

The most borrowed books of 2008

[James Patterson looks set to become the new Catherine Cookson](#). Though his top-ranking novel only takes sixth place in the chart, the American thriller writer - known for his staccato style and prolific output - has retained the crown of the UK's most borrowed author for the second year running. He follows in the footsteps of former library queen Cookson - who topped the charts for 20 years - and children's author Jacqueline Wilson, deposed by Patterson last year after four years at the top.

Patterson's books, the best known of which feature black detective and single father Alex Cross, were borrowed more than 1.5m times between July 2007 and June 2008, according to the latest figures from the Public Lending Right (PLR), and took four of the top 10 positions on the "most borrowed books" chart. In a year when libraries nationwide were battered by falling book stocks and multiple closures, Patterson was one of only four writers to clock up more than 1m loans, alongside Wilson, fellow American Nora Roberts and Daisy Meadows, creator of the Rainbow Magic children's series.

Although at first - and possibly second - glance the former advertising executive looks a million miles away from the publicity-shy, historical romance novelist, Patterson and Cookson have in common both their prolific output - more than 50 novels to date from him and more than 100 from her - and their predictability: borrowers know what they're going to get.

It's the same with the former children's laureate Wilson, who came in second. From *The Story of Tracy Beaker* to *Double Act* and *Vicky Angel*, her output of around 90 books continues to satisfy her young readers' yearnings for an accurate picture of troubled modern childhood, whatever their individual rankings.

The major change in the library league tables has been the increase in popularity of children's writers: there are now six in the top 10, with Little Wolf author Ian Whybrow leaping into 10th place from 15th the previous year, nosing crime writer Ian Rankin down into 11th. Whybrow comes in behind Meadows, Horrid Henry writer Francesca Simon, Kipper author Mick Inkpen and perennial favourites Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Meanwhile, the wonderful Lauren Child leapfrogs into 14th place from 54th the previous year, with her *Charlie and Lola* books.

A children's book - [Harry Potter](#) and the Deathly Hallows - is also the most borrowed title of 2008. [JK Rowling](#), however, only makes 43rd place in the author charts; she simply hasn't written enough books yet to trouble the Pattersons and Wilsons of this world.

As the endless discounting on the high street forces book prices - and with them advances and royalties - ever downwards, the PLR, which pays out around 6p per loan, is becoming increasingly important to many writers. And fortunately for authors such as Anna Jacobs, Freda Lightfoot, Anne Baker, Debi Gliori and Joan Jonker, who all failed to trouble the bestseller lists last year, popularity in libraries is very different from popularity in bookshops. Their titles were all borrowed more than bestselling authors such as Ian McEwan, who just makes 128th place.

Although media exposure clearly influences library users - Richard & Judy's book club recommendations take up five places in the top 10 titles borrowed - there's considerable regional variation. Borrowers in the north east spurned the television couple's picks in favour of old-fashioned romances and sagas by Emma Blair, Josephine Cox and Danielle Steel. Londoners, meanwhile, prefer literary fiction, with McEwan making it into their top 10 with Saturday, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Orange prize-winning Half of a Yellow Sun ranking 5th.

The non-fiction which did well in libraries last year was markedly more highbrow than those titles selling well in shops, with borrowers eschewing the latest volume of autobiography from the likes of Katie Price and Sharon Osbourne for James Martin's blueprint for humanity's survival, The Meaning of the 21st Century, Griff Rhys Jones's memoir Semi-Detached and Tim Butcher's account of his trip through the Congo, Blood River

Departure from this mortal coil, meanwhile, has never proved a barrier to success in the library. Had they been alive today, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Agatha Christie, Georgette Heyer, Beatrix Potter, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen would all have earned the maximum possible PLR payout of £6,600, while Shakespeare could have pocketed £4,685.

NON-FICTION

1	James Martin	The Meaning of the 21st Century	Eden Project	2006
2	Griff Rhys Jones	Semi-detached	Penguin	2007
3	Bill Bryson	The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid	Doubleday	2006
4	Tim Butcher	Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart	Vintage	2008
5	Peter Kay	The Sound of Laughter	Century	2006
6	Richard Dawkins	The God Delusion	Bantam	2006
7	Padesky, Greenberger	Mind Over Mood	Guilford Press	1995
8	Helen Kennerley	Overcoming Anxiety	Robinson	1997
9	Paul Gilbert	Overcoming Depression	Robinson	2000
10	Home Office	Life in the United Kingdom	TSO	2007