

BOOKS FOR EVERYONE

RGS Recommended reading for KS4 and 5

About this list

Most of the books on this list are recommended by other students. Their English teachers and the RGS librarians have added to it.

We aim to provide you with a starting point with this list: when you find a book you like, you can branch out into other books by the same writer or in the same style or genre. There are plenty of recommendations for further reading, but we can't list them all here! Ask your English teacher or the librarian for further suggestions.

If you read something which should be on the list, please do let us know. And if any title has over-

stayed its welcome here, we want to know that too. **Use the Library, it's a wonderful resource** – these books (and very many more) are available through it.

In this booklet, there is a range of popular fiction, fiction about the world around us, work by LGBTQIA+ writers, historical and science-fiction and non-fiction. The best way to learn about the world and the people in it is by reading.

NEWCASTLE ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL 2025-26



Year ten and 11 class readers

PLEASE NOTE: these books may be read in your English class. Please check with your teacher before you start reading

Novels

Daphne Du Maurier – Rebecca
Chinua Achebe – Things Fall Apart

Plays

Pearl Cleage – Blues for an Alabama Sky
Shelagh Delaney – A Taste of Honey

A selection of classics

Many students still make the strongest connections with established and well-loved classic novels, books which have been capturing the imagination of bright readers for many generations...

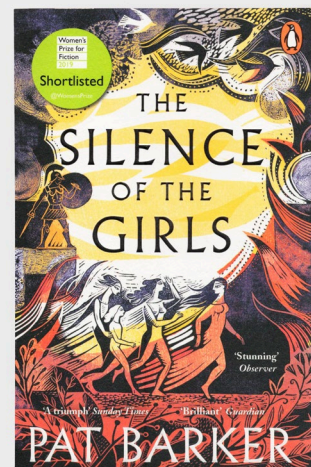
Angelou, Maya	<i>I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings</i>
Austen, Jane	<i>Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park</i>
Brontë, Charlotte	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (see also other Brontë sister novels)
Carter, Angela	<i>Wise Children</i>
Dickens, Charles	<i>Great Expectations, Oliver Twist, Hard Times</i>
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	<i>Crime and Punishment</i>
Du Maurier, Daphne	<i>Jamaica Inn</i>
Forster, E. M.	<i>Howards End, A Room with a View</i>
Greene, Graham	<i>Brighton Rock</i>
Hemingway, Ernest	<i>A Farewell to Arms, The Old Man and the Sea</i>
Heller, Joseph	<i>Catch-22</i>
Huxley, Aldous	<i>Brave New World</i>
James, Henry	<i>The Turn of the Screw</i>
Lee, Harper	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
Marquez, Gabriel Garcia	<i>Love in the Time of Cholera</i>
Remarque, Erich Maria	<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i>
Salinger, J.D.	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>
Solzenitsyn, Alexander	<i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</i>
Steinbeck, John	<i>East of Eden</i>
Stoker, Bram	<i>Dracula</i>
Taylor, Mildred D.	<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i>
Walker, Alice	<i>The Color Purple</i>
Wyndham, John	<i>The Day of the Triffids</i>

The Silence of the Girls

Pat Barker

Barker's retelling of *The Iliad* from the perspective of the voiceless women from the conflict is an electrifying novel. It demonstrates the importance of **who** tells stories and why their message is important.

When her city falls to the Greeks, Briseis's old life is shattered. She is transformed from queen to captive, from free woman to slave, awarded to the god-like warrior Achilles as a prize of war. And she's not alone: on the same day, and on many others in the course of a long and bitter war, innumerable women have been wrested from their homes and flung to the fighters.

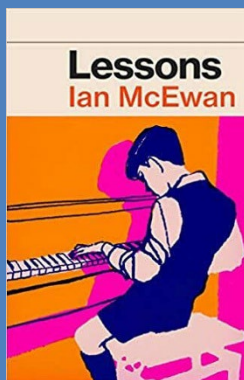
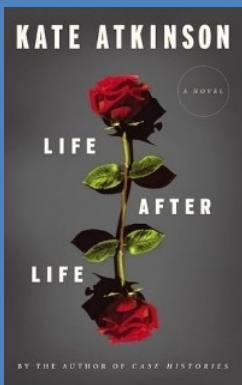


Wrestling the epic drama of the Trojan War away from its usual male-centric gaze, *The Silence of the Girls* seeks out the other story, the women's story, charting the journey of a sometime-queen across the chaos of history, seeking freedom and the right to be author of her own story. Also try ***Circe* by Madeline Miller**, which gives voice to one of mythology's most misunderstood women.

