I have a real taste for a strong moral lesson, even when it's laid on pretty thick (see, e.g., #2, #70).

Now, why eighty-one? Eighty-one turned out to be the natural cut-off point of my enthusiasm. There are hundreds of other books that I love, but not quite as passionately.

You should read all these books yourself, but in case you're buying them for someone else, I've marked the books with "C" for "children," and "YA" for "young adult." If a book is out of print, I've noted that it's "OOP." Usually you can get your hands on the book, anyway.

If you'd like to order a book on-line, **this list is posted on my blog here**. There, you'll find links to Amazon, IndieBound, and Barnes & Noble.

Happy reading! So many wonderful, wonderful books.

--Gretchen Rubin

## My Favorite Children's and Young-Adult Books

1. Joan Aiken, ***The Wolves of Willoughby Chase***. (C) A secret passage, a stint at an orphanage, a journey in disguise—a thrilling book.
2. Louisa May Alcott, ***Little Women*** and many other books. (C). A towering classic of world literature.
3. Hans Christian Andersen, ***Fairy Tales***. (C) These tales seem familiar, but when you actually read them...they're uncanny and unforgettable. "Thumbelisa" gives me chills.
4. Robert Arthur, ***Ghosts and More Ghosts*** and other books. (C, OOP) I've read the stories in this collection countless times.
5. Natalie Babbit, ***Tuck Everlasting***. (C) A short, beautiful, mysterious book that has the quality of myth.
6. J. M. Barrie, ***Peter Pan***. (C) If you've only seen the movie, you've never experienced *Peter Pan*. Haunting. Mind-blowing.
7. L. Frank Baum, ***The Wizard of Oz*** and following books. (C) Again, the movie doesn't prepare you for the richness of these books. The Nome King! Pyrzqzgl! The magic flower pot!
8. Judy Blume, ***Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*** and many other books. (YA) I'd read this book about ten times before I understood that it's really about *religion*.
9. Judy Blundell, ***What I Saw and How I Lied***. (YA) Unusual atmosphere for a YA book. A teenager gets pulled into the adult world, with its darker concerns and a mysterious death.
10. Carol Ryrie Brink, ***Andy Buckram's Tin Men*** and many other books. (C, OOP) I can't believe this book is out of print. *So good*.
11. Betty Brock, ***The Shades***. Ditto. (C, OOP) A perfect book. Hollis learns that if washes his face in the water of the dolphin fountain in the garden of his aunt's grand old house, he can talk to the kindly shadows of the people who came into the garden.
12. Frances Hodgson Burnett, ***The Secret Garden*** and many other books. (C) My fifth-grade teacher told us that she re-read *The Secret Garden* every year. I'm sure I have, too.
13. Betsy Byars, ***The Midnight Fox***. (C) Another perfect book. Beautiful, funny, satisfying. Just thinking about this book makes me happy.
14. Peter Cameron, ***Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You***. (YA) An eighteen-year-old in Manhattan tries to figure out life. A smart, interesting main character.
15. Orson Scott Card, ***Ender's Game***. (YA) Dark, exciting, lots of battles, with a great twist at the end (I love a great twist).
16. Lewis Carroll, ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*** and sequel. (C) Like no other books ever.
17. Kristin Cashore, ***Graceling*** and the following books. (YA) Terrific books, including uncanny powers and a fascinating villain.
18. Ruth Chew, ***What the Witch Left*** and many other books. (C) In middle school, I loved the afternoons when my teacher would distribute the Scholastic we'd ordered, and I ordered a *lot* by Ruth Chew.
19. Patricia Clapp, ***Jane-Emily***. (YA for scariness) A wonderful story, but beware, it does get very scary. A malevolent child ghost.
20. Beverly Cleary, ***Sister of the Bride*** and many other books. (C) Beverly Cleary! Enough said.

