



What to read next

The book to read based on your favourite BTS song

The world-conquering K-pop band has always had literary leanings. Here, we pick the perfect reads to accompany some of their best songs.

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Photo credit: Jeff Kravitz / FilmMagic, Inc via Getty Images

BTS are one of the biggest bands in the world, transcending language, culture and physical borders to appeal to fans across the globe.

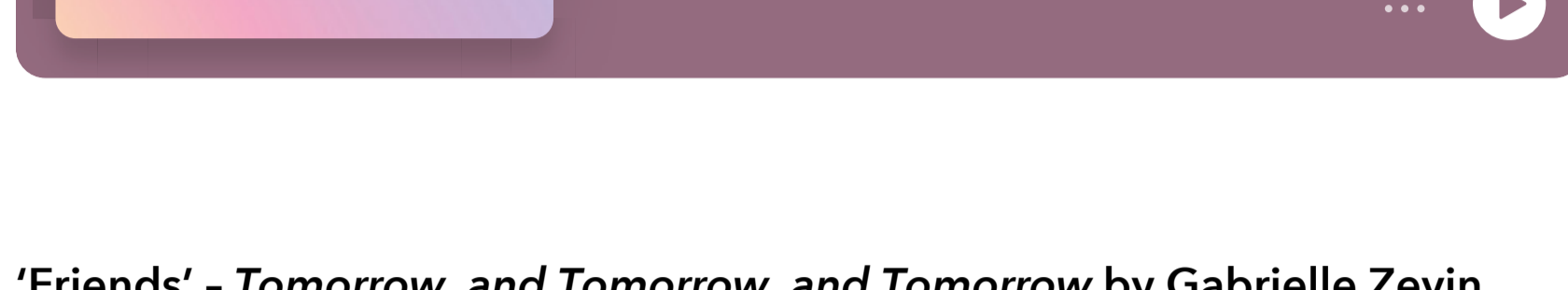
The seven-member group – featuring RM, Jin, Suga, j-hope, Jimin, Taehyung and Jungkook – are currently in a period where they’re concentrating on solo efforts, but music, which encompasses everything from pure pop anthems to fiery rap numbers, continues to conquer the charts and win new fans.

The group has literary chops, too – band member RM in particular is a well-known reader, and a number of their songs have literary influences, which started us thinking about the connections between their songs and books. Whether you’re a new fan or an old one, you’ve probably got a favourite BTS song; here’s our guide to what to add to your shelf, depending on which it is...

‘Epiphany’ – *The Gifts of Imperfection* by Brené Brown (2010)

Oldest member Jin sings this absolute anthem, whose central message boils down to one of the English lyrics from the chorus: “I’m the one I should love in this world.” For a boost of confidence, and to give yourself the tools you need to become more confident and kinder towards yourself, grab a copy of *The Gifts of Imperfection* by academic Brené Brown. More than a decade after it was first published, it remains as inspiring and practical as ever, teaching you how to get out of your own way and believe that you matter.

BUY THE BOOK



‘Friends’ – *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin (2022)

‘Friends’ is about and dedicated to the friendship between band members Jimin and Taehyung. The same age, the pair were thrown together as trainees in the K-pop world and have been through a lot, from going to school together to the infamous (within the BTS fandom) ‘dumpling incident’, which caused a big falling out between the pair – although thankfully for everyone it was momentary. For a story about an intense friendship with its fair share of ups and downs and misunderstandings, try Gabrielle Zevin’s incredible *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*,