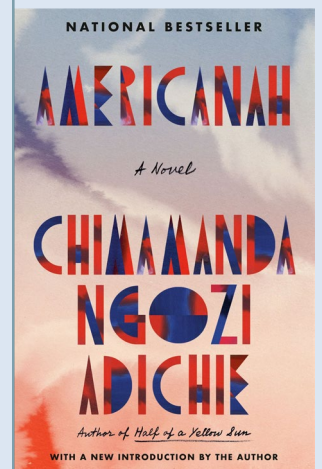


Life After Life by **Kate Atkinson** offers and answers the question ‘what would happen if I had a second chance at life? And then a third? A fourth?’ Ursula Todd is born (and dies) with a peculiar gift: her life rebegins and her knowledge of her previous existences gradually begins to accumulate. Ursula’s extraordinary lives coincide with some of the most dramatic historical events of the 20th century and her decisions have an enormous impact on the world around her.

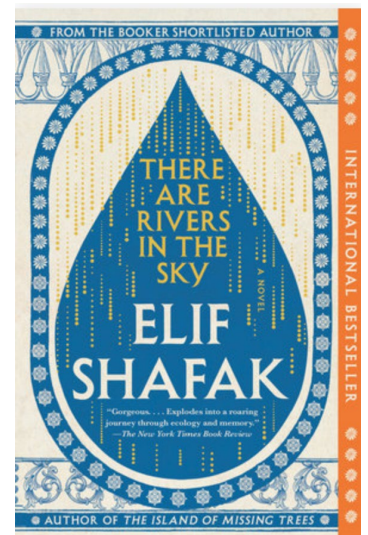
Try also **Ian McEwan’s Lessons**. McEwan’s novel (a bildungsroman) follows the life of Ronald Baines, charting his relationships, adventures, and the impact of a terrible event in his teenage years.



Americanah addresses issues of race and dislocation. As teenagers in Lagos, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their Nigeria is under military dictatorship, and people are fleeing the country if they can. The self-assured Ifemelu departs for America. There she suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

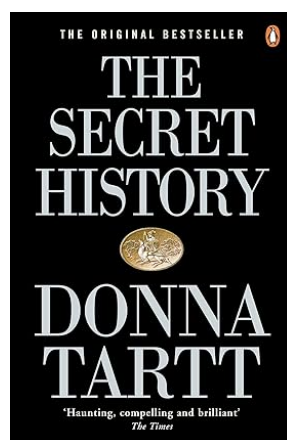


Elif Shafak’s There Are Rivers in the Sky is a rich, sweeping novel set between the 19th century and modern times, about love and loss, memory and erasure, hurt and healing, centred around three enchanting characters living on the banks of the River Thames and the River Tigris - their lives all curiously touched by the epic of Gilgamesh.



The Secret History by **Donna Tartt** is arguably one of the most popular books of the past two decades. The novel’s narrator, Richard Papeen, immediately confides in the narrator, confessing the impact of a murder he and his college classmates committed many years ago.

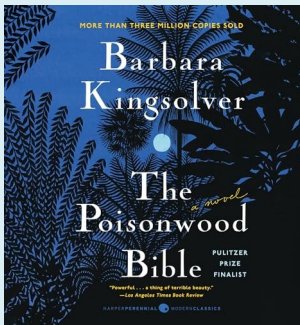
The novel recounts the events leading up to the murder, becoming a ‘whydunnit’ as Papeen explains his motives and whether or not his classmates escaped the law and their own consciences...



Yellowface
R.F. Kuang

Athena Liu is a famous, beloved author. June Hayward is a nobody. But when June just happens to witness Athena die in a freak accident, she realises now is her chance to find fame. So what if that means stealing her friend’s work? As her lies mount up and threaten her stolen success, how far will June go to keep what she thinks she deserves... This is one hell of a story. It’s just not hers to tell.





