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42

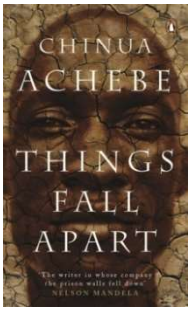
A collection of books to challenge, stimulate and enjoy!

Compiled by The Wodehouse Library and the English Department

Revised Edition 2021

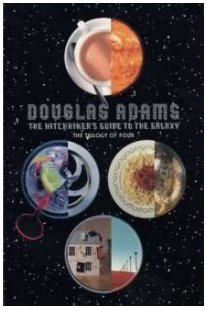
42 : Books to challenge, stimulate and enjoy

Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*



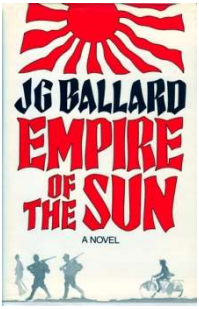
Deceptively simple and hugely affecting, this novel traces in parallel the fall from grace of strong, but flawed, tribal leader Okonkwo and the collapse of traditional Nigerian society with the arrival of colonialism and Christianity. A powerful fable that illuminates and still resonates today – more than fifty years after it was first published.

Douglas Adams *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*



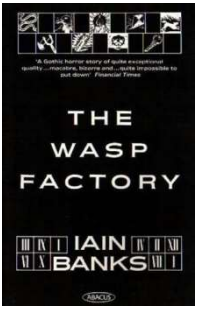
Volume one in a trilogy of five this is the work that introduced humanity to the most remarkable book ever to emerge from our galaxy - such a shame then that Earth has just been destroyed to make way for a new hyperspace bypass. Follow the adventures of Arthur Dent and his (alien) friend Ford Prefect as they escape the destruction and head off into space to discover, amongst other things, the reason this booklet is called 42!

JG Ballard *Empire of the Sun*



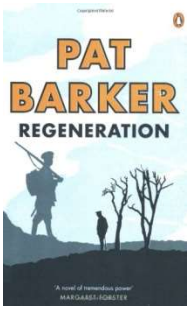
The story of Jim, a young boy caught up in the horror of World War II in Shanghai. Jim fights for survival on the streets of the city, desperately searching for the parents from whom he has been parted. He endures the trials of a Japanese prisoner of war camp yet stays hopeful that his courage will triumph. This is an enduring novel of war and deprivation which paints a brutal picture of a world thrown into chaos through the horror of war.

Iain Banks *The Wasp Factory*



A gothic horror story of sixteen-year-old Frank and his penchant for the torture of insects and the indiscriminate murder of family and friends. This is not a novel for the squeamish but its brilliant dialogue and black humour make for a darkly enjoyable read.

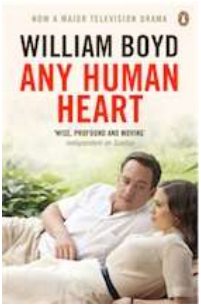
Pat Barker *Regeneration*



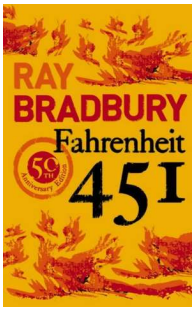
This is the first of the three *Regeneration* trilogy novels, all of which are set during World War I. *Regeneration* tells the story (based on real events) of British soldiers, including Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, as they are treated for shell-shock in a Scottish hospital. The horrors of the war provide a background for the themes that are explored, including sanity, masculinity, class and guilt. Despite her understated style Barker has created a heart-breaking and deeply moving book.

William Boyd *Any Human Heart*

A fictional diary of Logan Gonzago Mountstuart, writer, spy and art dealer. His life begins in Montevideo in 1906 and ends in France 85 years later. In between there's public school and Oxford, love affairs and marriages, the Bloomsbury Set and the Spanish Civil War, run-ins with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and incarceration and penury. Death and disappointment segue to fame and fortune in this beautiful and poignant story of a life both ordinary and extraordinary.