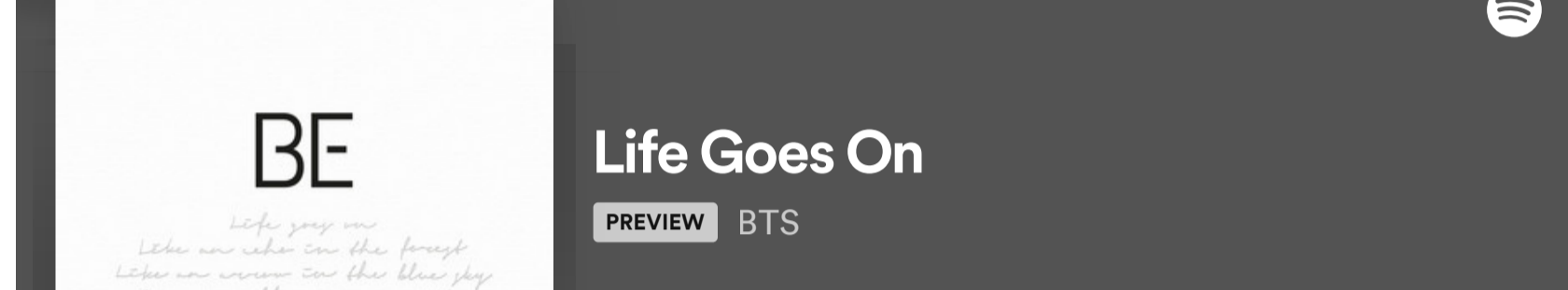
about gaming enthusiasts who meet as children, and whose professional life and friendship become entangled after they reunite in college.



‘Life Goes On’ – *This Too Shall Pass* by Julia Samuel (2020)

BTS was due to go on a massive world tour in 2020, which was postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic and then eventually cancelled – and, like ‘Life Goes On’ says, it felt like the world just stopped one day without warning. If this is your song, try psychotherapist Julia Samuel’s *This Too Shall Pass*, in which she draws on conversations with patients to guide us through adapting and surviving even in the most difficult and transformative of times. Published in the early days of the pandemic, this book stands the test of time to offer help whatever you’re facing.

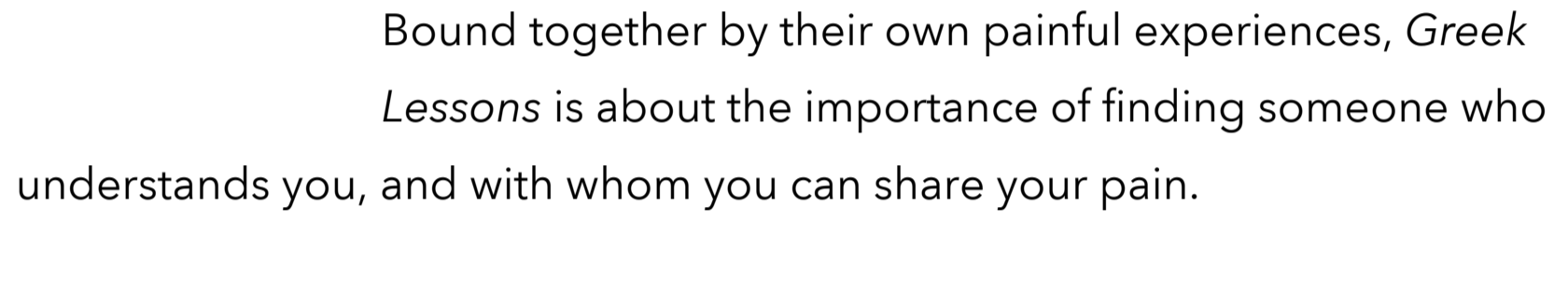
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‘Blue & Grey’ – *Greek Lessons* by Han Kang, trans by Deborah Smith and Emily Yae Won (2023)

Haunting and beautiful, ‘Blue & Grey’ is a song about dealing with depression, anxiety and burnout, and the kind of grief that comes from loneliness. It’s an emotionally raw call for human connection, and showcases BTS’s vulnerability. If it strikes a chord with you, try International Booker Prize-winning author Han Kang’s latest novel, *Greek Lessons*. Set in Seoul, it follows a young woman who has lost her voice, and her Greek language teacher who is losing his sight. Bound together by their own painful experiences, *Greek Lessons* is about the importance of finding someone who understands you, and with whom you can share your pain.