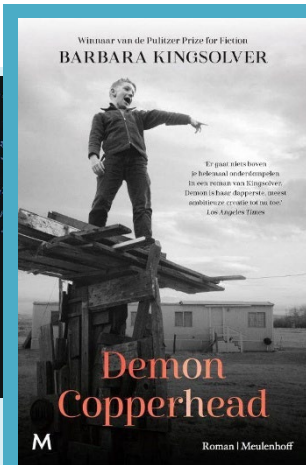
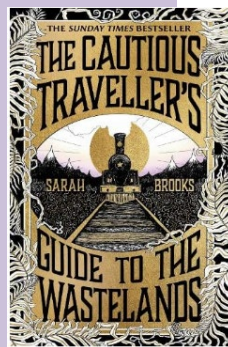
Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* is undoubtedly a modern classic. This epic focuses on a family's journey from America to the Congo in 1959. Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical priest, forces his family to accompany him to Africa on a religious mission; the story is told from the perspective of his four young daughters as they acclimatise to life in the Congo and helplessly await the tragedy that befalls them...

The Cautious Traveller's Guide to the Wastelands

Sarah Brooks

Following an unforgettable group of passengers on the way through the barren wasteland between Beijing and Moscow, Brooks' enchanting period novel is a thrilling tale of mystery and danger on the Trans-Siberian Express.

Cue a curious cast of characters: a grieving woman with a borrowed name, a famous child born on the train and a disgraced naturalist, all heading for the Great Exhibition in Moscow. But the old rules are changing, and there are whispers that the train isn't safe. As secrets begin to unravel, the passengers and crew must survive their journey through the Wastelands together - even as something uncontrollable seems to be breaking in . . .

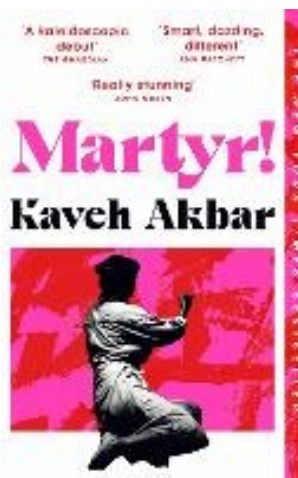


Demon Copperhead Barbara Kingsolver

Demon Copperhead (born Damon Fields) is born to a teenage mother in a trailer in Lee County, Virginia. His early life is marked by instability and hardship as Demon tries to grow and thrive in an America hard-hit by the opioid crisis.

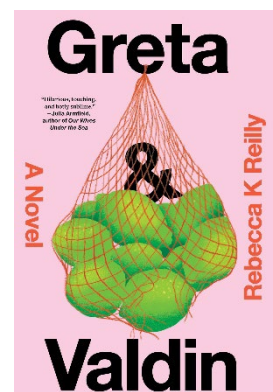
Throughout the story, Demon tries to navigate friendship, loss, and the harsh realities of his environment with only his fierce wit and his dead father's good looks to rely on. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favour of cities. Inspired by the unflinching truth-telling of David Copperfield, Kingsolver enlists Dickens' anger and compassion, and above all, his faith in the power of a gripping, heartbreaking story.

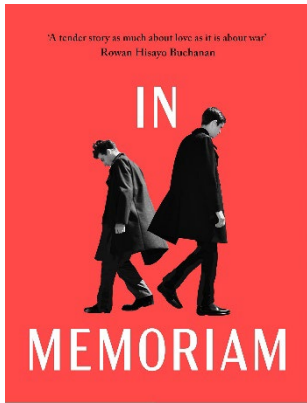
Martyr! Kaveh Akbar



Dark, mischievous and full of verve, Akbar's electrifying debut follows a newly sober poet adrift in the American Midwest. Cyrus Shams has always been lost. He's grown up tangled in the mysteries of his past - an uncle who rode through Iranian battlefields, a haunting work of art by an exiled painter, and his mother, whose plane was shot down over the Persian Gulf when he was just a baby. Now, newly sober and maybe in love, he's headed for an encounter that will transform everything he thought he knew. Can a final revelation change the truth of Cyrus's life?

Utterly hilarious, ruthless and mesmerisingly original, this delicious debut follows a Maori-Russian-Catalonian family's two titular children navigating multiracial identity, queerness and unattainable love interests in present-day New Zealand.





ALICE WINN

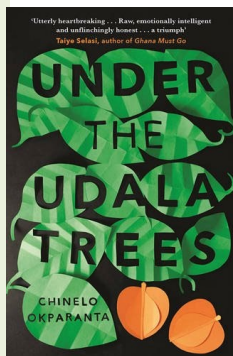
In Memoriam is an exceptionally beautiful story about the harrowing impact of the First World War on two young men who share an incredible connection...

