



Ten of the Best Historical Novels for Children

Article Author:

[Tony Bradman](#) [1]

[226](#) [2]

Article Category:

Ten of the Best

Byline:

Ten of the Best historical novels chosen by **Tony Bradman**

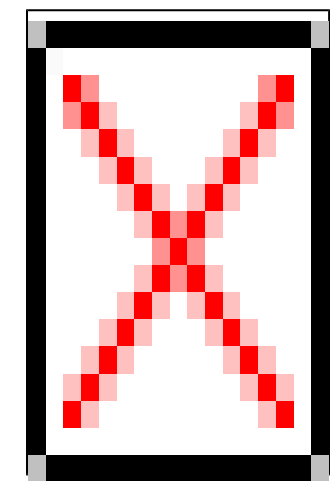
Tony Bradman chooses.

I don't think I would ever have become a writer if I hadn't discovered historical fiction when I was a boy. There was something powerful and liberating about being pitched into a properly realised past world. Good historical fiction - and this is something it shares with fantasy as a genre - can really stimulate a young imagination. It certainly helps you to understand that things haven't always been the way they are now, but also that people have always had to face and overcome problems. My favourite historical novels told big stories too, tales packed with journeys and quests and peril and adventure.

Just like all genres, historical fiction has gone in and out of fashion, but it seems to be popular with both writers and readers at the moment, and I've certainly been writing a lot of historical fiction myself. So my list of the ten best includes the classics that I grew up with, as well as some more recent books that might well last as long.

The Viking Saga

Henry Treece, Puffin, 978-0-1413-6865-8, £6.99pbk



I'm cheating by including this because it's actually a trilogy of three novels that were published separately then bound into one volume. But the Vikings in these tales of voyages, battles and survival would admire my boldness in starting that way. The stories follow young Harald Sigurdson from his beginnings as the son of a Viking chieftain to his last journey in search of vengeance against an enemy. I loved Henry Treece's books when I was a boy, and this one distils the essence of the Viking Age into great fiction.

[The Wheel of Surya](#) [3]

Jamila Gavin, Egmont, 978-0-7497-4744-2, £7.99pbk

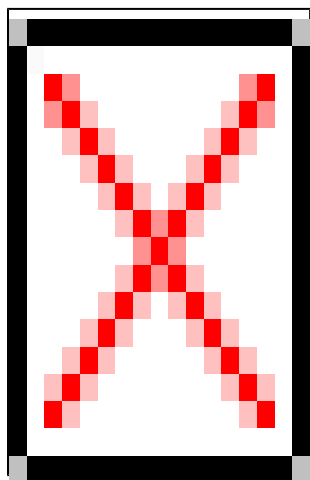
This wonderful novel is worth reading at any time, but has particular relevance this year, the 50th anniversary of the Partition of



their mother, so have to make an epic journey across the sub-continent and then to England to be re-united with their father. It's a poignant and gripping story.

Treasure Island [4]

Robert Louis Stevenson, multiple editions



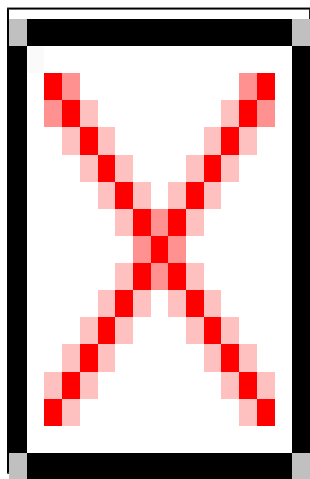
Stevenson's classic is often overlooked in surveys of historical fiction for children, but that's exactly what it is - RLS wrote it in the late-19th century, but it was set in the 18th. It's the greatest pirate story ever of all time, and features the best-ever pirate in the character of Long John Silver, and a terrific young hero in the brave and resourceful Jim. Don't be put off by its age - it's a straightforward, accessible read with a plot that rattles along, and is full of action and adventure.

Not to be missed at any age.