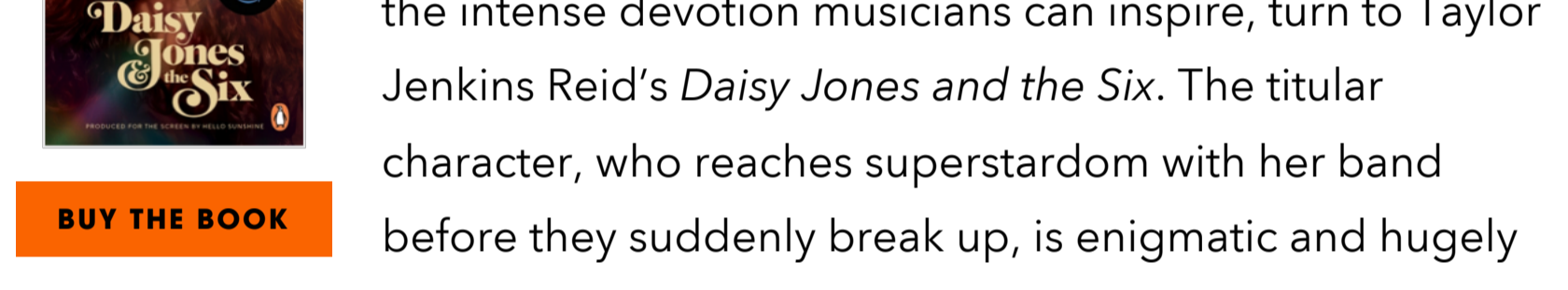
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‘Pied Piper’ – *Daisy Jones and the Six* by Taylor Jenkins Reid (2019)

At its core, ‘Pied Piper’ is a song in which BTS trolls their fans, simultaneously telling them to stop watching and listening to them and to go and live and their lives – while also telling us that they’re here both to save us and ruin us. For a book that captures the intense devotion musicians can inspire, turn to Taylor Jenkins Reid’s *Daisy Jones and the Six*. The titular character, who reaches superstardom with her band before they suddenly break up, is enigmatic and hugely talented; she has that superstar quality, and the book encapsulates the ways in which charismatic, famous people can draw us in.

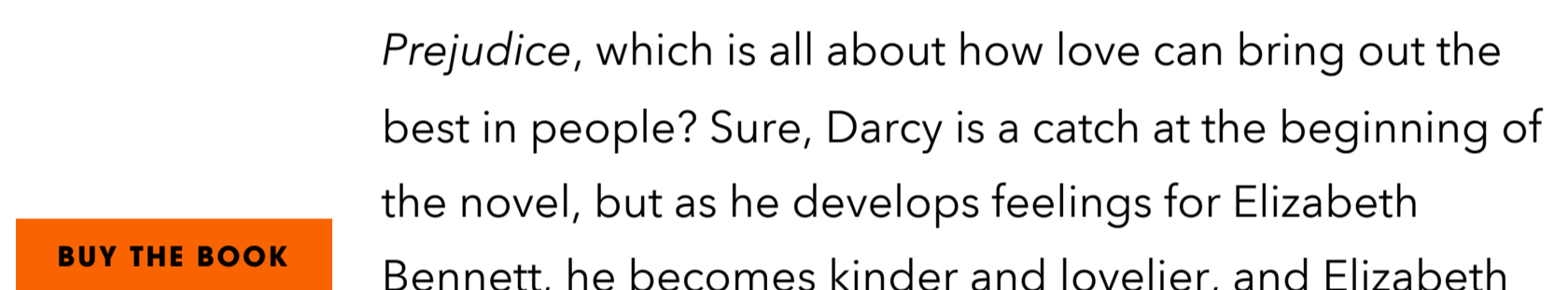
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‘Boy With Luv’ – *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (1813)

Catchy pop tune ‘Boy With Luv’, which features US singer Halsey, is all about the ways in which love can lift you up and make you better and stronger. So who better to turn to if you love this song than Jane Austen and her masterpiece *Pride and Prejudice*, which is all about how love can bring out the best in people? Sure, Darcy is a catch at the beginning of the novel, but as he develops feelings for Elizabeth Bennet, he becomes kinder and lovelier, and Elizabeth blossoms in return.