Ray Bradbury *Fahrenheit 451*



Set in a future America where the nation's firefighters are tasked with starting fires rather than quenching them so as to destroy books and the knowledge that they contain. One fireman, Montag, rebels and with a retired English professor they attempt to destroy the state's machinery of censorship. A provocative read in the mould of *1984* that demonstrates the importance of reading and independent thinking.

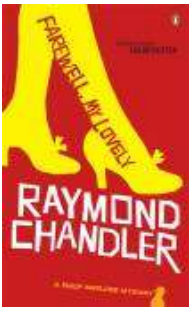
Octavia E Butler *Kindred*

This American time travel story takes place partly in Los Angeles in 1976 and partly in Maryland in around 1815, before slavery was abolished. Dana, a young black woman, discovers that she has a strange link with a young white boy, Rufus living 150 years ago, that causes her to travel back in time whenever he is in danger. Based on slave narratives of the time and extensive research by the author this novel was one of the first to depict accurately the experiences of black people during slavery. Ground breaking when it was published in 1979, it is now considered a classic of American literature.

Truman Capote *In Cold Blood*

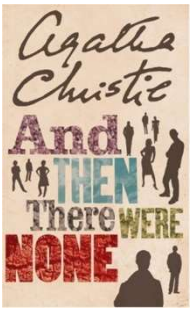
As compelling a read as any fictitious murder could hope to be. Capote details the crime, investigation, arrest and execution of the two murderers of a family of four in Kansas. He provides a unique look into the minds of the killers and creates a compelling, yet at times disturbing, story.

Raymond Chandler *Farewell My Lovely*



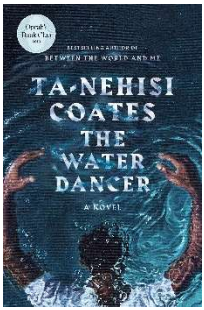
A classic detective yarn following the attempts of Philip Marlowe to track down Velma, a former dancer and girlfriend of Moose Molloy, a petty criminal just released from jail. Marlowe's efforts lead him into dangerous situations and allow Chandler to run riot with his hard-hitting metaphors and unmistakeable language.

Agatha Christie *And Then There Were None*



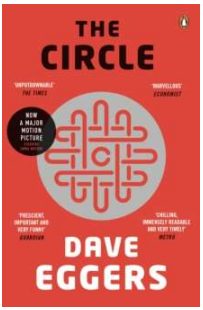
People bang on about Christie's inability to characterise, her middle-class prejudices, and her slavishness to generic convention. Nonsense! She perfected a style that is seductively addictive, she shone a spotlight on the malice and danger which lurks beneath the façade of cosy English life, and she revolutionised the mystery genre. And this is her masterpiece: terrifyingly claustrophobic, starkly comic, with a devastating ending.

Ta-Nehisi Coates *The Water Dancer*



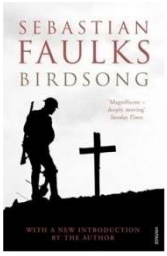
Set on a Virginia plantation during the Antebellum South, this powerful novel captures magic, suspense, history, survival, and action in its pages. The main character and narrator, Hiram is the son of the plantation owner but born a slave. Hiram is gifted - not just in his ability to magically transport himself, and others if necessary, from one place to another but also in that he believes he has a special destiny and role in the fight for freedom. Oprah Winfrey said that *The Water Dancer* is 'one of the best books I have ever read in my life.'

Dave Eggers *The Circle*



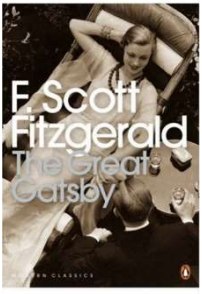
A *1984* for the modern world. When Mae lands a job at the Circle, the world's most powerful internet company, she feels she's been given the opportunity of a lifetime. Run from a sprawling California campus, the company links users' personal emails, social media, and finances with their universal operating system, resulting in one online identity and a new age of transparency. However, Mae soon finds that her dream job starts to take over all aspects of her life and that there is a more sinister side to the work of the Circle.