Winn started writing *In Memoriam* after reading real student newspapers from an English boarding school that were written in 1915. Henry Gaunt is half German. When his family ask him to enlist to forestall the anti-German sentiment they face, Gaunt does so immediately, relieved to escape his overwhelming feelings for his best friend, Sidney Ellwood. To Gaunt's horror, Ellwood rushes to join him at the front, and the rest of their classmates soon follow. Now death surrounds them in all its grim reality, often inches away, and no one knows who will be next.

Under the Udala Trees

Inspired by Nigeria's folktales and its war, *Under the Udala Trees* is a deeply searching, powerful debut about the dangers of living and loving openly. Ijeoma comes of age as her nation does; born before independence, she is eleven when civil war breaks out in the young republic of Nigeria. Sent away to safety, she meets another displaced child and they, star-crossed, fall in love. They are from different ethnic communities. They are also both girls.

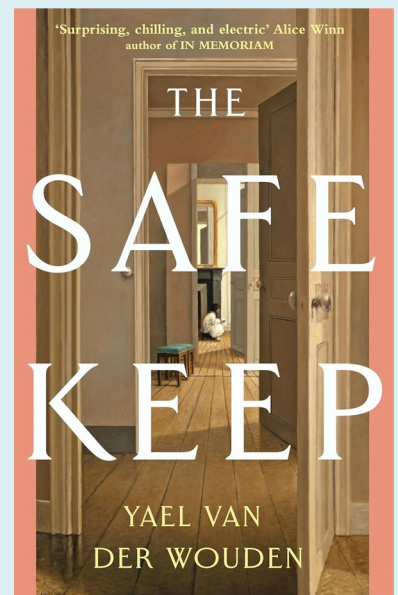
When their love is discovered, Ijeoma learns that she will have to hide this part of herself. But there is a cost to living inside a lie.



An exhilarating, twisted tale of desire, suspicion, and obsession between two women staying in the same house in the Dutch countryside during the summer of 1961—a powerful exploration of the legacy of WWII and the darker parts of our collective past.

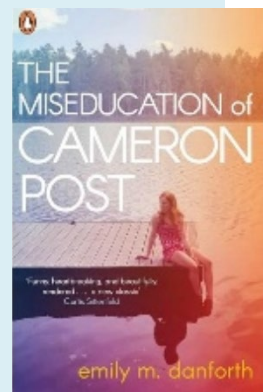
A house is a precious thing... Isabel has absolute control over her regimented, empty life until all is upended by her brother's new girlfriend, Eva. Is she what she seems?

The Safekeep – Yael Van Der Wouden



The Miseducation of Cameron Post – Emily M. Danforth

A beautiful coming of age novel about a young girl, Cameron, coming to accept who she is. Following the death of her parents, Cameron is forced to move in with her traditional aunt who wants to take drastic action to 'fix' her niece. Cameron, however, is captivated by her new and intense friendship with Coley Taylor...

