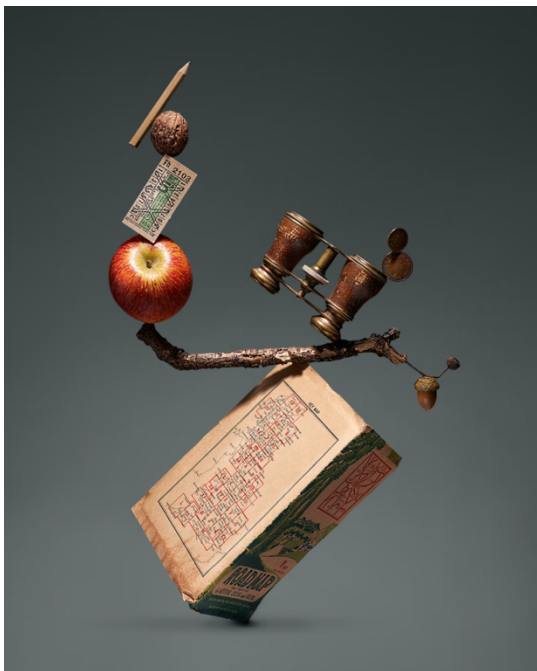


Chapter 1

Once upon a time



I don't know four words in the English Language more likely to cast a spell over the listener than *once upon a time*. They're more magical than *Abracadabra*. Or *Open Sesame*. Because as soon as you hear those words you change. At least I certainly do. Something in me deeply relaxes and I settle down. If I'm listening to a story, I might close my eyes and let my mind become a blank screen as words enter my ears and turn into characters that populate my mind. Suddenly magically distant or imaginary lands appear, and situations far more exciting and dangerous than I would ever encounter, take place inside my head. Swords are drawn, but I am never harmed. Seas are crossed on brave little ships, but I never leave my room. If that isn't magic, I don't know what is.

And while people have been bewitched by stories for as long as there have been humans on earth they have only been reading them for around 150 years. Why you ask? Surely there have been books around for longer than 150 years.



Well yes and no. The printing press was invented 600 years ago but it certainly wasn't printing stories. The books that we think of as being entertaining – novels and so on – are relatively recent. And of course only a very few people could read until the late 19th century. So it's only in the last 100 years or so that most people in the UK could read and have access to stories as we know them.



Before books, stories were told by word of mouth. We call this the **oral tradition**. Stories were memorised and told to captivated listeners. In fact if you are one of those lucky people who's had stories read to you, you'll know how wonderful an experience that can be.

I thought I'd mention this at the beginning of the course, because although not everyone enjoys **reading**, almost everyone enjoys **stories**. And this course is for everyone – even if you don't think you like reading – because although we will be talking about books, it won't necessarily be about books you read. It might be books you listen to or watch on film. I want everyone to be able to enjoy the course, whether they are reading strongly or not! All you have to do is ask yourself if your ears prick up when you hear the words *Once upon a time*. If they do, then this course is for you.

So the purpose of this first chapter is to cast a spell – to get you reading, in other words. To find out **HOW** you like to read the stories **YOU** enjoy and take it from there. Ready for the adventure? Let's begin.

A hot chocolate might be a good idea at this point...



Do you enjoy reading?



If you enjoy reading and always have your nose in a book you are SO LUCKY! It is a wonderful gift to have and a great world of literature is open to you. But not everyone enjoys reading. I certainly didn't when I was your age. I liked books with pictures but when they had lots of text, I found my brain couldn't digest the words. I got very bored and I struggled to keep track of the stories. I think this is because I'm a very visual learner and was an artistic child. I only liked stories with pictures (I suspect I'm not alone) so I'm very sympathetic with anyone who finds the act of reading hard. But if you do enjoy reading, that is wonderful!