Sebastian Faulks *Birdsong*



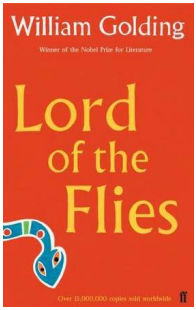
One of the most lauded novels about World War I, this is much more than a story about the horrors of war. It focuses on the life of Stephen Wraysford before, during and after the War, depicting his relationship with a French woman and the consequences of this affair. The story travels from France during the War to England in the 1970s as Wraysford's granddaughter attempts to find the truth about her grandfather's life.

F Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*



This novel paints a vivid picture of the decadent excess of America in the 1920s. Personified in the guise of Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire, it explores the drive for wealth and the unattainable, setting in motion a series of events which end in tragedy. This is one of the truly great American novels and has rightly endured the test of time.

William Golding *Lord of the Flies*

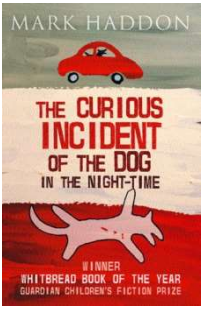


Golding's classic tale places a group of young boys alone on an island as a result of a plane crash. Though initially idyllic, the group soon breaks into factions and tensions begin to emerge. The ensuing descent into savagery is a frightening account of base tendencies and resonates with an honest horror that has managed to captivate readers for decades.

Graham Greene *Brighton Rock*

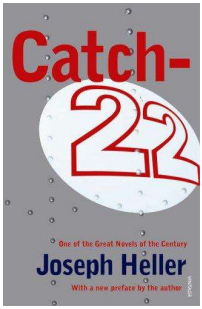
Pinkie Brown, the 17-year-old killer and future leader of the gang, kills without compunction or mercy in this thrilling novel which tells of a world of mob-land ruthlessness, murder and debased morality, set in Brighton between the wars.

Mark Haddon *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*



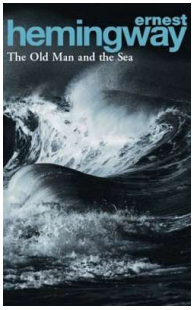
This book is unique in every sense of the word – told through the voice of Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome, it tells of Christopher's efforts to discover the killer of his neighbour's dog. The journey takes him away from his home environment and details his impressions of an adult world which he is unable to fully understand. It blends humour with real sadness and is written in simple words which belie their sophistication – a book which once read, will surely be remembered.

Joseph Heller *Catch-22*



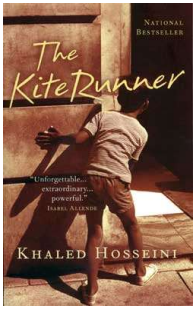
Catch-22 is a satirical novel set during World War II. It follows the exploits of Captain John Yossarian, a US Army bombardier, as he grapples with the insanity of war. It is that rare book that delivers the horror and fear of war but also uses humour, pathos and a real feel for the absurd to deliver a strong, unequivocal message about the bureaucracy so much a part of any war.

Ernest Hemingway *The Old Man and the Sea*



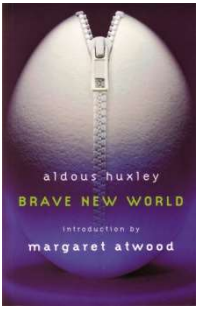
Set off the coast of Havana *The Old Man and the Sea* tells the story of an aged fisherman who, down on his luck, sails ever further out to sea in an attempt to catch a giant marlin. Finally successful, he attempts to bring the fish back to shore. This is the perfect introduction to Hemingway's magnificent writing.

Khaled Hosseini *The Kite Runner*



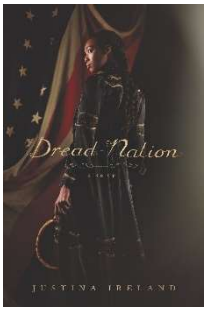
This book centres on the character of Amir, a young boy growing up in privilege in Afghanistan, and his relationship with both his friend Hassan and his father. It is a story of friendship and betrayal, of coming of age and of living with the consequences of one's actions. The plot moves from Kabul to America, where Amir and his father move after the Russian invasion and where they live a much more basic life. The story comes full circle as Amir faces up to his past actions and tries to right a previous wrong.