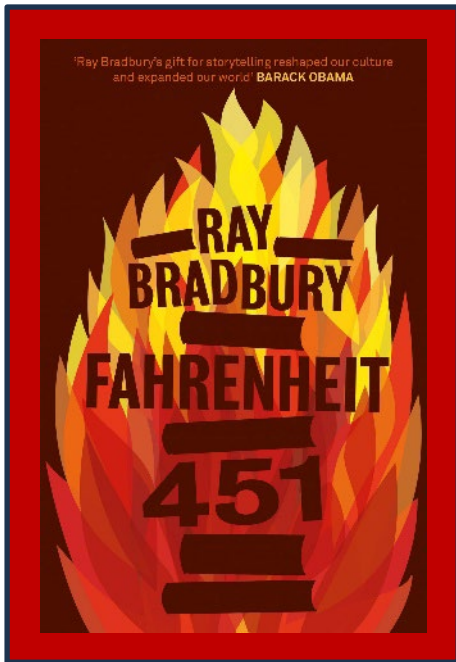


I Wish You All the Best – Mason Deaver

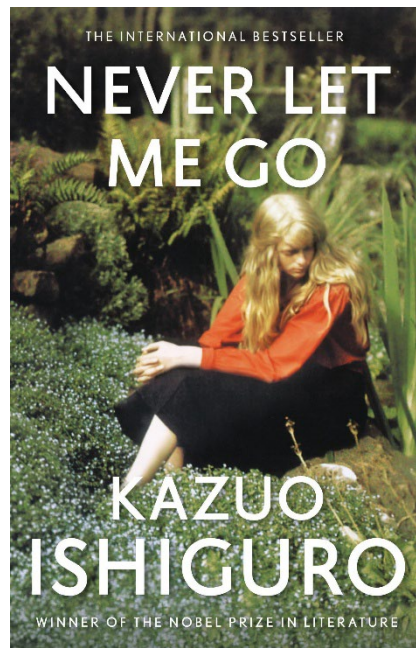
Coming out as non-binary went the worst way it possibly could have for Ben De Backer, and it led to them being immediately thrown out of the house and practically disowned by their parents. School is a nightmare, and Ben tries to keep a low profile as much as they can – regretting coming out the last time too strongly to trust the people around them enough to do it again. That is, at least, until they meet the charming Nathan Allan – a fellow student more than happy to give Ben the confidence they so gravely lack.



6 Dystopian, Sci-Fi, and Historical Fiction



Fahrenheit 451 – Ray Bradbury. Guy Montag is a fireman. His job is to destroy the most illegal of commodities, the printed book, along with the houses in which they are hidden. Montag never questions the destruction and ruin his actions produce, returning each day to his bland life and wife, Mildred, who spends all day with her television “family.” But when he meets an eccentric young neighbour, Clarisse, who introduces him to a past where people didn’t live in fear and to a present where one sees the world through the ideas in books instead of the mindless chatter of television, Montag begins to question everything he has ever known. **Fahrenheit 451** is one of the most famous dystopian novels, with serious relevance in 2025.

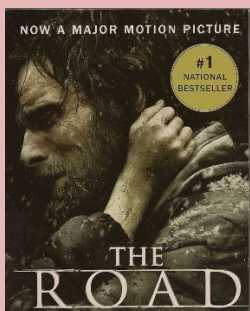


Never Let Me Go - Kazuo Ishiguro

As a child, Kathy – now thirty-one years old – lived at Hailsham, a private school in the scenic English countryside where the children were sheltered from the outside world, brought up to believe that they were special and that their well-being was crucial not only for themselves but for the society they would eventually enter.

Kathy is a human clone. Her sole purpose is to donate organs and care for other clones (‘donors’) who will suffer the same fate.

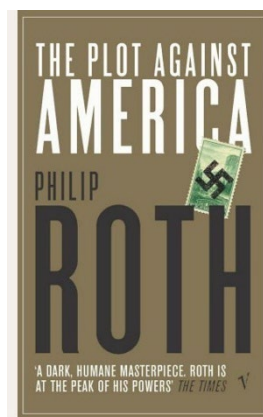
This dystopian novel is a beautiful exploration of the very human search for meaning and belonging.



A searing, postapocalyptic novel in which a father and his son walk alone through burned America. Nothing moves in the ravaged landscape save the ash on the wind. They have nothing; just a pistol to defend themselves against the lawless bands that stalk the road, the clothes they are wearing, a cart of scavenged food—and each other.



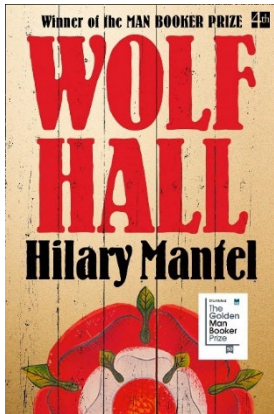
The state has its eyes on mothers like Frida — ones who check their phones while their kids are on the playground; who let their children walk home alone; mothers who only have one lapse of judgement. Now, a host of government officials will determine if Frida is a candidate for a Big Brother-like institution that measures the success or failure of a mother’s devotion.



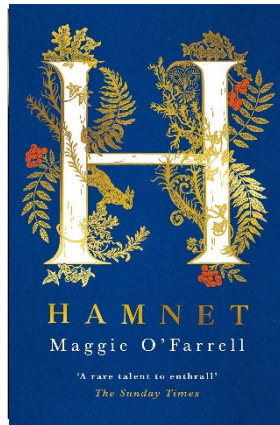
The Plot Against America – Philip Roth

Roth imagines an alternate version of American history. In 1940 Charles A. Lindbergh, heroic aviator and rabid isolationist, is elected President. Shortly thereafter, he negotiates a cordial “understanding” with Adolf Hitler, while the new government embarks on a program of folksy anti-Semitism.