Carrie's War

Nina Bawden, Puffin, £6.99 pbk

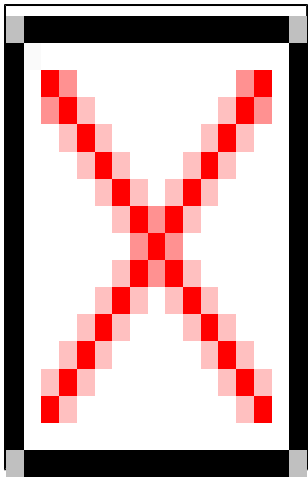
The evacuation of children from British cities at the beginning of the Second World War has long become a familiar subject,



especially in schools, but this is one of the earliest novels about it and still one of the best. Carrie and her younger brother Nick are evacuated from London to a small town in rural Wales. They're taken in by grumpy Mr Evans and his down-trodden sister, and Carrie is soon drawn into a long-running dispute. Ultimately it's about a central theme of historical fiction - how the past affects all our lives.

The Silver Sword

Ian Serraillier, Red Fox, 978-0099439493, £6.99 pbk

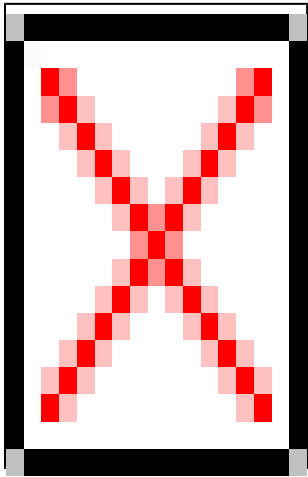


Another classic story of the Second World War, **The Silver Sword** focuses on the experiences of three Polish children in the horror and chaos of Europe under the Nazis. Siblings Ruth, Edek and Bronia are separated from their parents after the German invasion and have to fend for themselves in the ruins of Warsaw. Then they discover that their father might still be alive, and they set off on an epic journey to find him. It's a great story that covers a vast sweep of the war, and all from the viewpoint of children.

Hell or High Water

Tanya Landman, Walker Books, 978-1-4063-6691-4, £7.99 pbk

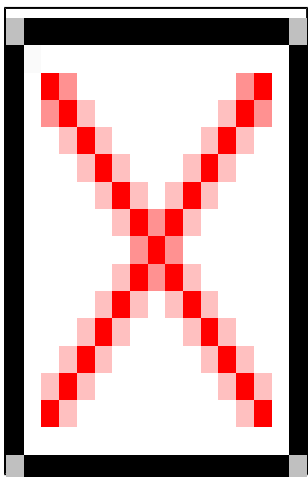
This is the story of Caleb, a mixed-race boy in 18th-century England. His father is a puppeteer who is falsely accused of a



crime and transported to the colonies. Caleb has to survive alone in an unfriendly, casually racist world, and sets off to find an aunt, hoping that she will take him in. She does, but soon Caleb finds himself enmeshed in an intrigue which leads to murder, and fighting for his own life. This has great characters, loads of suspense, a cracking plot, and a real feel for the texture of life at the time.

[Bracelet of Bones](#) [5]

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Quercus, 978-1-6236-5112-1, £12.99 hbk

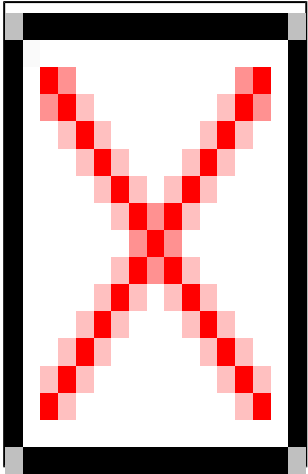


In my experience not many novels set in the Viking Age have girls as central characters, but that's only one of the things that make this story so distinctive. It's the tale of Solveig, a Viking girl whose father goes off to be a mercenary of the Emperor in Constantinople. Brave Solveig follows him on a journey down the great rivers of Russia, encountering all sorts of people and dangers. The writing is clear and lyrical in equal measure, the plot gripping, and you're left with a wonderful insight into the world of the Vikings.