Aldous Huxley *Brave New World*



Despite its age *Brave New World* has not lost its relevancy. Technology, with its power to save as well as to destruct; bottle-grown babies; drugs; a caste system and the search for immortality – these are issues that resonate now just as they did in 1932 when Huxley's futuristic classic was published. The overriding theme is happiness, and what value we give it when weighed against totalitarianism and freedom of thought.

Justina Ireland *Dread Nation*

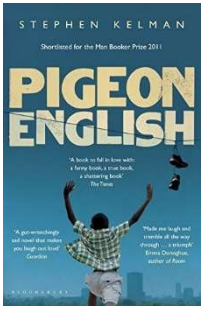


In the aftermath of the American Civil War, dead soldiers are coming back to life as Zombies. Trained at Miss Preston's School of Combat for Negro Girls in both weaponry and etiquette, Jane McKeene is poised for a successful career protecting the wealthy from the encroaching plague of walking dead. But when families begin to go missing, Jane uncovers a conspiracy that pits her against some powerful enemies.

Kazuo Ishiguro *Never Let Me Go*

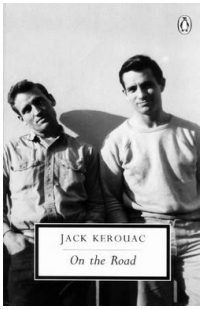
A frighteningly compulsive read about a future in which a sector of society are born to be organ donors for the rest of the population. The anguish of discovery of their ultimate fates and the overriding yearning for some semblance of a real life on the part of the donors makes for a heart-breaking story full of sorrow yet written with Ishiguro's magical touch.

Stephen Kelman *Pigeon English*



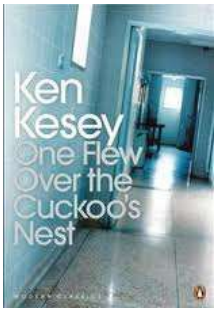
Harrison Opoku's life in London is a kaleidoscope of exciting new experiences from discovering all the varieties of Haribo sweets, to his itchy but bo-styles Chelsea shirt, to trying to tame a pigeon. When a boy he was half friends with is choked Harrison can't resist trying to solve the murder before the police do, but his innocence and enthusiasm is no protection from the very real dangers that surround him. Funny and heart-breaking this book was inspired by the real events surrounding the death of Damilola Taylor and was shortlisted for the 2011 Booker Prize.

Jack Kerouac *On the Road*



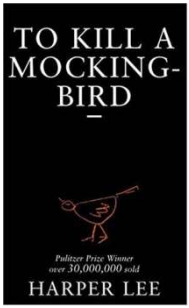
A highly important American text which offers a fascinating perspective on the American Dream as well as an insightful introduction to Beat literature.

Ken Kesey *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*



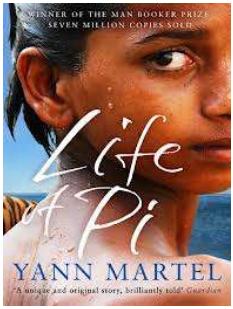
The story of Randle McMurphy, a rebel who finds himself serving the remainder of his prison sentence in a mental hospital after faking insanity. It is here that he meets Nurse Ratched who rules the ward with an iron fist and finds McMurphy's anti-authoritarian attitude repugnant. The battle of wills between the two form the basis of the novel and offers the reader a tale of hope, dignity and honour in the face of oppression.

Harper Lee *To Kill a Mockingbird*



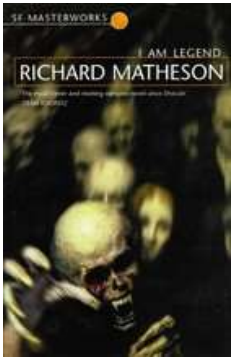
Told through the voice of eight-year-old Scout Finch, this is a remarkable book about growing up in the American South. It is a story about the loss of innocence and the value of honour and in Atticus Finch, Scout's father, is embodied the fight for right against the evils of racism and prejudice. An American classic which has endured through generations.