21. Suzanne Collins, ***The Hunger Games***. (YA) A truly thrilling dystopia.
22. Susan Cooper, ***The Dark Is Rising*** and related books. (C) Newly discovered powers, good vs. evil, the chosen one, deep symbolism.
23. Roald Dahl, ***James and the Giant Peach*** and many other books. (C) Roald Dahl is one of the most *distinctive* writers ever. Hilarious, absurd, deliciously twisted.
24. Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire, ***D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths***. There's something about the odd illustrations in this book that made it especially riveting. A great introduction to Greek myths, which every child (and adult) should know.
25. Edward Eager, ***Half Magic*** and many other books. These books had a lot of influence on my writing (I hope).
26. Julie Andrews Edwards, ***Mandy***. (C) It's not fair that on top of everything else, Julie Andrews is also a brilliant writer. An orphan finds a deserted shell cottage in the forest.
27. Sylvia Louise Engdahl, ***This Star Shall Abide***. (C) Great twist, on another world, with a fascinating civilization.
28. Elizabeth Enright, ***The Saturdays*** and many other books. (C) Each of her books is *so good*. I can't find the words to say how much I love them all. (Except, weirdly, *Thimble Summer*, which was the book that won the Newberry.)
29. Eleanor Estes, ***The Witch Family***. (C) A cozy, happy book.
30. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, ***Understood Betsy***. (C) As a child, I loved the single footnote in this book, which made me feel very grown-up; also the meditation on the nature of character. This is a book about courage in an unexpected, non-annoying way.
31. Rumer Godden, ***The Greengage Summer*** and many other books. (YA) So many books by Godden, so good.
32. John Green, ***The Fault in Our Stars***. (YA) Yes, it sounds so sad, but read it.
33. Irene Hunt, ***Up a Road Slowly***. (YA) A thoughtful story that unfolds over many years.
34. Randall Jarrell, ***The Animal Family***. (C) A very quiet and serene book; beautiful illustrations by Maurice Sendak. The first line reads, "Once upon a time, long, long ago, where the forest runs down to the sea, a hunter lived all alone..." Who could resist these enchanting words? Plus, mermaid.
35. Diana Wynne Jones, ***Fire and Hemlock*** and many other books. (C) I discovered Diana Wynne Jones only recently, and raced through a giant stack in a few weeks. Other people might like the Chronicles of Chrestomanci better. Very tough call.
36. Norton Juster, ***The Phantom Tollbooth***. (C) Brilliant.
37. E. L. Konigsburg, ***From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*** and many other books. (C) The first time I went to the Metropolitan Museum, all I cared about was seeing the pieces mentioned in the book. Konigsburg has written so many good books! But I do love this one the very best.
38. Harper Lee, ***To Kill a Mockingbird***. (YA) Yes, it's as good as you remember.
39. Ursula Le Guin, ***A Wizard of Earthsea*** and many other books. (C) A strange, eerie magical world.
40. Madeleine L'Engle, ***A Wrinkle in Time*** and many other books. (C) Good vs. evil, traveling through space and time, encounters with other worlds, romance. So good.
41. Lois Lenski, ***Strawberry Girl***. (C) A great heroine, a great story, and an interesting look at a time and place in American history.

42. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and all the Narnia books. (C) Words can't capture how much I love these books.
43. Jennie Lindquist, *The Golden Name Day* and following books. (C, OOP) My family comes from Sweden, so I took special delight in all the Swedish traditions.
44. Lois Lowry, *The Giver*. (YA) Powerful. How utopia becomes dystopia.
45. Betty MacDonald, *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle* and the following books. (C) Brilliantly funny on so many levels.
46. Robin McKinley, *Beauty* and many other books. (C) Re-tellings of fairy tales are often disappointing, but this one, a re-telling of "Beauty and the Beast," is terrific.
47. Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight* and the following books. (YA) You either love it—or not. I *love* it.
48. L. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* and following books. (C) I never get enough of Anne. And she's a rare red-haired character.
49. O. T. Nelson, *The Girl Who Owned a City*. (YA) My sister and I share a passion for this book.
50. E. Nesbit, *The Railway Children* and many other books. (C) So good. Nesbit is best known for her ground-breaking books about magic, but this realistic novel is my favorite of her work.
51. Joan North, *The Whirling Shapes*. (C) Supernatural, suspenseful, great characters. A frightening situation, but somehow not frightening, just interesting.
52. Naomi Novik, *His Majesty's Dragon*. (C) This is usually classified as an adult book, but to me, it seems to belong here. "Patrick O'Brian with dragons" may not sound appealing, but I *love* this book.
53. Robert O'Brien, *The Silver Crown* and many other books. (Tough to classify. I'd say C, others might argue YA) Or should I have named O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*? So hard to decide.
54. Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. (C) Physical survival is a surprisingly common theme in children's books, and this is one of the best. A girl survives alone on an island off the California coast—for decades.
55. Edward Ormondroyd, *Time at the Top* and sequel. (C) Whimsical, delightful time-travel by elevator.
56. R. J. Palacio, *Wonder*. (YA) It sounds very sad, but read it anyway. You won't regret it.
57. William Pene du Bois, *The Twenty-One Balloons*. (C) What a story! Balloon flight, a volcano-island government based on unlimited wealth and fine dining.
58. Elizabeth Marie Pope, *The Sherwood Ring*. (C) I love books with friendly, loving ghosts, and this is my favorite of all. Plus a healthy dash of Revolutionary War history.
59. Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass* and the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. (YA) Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Run don't walk.
60. Ellen Raskin, *The Westing Game*. (C) I've read it fifty times, and am entranced by the puzzle every time.
61. Wilson Rawls, *Where the Red Fern Grows*. (C) A friend told me, "You will shed many sad tears, but you will love it," and I do. Also, it's a dog book, if you like dog books.
62. Gail Rock, *The House Without a Christmas Tree* and following books. (C) These were made into great TV specials, as well. That's how I discovered the books.
63. Mary Rodgers. *Freaky Friday*. A daughter and a mother switch bodies for the day, and hilarity and insight ensue. Crazy fun.

64. Rainbow Rowell, *Eleanor & Park*. (YA) A wonderful romance.
65. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and the following books. (C) These don't need a plug.
66. Kate Seredy, *The Good Master* and sequel. (C) A wonderful family story. Set in Hungary at the turn of the last century.
67. William Sleator, *House of Stairs*. (YA) Scientists perform evil experiments on a bunch of teenagers.
68. Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. (YA) I bet it's not what you remember.
69. Zilpha Keatley Snyder, *Black and Blue Magic* and many other books. (C) A perfect book. Perfect! *I love this book*.
70. Virginia Sorensen, *Miracles on Maple Hill*. (C) I do love a cozy book, and boy this is cozy.
71. Johanna Spyri, *Heidi*. (C) Not everyone has a taste for so much goat milk and didacticism, but I love it. (Coincidence, there's goat milk in *Miracles on Maple Hill*, too.)
72. Mary Stolz, *In a Mirror* and many other books. (YA) I want to lead the re-discovery of Mary Stolz's work. Complex, unusual, thought-provoking.
73. Noel Streatfield, *Ballet Shoes* and many other *Shoes* books. (C) I love the theme of children-earning-money-for-their-family, and this is one of the best.
74. Sydney Taylor, *All-of-a-Kind Family* and following books. (C) More cozy!
75. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* books. (C) If you like this sort of thing, you'll love it, and if you don't like this sort of thing, you'll stop on page 5.
76. P. L. Travers, *Mary Poppins* and the following books. (C) The character of Mary Poppins is more interesting than in the movie. Though don't get me wrong, I love the movie. (Note, see #26.)
77. Gertrude Chandler Warner, *The Boxcar Children*. (C) Survival *and* earning money.
78. Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*. (C) The first epistolary book I ever read. Great twist.
79. E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*. (C, but very sad) A towering classic of literature. I cried for four days straight after I read it the first time.
80. T. H. White, *The Sword in the Stone*. (C) I love the theme of vindication, and this is great vindication. Also, the Arthurian legend re-imagined. Also, people turning into animals.
81. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* and all the *Little House* books. (C) The *Little House* series is one of the greatest masterpieces in children's literature. I have no words to describe how much I love, love, love these books. *Now is now*.

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