Why reading can be hard



Reading involves lots of different brain functions all working together at once: you have to use your eyes to look at a lot of squiggles in a row and then your brain has to turn those squiggles into words. Then you have to turn those words into a story that you can remember and keep

track of. It's a wonder anyone can read at all, given how hard the brain has to work! So if you struggle with the physical act of reading, there may be many different reasons for that. You might have a problem with your eyes. Or it might be that you have dyslexia and your brain struggles to turn squiggles into stories. If that is the case, no problem. You can still enjoy books, but you might like them better if they go in through your ears rather than your eyes!

What sort of reader are you?



As I've explained, there are two ways of getting stories into your brain – through your eyes and through your ears. Let's discover what sort of reader you might be. Try to answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers. This is about getting it right FOR YOU. Cross out the answers that don't apply to you. When you've done this, take a photo to send with your first assignment so I know what you enjoy.

Do you like reading?

- A lot
- A bit
- Not really

Do you like being read to?

- A lot
- A bit
- Not really

Do you like audio books?

- A lot
- Not really
- I've never tried them but I might like them.

Do you like stories with pictures?

- Yes I prefer them.
- I like them but don't really mind if they don't have pictures.
- I don't like stories with pictures.

If you find reading difficult, can you explain why? Do the letters jump about, for example, or does it make you tired?

What sort of stories do you like?

If you know you like reading you'll have a clear idea of the sorts of books you like. However if you don't read many books, this will help you discover what you like. If you don't know if you like books about action and adventure, but you like being active, underline *action and adventure*. There are no right or wrong answers, by the way. This is all about what you enjoy:

- Action and adventure
- Fairy tales
- Stories about families
- Manga
- Stories about heroes or heroines
- Stories that make you laugh
- Stories about wizards and magic
- Books set in a historical period
- Books with animals as heroes
- Books about the life of people the same age as you
- Fantasy novels
- Graphic novels
- Stories about famous people (celebrities, footballers, etc)
- Sci fi books
- Mystery novels
- Mythology
- Thrillers
- Books about serious social issues (homelessness, war, etc)
- Classic books

This isn't a complete list – I might have forgotten something. If I have, or you have a favourite author, write that in the box below. When you have done this take a photo to send with your first assignment.

What sort of stories do you like?

By now you should have an idea of what sort of reader you are (whether reading or listening) and what sort of stories you like. Hang on to that information, and let's take a dive into where to find books!

Let's find some books!

There are lots of places to find books and for the next few pages, we'll look at some of them. Books can be new and expensive or second hand and cheap. There is a third category which is library books, which are free. Audio books are different again but let's survey the territory.

Bookshops



I happen to love book shops. They have a special smell which is comforting and cosy and reminds me of hot chocolate (in fact some bookshops have cafes that serve hot chocolate, and needless to say, they are my favourite).

Bookshops can be part of big chains, such as Waterstones, but you might be lucky enough to have an independent book shop in your town. If you have, I encourage you to use it. If you buy books from a local shop they will get to know you and might make recommendations. Most book shops these days have seating areas inside and don't mind if you sit and read a few pages of a book. Book shops are very good places to source books because although they are the most expensive way to get books, you can physically hold them and flick through the pages. This is a good way to find out if you'd like a story or not.

Libraries



Most towns have public libraries, which means that anyone can become a member of a library and borrow a book for free. Libraries also stock audio books on CDs too, and magazines, as well. Along with book shops, libraries are great places to browse books and perhaps get to know writers that you haven't heard about before. Most

modern libraries have comfortable seating areas, too. You can sit and listen to an audio book, or browse books on your favourite topics, whether it be football or cake baking. Here is a photo of the library in my hometown of Telford.

