

A Sharp Touch

The books chosen for this list are linked by a certain sharpness – they use style, language and humour in a cutting or super-observant way. Expect to get to the heart of things – to be exposed to the reality of life, without the comfortable padding that writers so often use to coddle their readers.

Use this list to point yourself in a new direction. Prepare yourself for comic send-up, shocking home truths and wicked satire. Add a bit of bite to your reading life.

Read the introductions to each book and decide for yourself whether you want fierce satire or dry humour. Be generous, be daring – you can always swap the book for something else if it's not your cup of tea. But if you don't try... you'll never know!

Blast From the Past by Ben Elton

Ever been woken in the early hours by the sound of a telephone? Recognise that feeling of panic that turns your legs to jelly and has your heart belting against your ribcage? It is just such a sound that heralds a night of heaven and hell for Polly as she is hit, full-force, by a blast from the past. Everything about this novel is razor sharp: the humour; the dialogue; the furious pace of the plot; the uncomfortable issues. So sharp, in fact, it hurts.



Disgrace by J M Coetzee

This powerful book, set in contemporary South Africa, raises a whole bunch of prickly issues and will jab away at your conscience, forcing a long hard look at your own value system. It's a fast and accessible read – a good story, sharply delivered, not a word more than is necessary. Be prepared to be shocked; be prepared to be challenged; be prepared for a read that leaves you pondering disturbing questions deep into the night.



Liar Birds by Lucy Fitzgerald

Life is just a lark for Oonagh, Rose and Teresa – three Irish girls – and gossip (received or just made up) is their daily fix. Oblivious to the warning signals, it is Teresa that takes the brunt of the inevitable impact. The joy ride has to stop and there's no hiding from the consequences of their behaviour. A sharp, but very readable reminder that one person's fun can be another person's pain.



All Points North by Simon Armitage

The North begins, says Simon Armitage, where the goalpost of the M1 meets the crossbar of the M62 and England tucks its shirt in its underpants. Precise, funny, full of wry observations – Simon Armitage is like a younger version of Alan Bennett. These short pieces cover everything from being a poet to going with his mum on the Yorkshire Post trip to Iceland. There's plenty for Southerners to enjoy, too, though Lancastrians may feel old feuds stirring!



A Touch of... Get a sneak preview of ten great reads

Stuck for what to read next? Maybe you fancy trying something new but don't know where to start. **A Touch of** is a great way for readers who use large print, Braille or audio books to find that good read everyone is looking for. Whether you're choosing for yourself or for someone else who can't get to the library, **A Touch of** gives you a sneak preview of tempting possibilities. There are ten different booklists in the series, including A Touch of Terror, A Touch of Mischief, A Ticklish Touch and Touching Infinity.

A Sharp Touch features books available in large print and tells you which ones you can get in audio and Braille as well. If you prefer to start from what's available in audio or Braille, please ask for the ten **A Touch of** samplers which give you friendly introductions and a short extract from each book to listen to or touch read.

 Available from RNIB Talking Book Service

 Available from NLB in Braille

 Available from Calibre Cassette Library

 Available in audio through public libraries

If you would like more information about the services to readers offered by these organisations please ask a member of library staff. If you have internet access, you can check out www.nlbuk.org



Marrying the Mistress by Joanna Trollope

Forget the cosy image of Agas in country kitchens, Joanna Trollope delivers a powerful and emotional exploration of marriage, adulterous love, guilt and duty. No rose-tinted spectacles here, or a carefully manufactured happy-ever-after ending, just a sharply perceptive slice of real life, crystallised in this story of family crisis. And it's the fact that you feel so quickly and so strongly for the people involved that makes this a satisfying and thought-provoking read.



Pastures Nouveaux by Wendy Holden

If you're looking for a bit of fun, and a few hours of pure escapism, then why not try Wendy Holden's satirical swipe at the pretensions of modern living? Here, the collision between the townies and the country-lovers will have you laughing into your organic veg. It's a complete send-up of a culture that worships celebrity name-dropping, designer labels and Hello magazine. Amidst the witty exposé of a few home truths, watch out for an old-fashioned love story lurking beneath the surface glamour.

England, England by Julian Barnes

Ever wondered what makes England 'English' – Morris dancers, Buckingham palace, Marmite sandwiches? This is the task facing larger-than-life tycoon, Sir Jack Pitman, and his carefully chosen team of highfliers and sycophants. Their brief – to create the perfect theme park, a 'Little England'. The location – the Isle of Wight! If you find clever, pointed satire irresistible, then this one will have you wincing with recognition all the way to the turnstiles.

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Worst Fears by Fay Weldon

What is your worst fear? For many, it is the death of a partner, so when Alexandra Ludd's husband, Ned, dies suddenly, she steels herself for grief and widowhood. But nothing prepares her for the floodgates that are about to open. What exactly was Ned doing at the moment his heart stopped – and with whom? Forget any notion of sympathy or compassion – both are alien emotions as Fay Weldon rips into hypocrisy with acerbic wit.

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Planet of the Blind by Stephen Kuusisto

Stephen Kuusisto has been almost blind from birth. Amazingly, he spent his childhood and much of his adult life pretending he could see. Here he recounts exactly what this felt like, and what the disability and the deception cost him – both physically and emotionally. His writing style pulls no punches. It's direct and unsentimental; sometimes sharp and raw, often powerful and moving. In fact, it's more like a novel than a true-life story.

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The Orchard on Fire by Shena Mackay

You might expect a story about growing up in the fifties, in a rural backwater in Kent, to be given the nostalgic, soft lens treatment. But this is a tough, honest tale about how children see the world and what happens to them in it. You get a real sense of the colours and smells of the village, as well as the hopes and fears of the child. A lively read – sharply perceptive rather than caustic.

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A Sharp Touch offers you a brief, to the point exposé of ten very different books. You may crave that bit of acid to pep up your reading habits, or you may just prefer your diet sugar-free. Either way, you'll find plenty here that's a cut above the rest...

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