Yann Martel *Life of Pi*



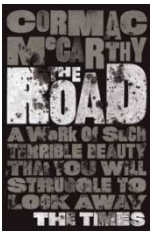
This is the story of a sixteen-year-old boy who survives over 200 days at sea on a lifeboat with a tiger. This fantastical story is made believable by the author's unerring ability to bring to life the everyday problems involved in surviving this incredible situation.

Richard Matheson *I am Legend*



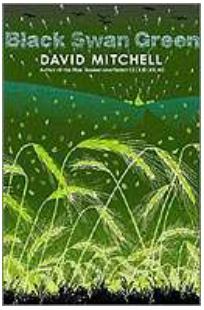
Following an apocalyptic virus outbreak that has devastated the human race turning them into living dead displaying vampiric tendencies Robert Nevile is the last surviving human. Somehow immune to the virus he has to survive in the city scavenging for food whilst avoiding the terrifying attentions of the zombies. *I am Legend* is a novel that has provided the inspiration for many zombie films and novels but is perhaps most remarkable for its descriptions of the battle against scarred memories and loneliness.

Cormac McCarthy *The Road*



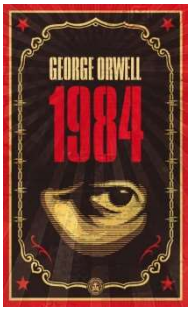
A story of the relationship of a father and son as they make their way through the burnt landscape of a post-apocalyptic future searching for the remnants of civilization. This is a bleak novel of emotion and intensity.

David Mitchell *Black Swan Green*



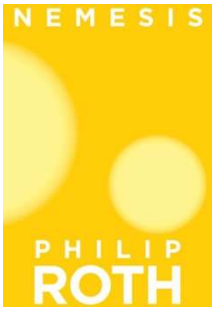
Ford Capris and Angel Delight – just some of the ephemera that accompany 13-year-old Jason Taylor as he stammers and stumbles his way through 1982. An eventful year, as the Falklands War rumbles on in the background, Jason, who rather self-consciously writes poetry under the name of Eliot Bolivar, also gets into typical adolescent scrapes with friends and kisses a girl for the first time. Funny, warm and moving.

George Orwell *1984*



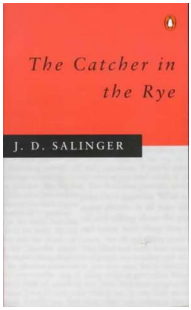
The very mention of *1984* evokes pictures of the Big Brother society which the book depicts. It follows the story of Winston Smith, a worker for the Ministry of Truth, who dreams of rebellion against the system that espouses unrelenting surveillance and total mind control. The world portrayed in this post global atomic war scenario is a chilling, brutal one in which any form of individuality is thwarted and where obedience to the system must be absolute.

Philip Roth *Nemesis*



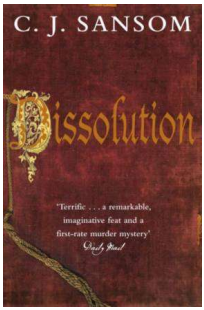
This is a story about a polio outbreak in Newark, New Jersey in the summer of 1944. The main character, Bucky Cantor, is a young, athletic man unable to go to war because of poor eyesight. Instead he is put in charge of a group of children during this long, hot summer with sad, humbling consequences. If you have never read a Philip Roth book, this short novel offers a wonderful taste of one of the most recognized and influential authors in modern literature.

J D Salinger The *Catcher in the Rye*



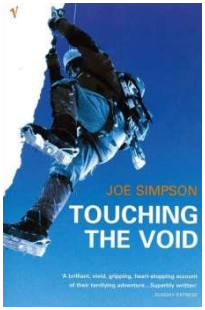
This is perhaps the seminal work on teenage angst. Holden Caulfield is a sixteen-year-old boy who, after being expelled from his prep school, goes underground in New York for three days searching for truth and railing against adult phoniness. His observations and rants became the voice of a generation and continue to entertain and challenge even today.