Online book stores

There's a huge range of places to buy books online and I'll cover a few of the main ones here. I'm sure you've heard of Amazon. It has its pros and cons, which we'll talk about in a minute, but it's particularly good for browsing as you can get to see inside a book and read a few pages. If I were looking for *Artemis Fowl and the Atlantis Complex*, for example, I would go to the Amazon website, type the title in the search bar, and I'd arrive at a page like this:

Back to results

[Look inside](#)

Artemis Fowl and the Atlantis Complex, 7 (Artemis Fowl, 7)
Paperback – 7 April 2011
by Eoin Colfer (Author)
★★★★★ 1,871 ratings
Book 7 of 8: Artemis Fowl

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[See all 3 images](#)

The boxes in the middle show a choice of formats. There's the **Kindle** edition you can read online; an **audio book**; a **library binding** (which you won't need unless you are a library!); a **paperback**, and **audio CD**. The prices differ for each option. Under some of these boxes you'll see a link to a 'used' version where you can buy the book second hand. This is often cheaper, although you might have to pay more for postage. If you want to read a few pages, just click the *Look inside* link at the top right of the book cover and you'll get to a page like this. Depending on the book, Amazon lets you scroll quite a few pages; certainly enough for you to know if you would enjoy it or not!

Available samples: **Kindle** Paperback

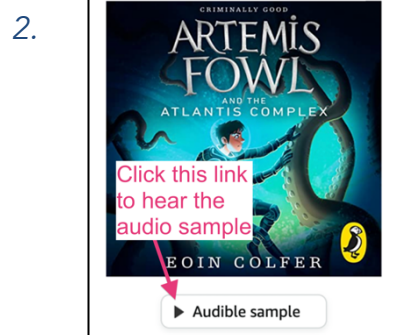
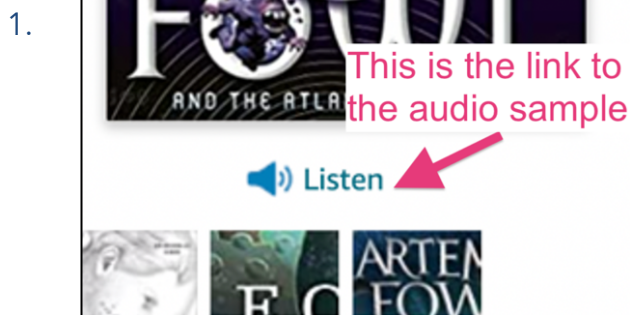
This is a sample. The number of pages displayed is limited.

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ARTEMIS FOWL: SO FAR SO BAD

THERE was once an Irish boy who longed to know everything there was to know, so he read book after book until his brain swelled with astronomy, calculus, quantum physics, romantic poets, forensic science and anthropology among a hundred other subjects. But his favourite book was a slim volume which he'd never once read himself. It was an old hardback that his father often chose as a bedtime tale, entitled *The Crock of Gold*, which told the story of a greedy bucko who captured a leprechaun in a vain effort to steal the creature's gold.

Artemis Fowl and the Atlantis Complex, 7 (Artemis Fowl, 7)
Eoin Colfer
★★★★★ 1,871 Ratings
Paperback: £6.85
[Add to Cart](#)
Dispatches from and sold by Amazon.
[See more buying options](#)

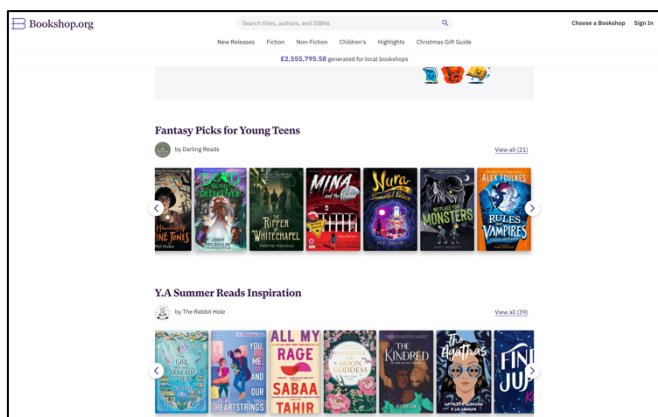


If you'd prefer to listen to a book and you're not sure whether you'd enjoy it or not, you can hear an audio sample. If you click the *Listen* link under the book's cover (see 1 above) it will take you to the icon (2 above) where you can listen to a sample on *Audible*. *Audible*, by the way, is a subscription service with a monthly fee. We'll talk about that in a minute, but there are educational discounts if you join.