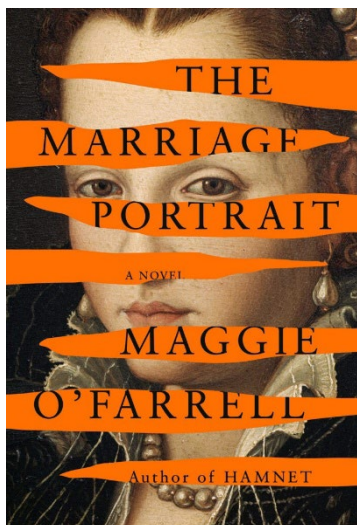
For one boy growing up in Newark, Lindbergh's election is the first in a series of ruptures that threatens to destroy his small, safe corner of America - and with it, his mother, his father, and his older brother.



England in the 1520s is a heartbeat from disaster. If the king dies without a male heir, the country could be destroyed by civil war. Henry VIII wants to annul his marriage of twenty years and marry Anne Boleyn. To accomplish the impossible, up steps Thomas Cromwell...

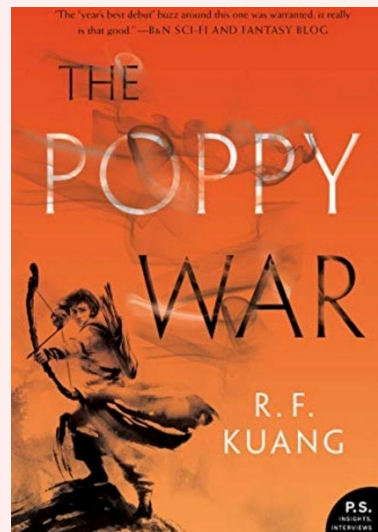


Warwickshire in the 1580s. Agnes is a woman as feared for her unusual gifts. She settles with her husband in Henley street, Stratford, and has three children: a daughter, Susanna, and then twins, Hamnet and Judith. The boy, Hamnet, dies in 1596, aged eleven. Four years or so later, the husband writes a play called Hamlet.

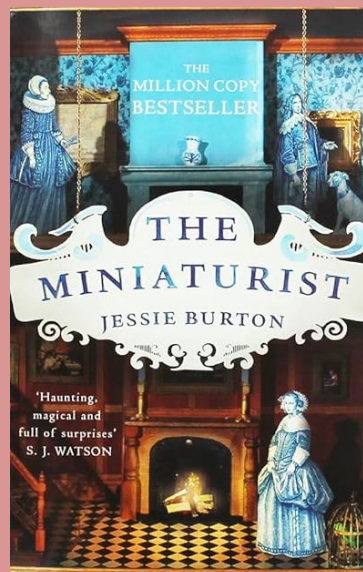


Florence, the 1550s. Lucrezia, third daughter of the grand duke, is comfortable with her obscure place in the palazzo: free to wonder at its treasures and pursue her artistic interests. However, a mysterious Duke requests her hand in marriage and is quick to snatch her from her life of ease. He is mysterious and doesn't seem like he has good intentions...

The Poppy War, R.F. Kuang



When Rin aced the Keju—the Empire-wide test to find the most talented youth to learn at the Academies—it was a shock to everyone: to the test officials, who couldn't believe a war orphan from Rooster Province could pass without cheating; to Rin's guardians, who believed they'd finally be able to marry her off and further their criminal enterprise; and to Rin herself, who realized she was finally free of the servitude that had made up her daily existence. That she got into Sinegard—the most elite military school in Nikan—was even more surprising. But surprises aren't always good. Because being a dark-skinned peasant girl from the south is not an easy thing at Sinegard.



There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed...

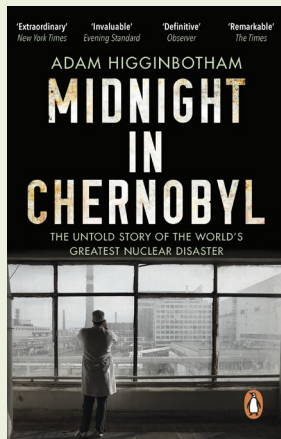
On an autumn day in 1686, eighteen-year-old Nella Oortman knocks at the door of a grand house in the wealthiest quarter of Amsterdam. She has come from the country to begin a new life as the wife of illustrious merchant trader Johannes Brandt, but instead she is met by his sharp-tongued sister, Marin.