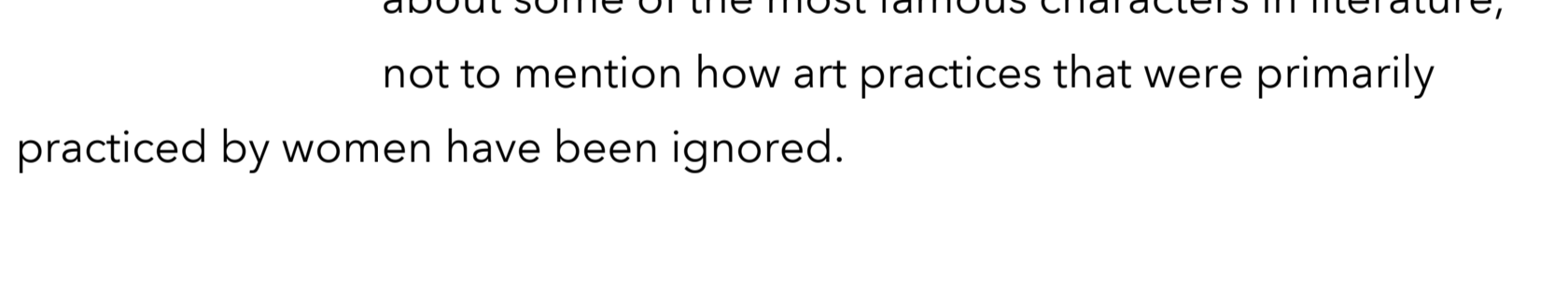
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‘Dionysus’ – *Greek Myths* by Charlotte Higgins, illus. Chris Ofili

Named after the Greek god of wine (and partying, and debauchery, and excess), this isn’t actually a song about drinking, but rather one about art and the creative process, and reflects on being a K-pop idol and an artist. For a look at lesser-known artistry in Ancient Greece, pick up Charlotte Higgins’ *Greek Myths*, a retelling of myths that put women at the centre of the story, told through the framework of tapestries being woven. You’ll reassess what you know about some of the most famous characters in literature, not to mention how art practices that were primarily practiced by women have been ignored.

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‘Blood, Sweat & Tears’ – *Demian* by Hermann Hesse (1919)

BTS’s second studio album, *Wings*, is a bit of a homage to Hermann Hesse’s novel *Demian*, but its influence is most clearly seen in ‘Blood, Sweat & Tears’ and the accompanying music video, in which BTS battle reality and a slightly threatening fantasy world. It’s a song about growing and temptation, linking perfectly to Hesse’s *Demian*, which tells the story of a young boy who is torn between good and evil. His mentors – including the otherworldly and charismatic Demian of the title – help him to forge a path forward.

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‘Baepsae’ – *The Poet* by Yi Mun-Yol (1992)

From early on in BTS’s oeuvre, ‘Baepsae’ (to give the song its Korean title – in English it’s ‘Silver Spoon’) is probably most famous for the moves the band executes when performing it. But the song is more serious than just a bunch of hip thrusters; it’s all about how young people are compared to those older than them, and their concerns dismissed. If you love this song, try *The Poet* by South Korean writer Yi Mun-Yol. It’s the story of a young man who is determined to maintain his integrity in an unjust society, something that – like ‘Baepsae’ – will resonate today even though the book was first published over 30 years ago.

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‘Spring Day’ – *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (2012)

One of the band’s most popular and enduring songs, ‘Spring Day’ is widely thought to be about the 2014 Sewol ferry tragedy in South Korea – in which 306 people died, including many students – but its message about being lost in grief and longing is a universal one. If you love ‘Spring Day’, pick up John Green’s YA novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, about two young people grappling with their mortality, facing death head-on, and learning to love and live even through intense pain and grief. It’s a novel that, like ‘Spring Day’, packs an emotional punch and stays with you.

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