It's up to you whether you buy your books from Amazon. I prefer to buy books from independent shops to support their businesses. I also like buying from online booksellers that support independent bookshop or charities. But as I say, Amazon is good for sampling and there aren't many places where you can actually look inside a book without going to a shop.

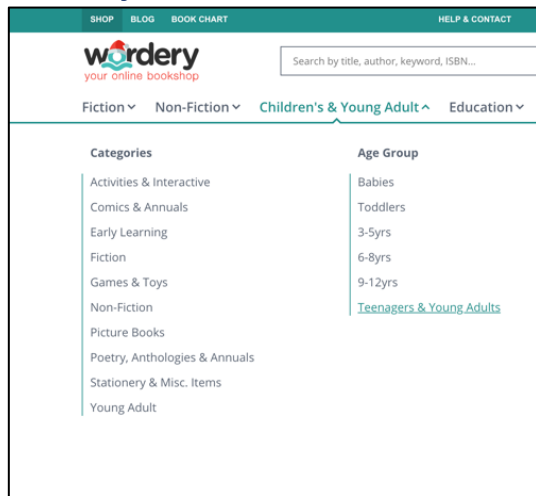
Let's have a look at some more online stores. There are lots but I have chosen some with good 'young adult' sections. I have also favoured those which support independent shops or other good causes, as you will see.

Bookshop.org



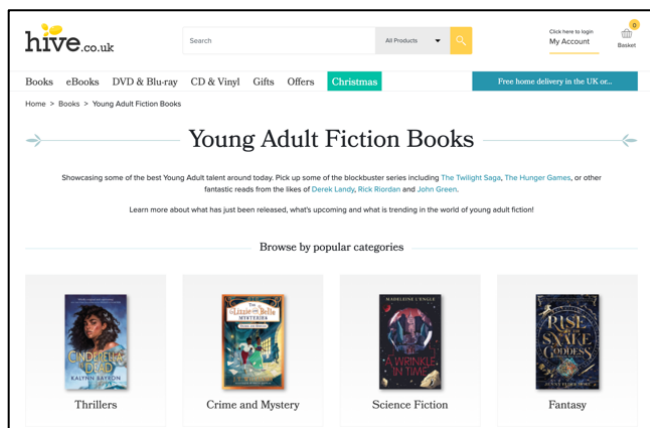
If you don't have a local bookshop but would like to support one, I highly recommend Bookshop.org. This website allows you to buy from an independent bookshop of your choosing so they get the profit from selling the books. This is what their teen page is like.

Wordery.com



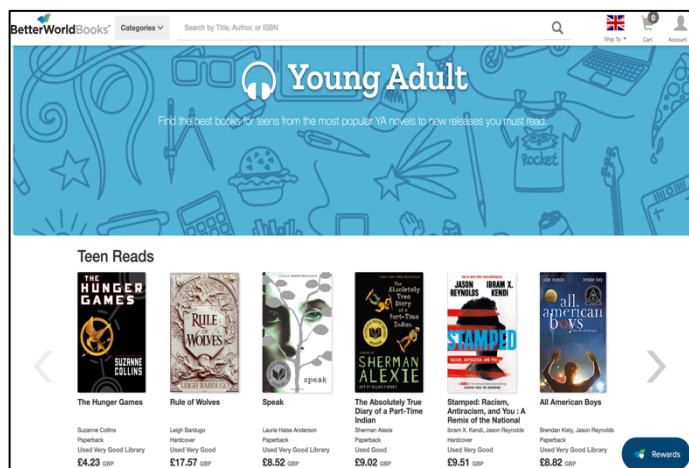
This online store was set up by five friends and they are committed to using their influence for good. They work with charities to improve literacy among young people. Books are sent out with recycled paper and cardboard. I particularly like **Wordery** because under the *Children & Young Adults* tab, there are age divisions, which you don't get with all online book stores. It makes browsing much easier.