Only later does Johannes appear and present her with an extraordinary wedding gift: a cabinet-sized replica of their home. It is to be furnished by an elusive miniaturist, whose tiny creations mirror their real-life counterparts in unexpected ways...

Careless People – Sarah Wynn-Williams



From trips on private jets and encounters with world leaders to shocking accounts of misogyny and double standards behind the scenes, this searing memoir exposes both the personal and the political fallout when unfettered power and a rotten company culture take hold. In a gripping and often absurd narrative where a few people carelessly hold the world in their hands, this eye-opening memoir reveals what really goes on among the global elite. Sarah Wynn-Williams tells the wrenching but fun story of Facebook, mapping its rise from stumbling encounters with juntas to Mark Zuckerberg’s reaction when he learned of Facebook’s role in Trump’s election. She experiences the challenges

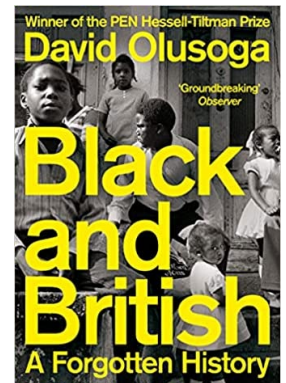


The story of Chernobyl is more complex, more human, and more terrifying than the Soviet myth. Adam Higginbotham has written a harrowing and compelling narrative which brings the 1986 disaster to life through the eyes of the men and women who witnessed it firsthand. Drawing on hundreds of hours of interviews conducted over the course of more than ten years, as well as letters, unpublished memoirs, and documents from recently-declassified archives, this book makes for a masterful non-fiction thriller which offers a minute-by-minute account of the disaster.

David Olusoga’s *Black and British* tells the rich and revealing story of the relationship between the British Isles and the people of Africa and the Caribbean.

'[A] comprehensive and important history of black Britain. Written with a wonderful clarity of style and with great force and passion.' – Kwasi Kwarteng, *Sunday Times*

Another vital and urgent book is *Why We Kneel, How We Rise* by cricket legend Michael Holding.

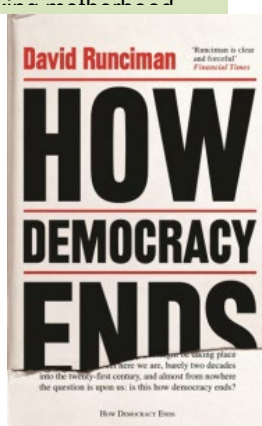
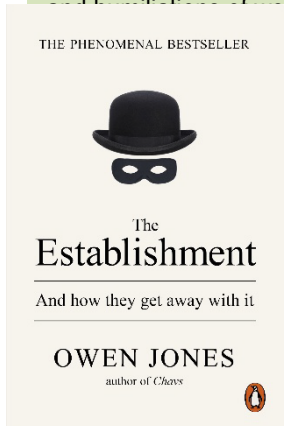


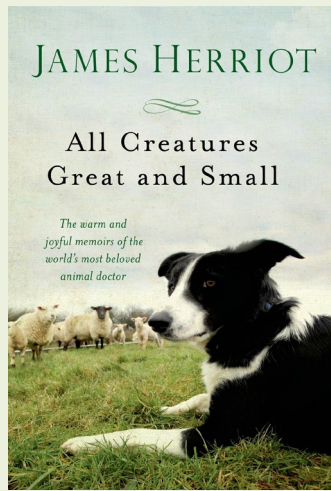
The Establishment: Behind our democracy lurks a powerful but unaccountable network of people who wield massive power and reap huge profits in the process. In exposing this shadowy and complex system that dominates our lives, Owen Jones sets out on a journey into the heart of our Establishment, from the lobbies of Westminster to the newsrooms, boardrooms and trading rooms of Fleet Street and the City.

How Democracy Ends: Since the end of World War II, democracy's sweep across the globe seemed inexorable. Yet today, it seems radically imperiled, even in some of the world's most stable democracies. How bad could things get? David Runciman argues that we are trapped in twentieth-century ideas of democratic failure. By fixating on violence, we are focusing on the wrong threats. Our societies are too affluent, too elderly, and too networked to fall apart as they did in the past.