C J Sansom *Dissolution*



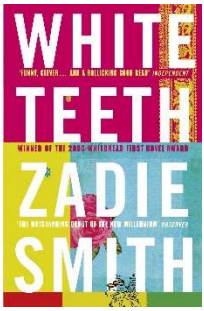
Set during the reign of Henry VIII whose commissioners are investigating the monasteries and appropriating their buildings and wealth for the King. At Scarnsea, on the Sussex coast matters have spiralled out of control and the King's Commissioner has been killed. Lawyer and ardent reformer, Matthew Shardlake, is sent to investigate but soon finds he is led to question the beliefs he holds dear. An excellent, historically accurate thriller.

Joe Simpson *Touching the Void*



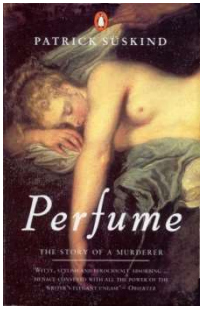
The remarkable true account of Joe Simpson's survival in the Peruvian Andes. After reaching the summit of Siula Grande, Joe and his climbing partner, Simon, are caught up in a disastrous accident which leaves Simon believing that Joe is dead at the bottom of a crevice. Simon makes the awful decision to cut the rope between them but almost impossibly, Joe survives and makes the gruelling journey back to base camp. One of the most courageous, terrifying and gripping adventures ever written – a truly outstanding book.

Zadie Smith *White Teeth*



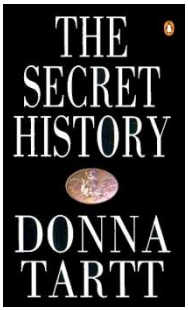
A brilliantly written, comic look at multi-cultural life in England since the Second World War seen through the lives of three families in North London. *White Teeth* was a ground-breaking debut novel and marked the emergence of one of the most brilliant novelist of the 21st Century.

Patrick Suskind *Perfume*



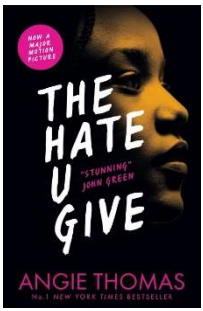
Grenouille, a French orphan boy with no body odour of his own, yet possessing an extraordinary sense of smell, becomes obsessed with creating the perfect scent. The gruesome details of what Grenouille is compelled to do in order to fulfil his quest are a stark contrast to the intricate and delicate nature of creating perfume. This is a fascinating, dark, bizarre and thought-provoking tale of human morality.

Donna Tartt *The Secret History*



Set in a small New England university, *The Secret History* tells the story of six classics students and a macabre situation which leads to the murder of one of the group. The book explores the lasting effects of this murder on the survivors and the circumstances which made the outcome tragically inevitable.

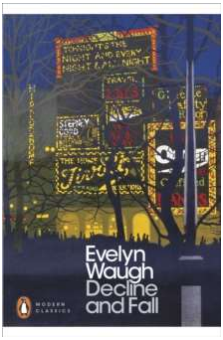
Angie Thomas *The Hate U Give (THUG)*



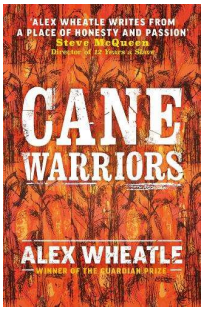
Sixteen-year-old Starr lives in two worlds: the poor neighbourhood where she was born and raised and her posh high school in the suburbs. The uneasy balance between them is shattered when Starr is the only witness to the fatal shooting of her unarmed best friend, Khalil, by a police officer. Starr is an inspirational character and THUG is an important book highlighting the everyday dangers faced by the African-American community.

Evelyn Waugh *Decline and Fall*

Sent down from Oxford in disgrace following an unfortunate experience with the badly-behaved Bollinger Club, Paul Pennyfeather lands a job as a schoolmaster at Llanabba Castle where he meets a motley assortment of fellow masters including the frequently drunk Captain Grimes. Life for Paul looks to take a new turn for the better when he meets Margot Beste-Chetwyne, the mother of one of his pupils, but her plans for our hapless hero only lead to further misfortune. An outrageously funny satire of life in the 1920s.