Hive.co.uk



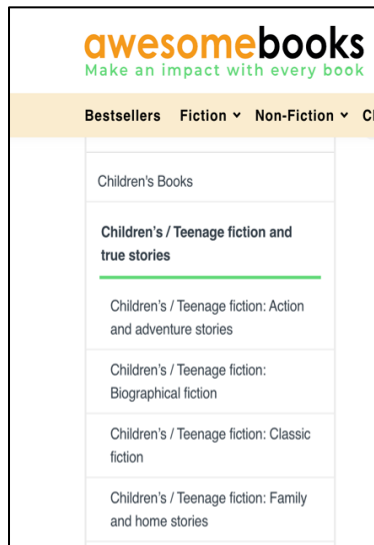
Another online seller very similar to Bookshop.org is Hive.co.uk They also support independent bookshops. They have student discounts, too, if you are 16. They also have a very good e-book section, as well. This is a screenshot of their Young Adult page with helpful categories.

Better World Books.com



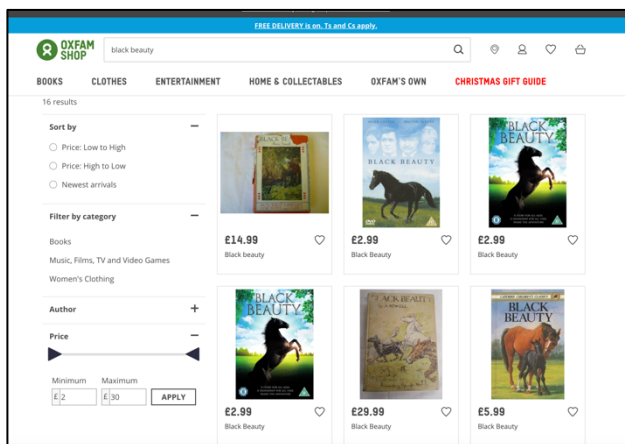
This was set up in America by some friends who wanted to sell used books to fund literacy. When they started out they rescued library books which were destined for landfill. They have a good Young Adult section and although they began by selling used books they sell new books now, too. Postage is free.

Awesomebooks.com



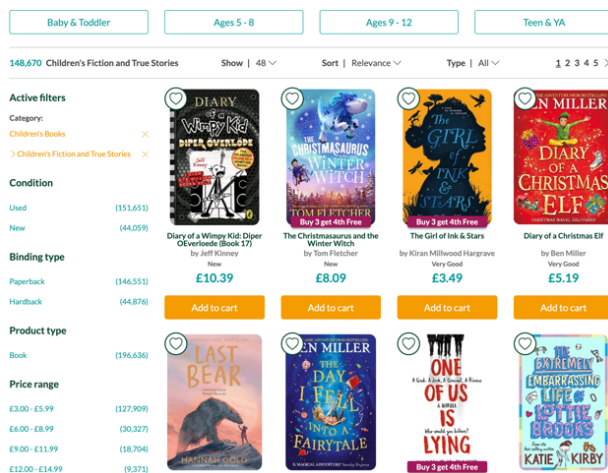
This is another great supplier with a focus on doing good. They contribute to charities and donate one book for each one sold. They have a good site, too, which makes it easy to find the sort of book you are looking for. The screenshot shows just a small section of their category list for children and teens. As you can see it is easy to find the genre of book you are looking for. There are about 20 categories so you'll easily be able to find something that interests you. The only problem is that children and teen books are all bundled together so you might have to do a lot of browsing to find something that is for your age group.