What makes a story a tragedy? **Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction** by **Adrian Poole** traces the origins and development of the genre from ancient Greek theatre to modern drama. Concise and accessible, this book explains what tragedies reveal about human nature, fate, and moral dilemmas through stories of suffering and loss.

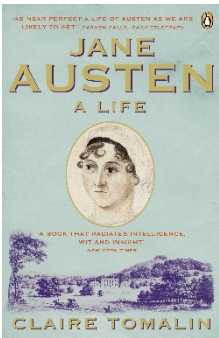
In the same Oxford series, **Matthew Bevis'** short introduction to **Comedy** raises diverse questions: what is humour, and how may it be used, or abused? When do we laugh, and why? Dip into the history and variety of comedy, from Shakespeare’s wit to modern sitcoms and stand-up.





All Creatures Great and Small – James Herriot

In *All Creatures Great and Small*, we meet the vet Herriot as he takes up his calling and discovers that the realities of veterinary practice in rural Yorkshire are very different from the setting of veterinary school. Some visits are heart-wrenchingly difficult - the old man in the village whose very ill dog is his only companion, some are lighthearted and fun, such as Herriot's periodic visits to the pampered Pekinese Tricky Woo who throws parties and has his own stationery. Others are inspirational and enlightening, exploring life in rural Yorkshire on the brink of the Second World War.

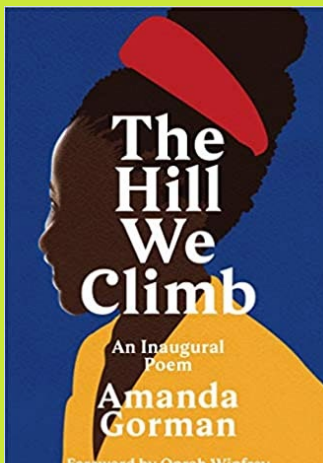


At her death in 1817, Jane Austen left the world six of the most beloved novels written in English—but her shortsighted family destroyed the bulk of her letters; and if she kept any diaries, they did not survive her. Now acclaimed biographer Claire Tomalin has filled the gaps in the record, creating a remarkably fresh and convincing portrait of the woman and the writer.



Set amid the civil rights movement, **Margot Lee Shetterly's *Hidden Figures*** tells of the African-American women who played such a crucial role in America's space programme.

The Hill We Climb by **Amanda Gorman** is the remarkable poem read aloud at the 2021 Presidential Inauguration in America, offering us courage, consolation and the inspiration to make change. Ambitious readers might try **Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*** after this.



Alice Oswald Memorial

Oswald's moving and visceral poem **Memorial** is a beautiful retelling of the deaths of Homer's *Iliad*. She painstakingly captures the life of each fallen soldier before lyrically recounting their death. This is a must-read by one of Britain's best poets. You might also wish to try her collection **Falling Awake**.

Six Poets Hardy to Larkin
An Anthology by Alan Bennett



In this personal anthology, **Alan Bennett** has chosen over seventy poems by six of Britain's best-loved poets, discussing the writers and their verse in his customary conversational style through anecdote and shrewd appraisal. You might also wish to try **John Betjeman's *Selected Poems***.

Local poet Tony Harrison's **Selected Poems** are political, personal, moving, and incredibly important. This is altogether the perfect introduction to the work of one of our best poets including the exquisite sonnets about his parents, the notorious 'V', the beautiful 'A Kumquat for John Keats' and many others



My reading list

Use this space to keep a record of your own reading through the year...

	Title	Author	Date Finished	No. of Pages	Rating
1					☆☆☆☆☆
2					☆☆☆☆☆
3					☆☆☆☆☆
4					☆☆☆☆☆
5					☆☆☆☆☆
6					☆☆☆☆☆
7					☆☆☆☆☆
8					☆☆☆☆☆
9					☆☆☆☆☆
10					☆☆☆☆☆

Reward:

	Title	Author	Date Finished	No. of Pages	Rating
1					☆☆☆☆☆
2					☆☆☆☆☆
3					☆☆☆☆☆
4					☆☆☆☆☆
5					☆☆☆☆☆
6					☆☆☆☆☆
7					☆☆☆☆☆
8					☆☆☆☆☆
9					☆☆☆☆☆
10					☆☆☆☆☆

Reward:

My personal book notes