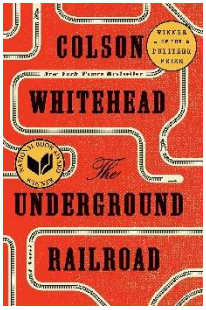


Alex Wheatle *Cane Warriors*



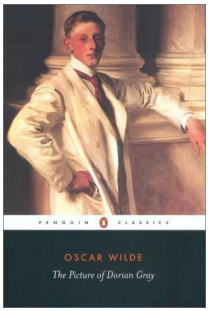
Moa is 14-year-old slave who endures backbreaking 13-hour days cutting sugar cane on a Jamaican plantation. Two of his siblings have already died, his father has lost his arm in a work accident and he isn't allowed to see his mother, the Master's cook. Moa is 14, but he feels as if his life is over already. One day Moa is invited to join a rebellion, fighting back against the brutal slave owners. He knows he will have to kill, and will risk being killed himself, but despite his father's protestations he decides to join the rebels as he prefers to live a life of hope, rather than of despair. Moa's story, and that of the Cane Warriors, is based on true events – the Easter Uprising of 1760. In this retelling, Wheatle brings an important period in British slave owning history to light: one that portrays the slaves as the heroic and brave men, women and children that they were.

Colson Whitehead *The Underground Railroad*



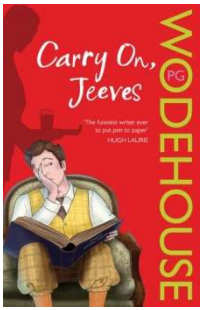
The underground railroad was a network of brave individuals who sheltered and assisted runaway slaves seeking freedom in the Northern United States. Using techniques of magic realism, Colson Whitehead reimagines this as an actual system of railway lines and steam trains travelling underneath the South with secret stops below houses and farms. His central character, 15 year old Cora, has a dream like (sometimes nightmarish) journey on the railroad experiencing different aspects of the history of black people in America when she emerges at each stop. This book won the Pulitzer Prize in 2016.

Oscar Wilde *The Picture of Dorian Gray*



A classic work of gothic fiction, this book tells the story of Dorian Gray, a handsome young man who sells his soul to retain his youthful beauty. His debauched lifestyle reflects itself in a portrait painted by an artist friend, which ages with each sin committed, while Gray himself escapes any of the ravages of age. However, the consequences of this lifestyle have horrific consequences as the book propels the reader to its tragic ending.

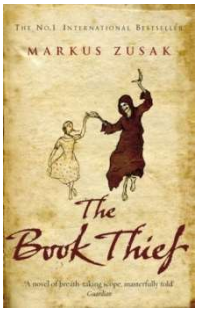
P G Wodehouse *Carry On, Jeeves*



A set of short stories introducing Bertie Wooster and his indomitable valet, Jeeves. Wooster invariably gets into scrapes of his own making to be duly rescued by his faithful servant. Wodehouse was the finest comic writer of the twentieth century and his warmth and wit have amused generations of fans.

Marcus Zusak *The Book Thief*

Nazi Germany, 1939. Liesel, a nine-year-old girl is living with a foster family after her parents have been taken away to a concentration camp. Death narrates the story – the story of ordinary Germans living through the war – with a confused, bemused air over the antics and cruelty of humanity.



Year 9 Recommendations

Douglas Adams	The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Agatha Christie	And Then There Were None
Mark Haddon	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time
Justina Ireland	Dread Nation
Harper Lee	To Kill a Mockingbird
Angie Thomas	The Hate U Give

Year 10 Recommendations

Olivia E Butler	Kindred
Dave Eggers	The Circle
Ernest Hemingway	The Old Man and the Sea
Yann Martel	Life of Pi
George Orwell	1984
Alex Wheatle	Cane Warriors

Year 11 Recommendations

Graham Greene	Brighton Rock
Kazuo Ishiguro	Never Let Me Go
J D Salinger	The Catcher in the Rye
Zadie Smith	White Teeth
Donna Tartt	The Secret History
Colson Whitehead	The Underground Railroad