Oxfam online



Oxfam Online stocks the biggest selection of second-hand books in Europe, which is quite an achievement. You can browse online, too, as there are clear categories. This is a screenshot of the page I got when I searched for Black Beauty, a book I read as a child. There is a wide choice of different prices.

World of Books (wob.com)



World of Books started 20 years ago when some book-loving people rescued books from a charity shop that were destined for landfill. The company was founded on a do-good ethos, helping charities and making a positive impact on the environment through recycling and reuse. They sell second-hand books. You have to root around a bit for the teen and young adult section, but the prices are good.

Second hand book shops

There are lots of places where you can buy second-hand books very cheaply. Charity shops are an obvious choice. The problem with charity shops is they are a bit hit and miss; you won't get the choice that you can get in a bookshop which will stock the most popular titles, nor an online store which will have thousands of books. That said, there can be something fun about picking up a book in a charity shop as a random choice. However if you know what you are looking for they aren't the best places to go.

For that I recommend choosing from one of the many wonderful second-hand bookshops we have in the UK. Google will be your friend here if you are searching for one in your town, but here are some of my favourites.

The Bookshop Wigtown



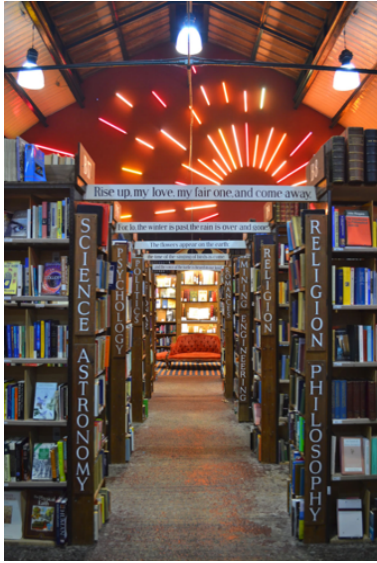
This is a wonderful bookshop in Scotland and worth a visit in its own right, not least because there is a violin playing skeleton suspended from the ceiling! Wigtown is the book capital of Scotland so worth a visit in its own right. This shop is quite famous and its owner has written several books himself about his shop and its customers, which have become best sellers. You can buy online too. Wigtown is on the south coast of Scotland so a good place to plan a seaside holiday, too.

Astley Book Farm, Coffee shop and Yurt



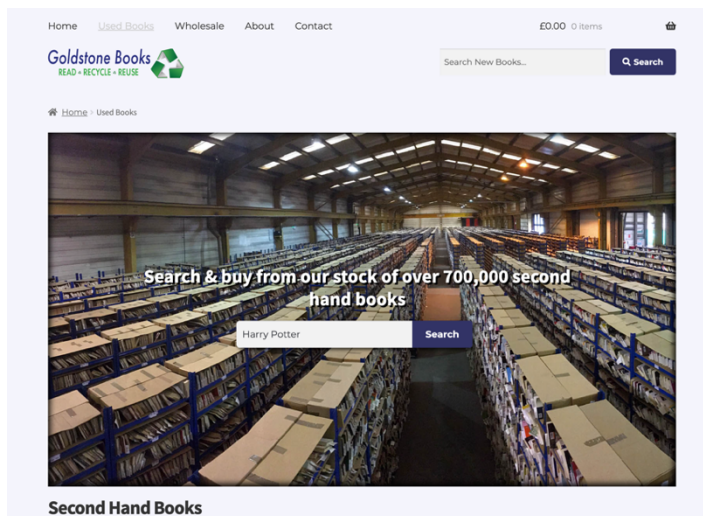
There's something for everyone here. Astley Book Farm has the largest selection of second-hand books in the Midlands. It's open every day of the year, except over Christmas. There is a marvellous selection of children's books in the Hayloft, with comfy chairs to relax in and scrummy cakes. The author George Eliot lived nearby too, so a very literary destination!