[Sawbones](#) [6]

Catherine Johnson, Walker Books, 978-1406340570, £6.99 pbk

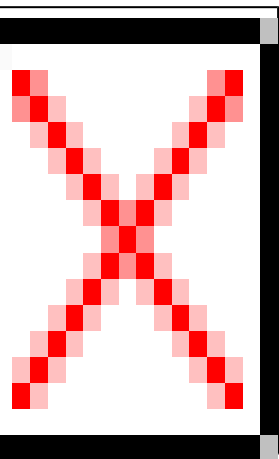
There's nothing like a bit of grave-robbing and body-snatching in *Resurrection Men* to give a story some oomph, and this tale



of London in the late-18th century has plenty. Ezra, a 16-year-old mulatto boy, is apprenticed to a top London surgeon, the kind who amputates limbs without anaesthetic. But there are strange goings-on, and Ezra is drawn into a dangerous intrigue. London itself is a character in this dark, suspenseful story, the kind of tale that lingers in the mind and makes you feel very grateful for modern medicine.

[My Name's Not Friday](#) [7]

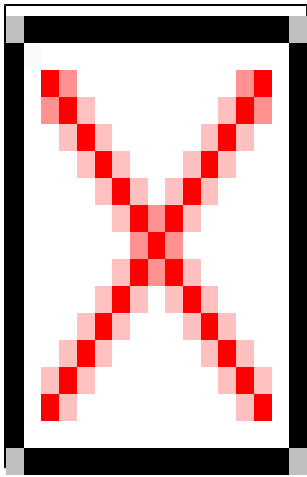
Jon Walter, David Fickling Books, 978-1-9109-8918-0, £7.99 pbk



Samuel is an orphaned black boy who is tricked into slavery in Civil War America, and finds that everything is taken from him, even his name. What follows is an enormously gripping story about Samuel's struggle to survive the horrors of a plantation and escape as the war comes ever closer. It's an extraordinary and moving book that tackles a difficult subject and does it very well indeed.

[The Eagle of the Ninth](#) [8]

Rosemary Sutcliff, Oxford University Press, 978-0-1927-5392-2, £8.99 pbk



This is a case of last but definitely not least. I'm a real fanboy when it comes to Rosemary

Sutcliffe's books, and her tale of one young Roman's quest to find out the truth about his centurion father's lost legion is my favourite. It's about family and growing up and about coming to terms with a disability. It also happens to be a marvellous evocation of Roman Britain, bringing the landscape and people of the past vividly to life.

Tony Bradman has published four historical stories this year:

Revolt Against the Romans (Bloomsbury Education), a story about a Roman boy who is taken hostage by Celtic tribesmen in Britain.

Anglo-Saxon Boy [9] (Walker Books), a story about Magnus, son of the King Harold who fought the Normans at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Attack of the Vikings (Bloomsbury Education), a story about a boy who has to lead the defence of his village against savage Viking raiders.

Secret of the Stones (Barrington Stoke), a story of Stonehenge, set at the time when the Stone Age was giving way to the Bronze Age.

Page Number:

10

Source URL (retrieved on Jan '18): <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/226/childrens-books/articles/ten-of-the-best/ten-of-the-best-historical-novels-for-children>

Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/tony-bradman>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/226>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/107/childrens-books/reviews/the-surya-trilogy-the-wheel-of-surya-the-surya-trilogy-the-eye-of>

[4] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/102/childrens-books/articles/classics-in-short/classics-in-short-no1-treasure-island>

[5] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/188/childrens-books/reviews/bracelet-of-bones>

[6] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/203/childrens-books/reviews/sawbones>

[7] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/214/childrens-books/reviews/my-name-s-not-friday>

[8] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/181/childrens-books/articles/classics-in-short/classics-in-short-no80-the-eagle-of-the-ninth>

[9] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/224/childrens-books/reviews/anglo-saxon-boy>