Barter Books



This is another of the truly great second hand book stores (certainly the largest in Northumberland), which occupies the old station at Alwick. You can find virtually any book in this vast cavern of a shop, which looks as though it should be on the Hogwarts campus! The fact that they have a superb café, wood burners, comfy chairs and their own ice cream parlour is another draw. Be warned, though: it isn't the sort of place where you would just pop in for 5 minutes. Hours will pass before you emerge blinking into daylight (or starlight, depending on how long you have spent in there).

Goldstone Books



This is a wonderful book shop in Carmarthen in South Wales. It's a conventional book shop but they also have a huge warehouse in Llandybie, which is also in South Wales. Here they process over 100,000 books a week which arrive from charity shops, book banks and other sources. They have a good browsable

section, too, if you know what title you are looking for. I just searched for Harry Potter and got 150 results. You can't visit the warehouse but you can order online and collect books from there, otherwise they post to you.

Ebay

Finally, If you know what book you're looking for, Ebay can be good. The problem with Ebay is that it isn't like Amazon or a book shop's website because you can't really browse. But as I say, if you know what you are looking for – the latest Artemis Fowl novel, for example – it can be great!

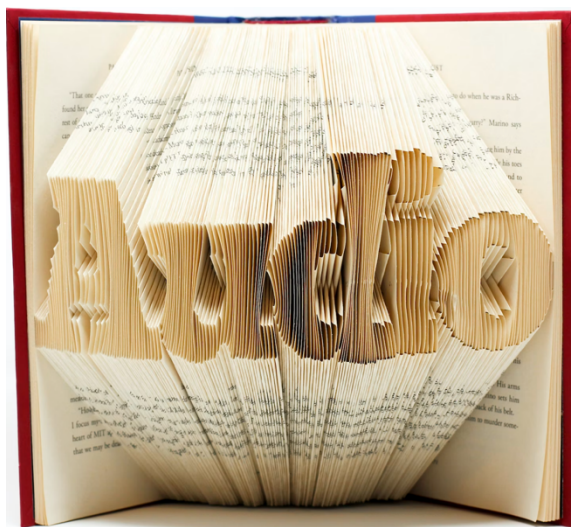
Ebooks



I am mindful that I am writing these words in 2023 and anything I write about digital resources is likely to be out of date in less than a year. So I'm putting Ebook resources in as up to date a space as I can which will be on the course website where I can ensure the links are correct. Meanwhile at the time of writing Kindle and Kobo are the main e-readers on the market. Kindle is linked to Amazon and Kobo is independent. The main advantage of e-readers as opposed to reading off a conventional screen is that the e-readers use different lighting technology so they are easier on the eyes. You can also download e-

readers onto phones and tablets (although you don't then have the advantage of the easy-on-the-eye lighting). Ebooks.com is a good resource at the time of writing, too. You need an e-reader or app to read from Ebooks (Kindle Fire, but not other kindles). Another advantage of an e-reader, especially if you are dyslexic, is that you can change the font and the background colour. There's virtually zero impact on the environment, too, as there is no physical product.

Audio Books



Whatever you think about Amazon it is impossible to ignore **Audible**. For a subscription of £7.99 a month (at the time of writing) you have access to an almost unlimited range of audio books. There are other places where you can get audio books, but I have put links in the appendix as they update too regularly to keep track of in the printed course. Often you will find that the author is reading the book, too, and this gives a bit more magic

to the experience (if they have good speaking voices, that is!).

Assignment 1

Using one of the places I've shown you in this chapter, choose a book and spend your book token on it! I don't mind which one you get or in what format. (You won't be able to spend your book token everywhere, but that is an important thing to learn about, too.)

What book did you choose/ Write down the title and author.

Did you enjoy your book?

Do you think you'll get another by the same author or try a different one next time?

Imagine I haven't read your book. Write a few lines describing to me what I'd enjoy about it and why I might want to recommend it to others. This is called a **book review**. Even if you didn't enjoy the book, try to describe why. Was it a bit boring? Did it not have a good ending? If you give me permission, I'll share your review to help others to choose.