



A-level English Literature Transition Pack

**Welcome to the Burgate Sixth Form English
Department!**

**This booklet will provide you with some ideas for your
course and some preparation to do for September.**

**Please read it carefully so that you know
what to expect at A-level!**



English

And this, our life, exempt from public haunt, finds
tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons
in stones, and good in everything.

- William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*



Welcome to the English A-level at the Burgate! In this booklet, you will find lots of suggestions about things you can read or do to prepare for your course and we hope you are as excited about the next two years as we are.

It is important to be sure that you will enjoy and manage the quantity and quality of reading that you will have to do throughout the course. There will be five 'compulsory' texts and a poetry anthology which we will work on in depth, but you will have to read all or part of them independently. The more widely you read, the easier you will find it to relate the set texts to Literature in general.

What should I do before September?

The most important thing to do before September is read (and in some cases watch) *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. If you have time, you could also tackle *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Hardy and *Othello* by Shakespeare.

In addition, you will also find the course easier if you have a good general knowledge, including an understanding of current affairs, geography and history. For example, if you read *A Streetcar Named Desire*, you will find it easier if you know something about the history of America, the city of New Orleans and the life and times of the writer Tennessee Williams. You might wish to do some research about each text and get to grips with the context. This summer is a great time to add to your knowledge and ensure that you have lots to contribute in lessons which are often discussion based.

In addition to reading and researching the set texts, there are a few activities here for you to complete:

- (i) the questionnaire might help you to prepare a few 'ice-breaker' conversations with your new classmates and teachers.
- (ii) Researching and creating the tragedy fact-file will give you all the essential knowledge you need to tackle *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Othello*.
- (iii) *A Thousand Splendid Suns* contextual research will also help you understand this complex novel.

Happy reading and we look forward to meeting you next academic year!



Why study English Literature?

A-level English Literature is highly respected amongst Higher Education institutions and employers in a range of industries but there are many more valuable reasons to take the subject. Below are just a few...

To benefit from the insight of others. The body of world literature contains most available knowledge about humanity--our beliefs, our self-perception, our philosophies, our assumptions and our interactions with the world at large. Some of life's most important lessons are subtly expressed in our art. We learn these lessons only if we pause to think about what we read. Why would anyone bury important ideas? Because some ideas cannot be expressed adequately in simple language, and because the lessons we have to work for are the ones that stick with us.

To open our minds to ambiguities of meaning. While people might "say what they mean and mean what they say" in an ideal world, language in the real world is maddeningly and delightfully ambiguous. If you go through life expecting people to play by your rules, you'll only be miserable, angry and disappointed. You will not change them. Ambiguity, *double entendres* and nuance give our language depth and endless possibility. Learn it. Appreciate it. Revel in it.

To explore other cultures and beliefs. History, anthropology and religious studies provide a method of learning about the cultures and beliefs of others from the outside looking in. Literature, on the other hand, allows you to experience the cultures and beliefs of others first-hand, from the inside looking out. The only other way to have such a personal understanding of others' beliefs is to adopt them yourself--which most of us are not willing to do. If you understand where other people are coming from, you are better equipped to communicate meaningfully with them--and they with you.

To appreciate why individuals are the way they are. Each person we meet represents a unique concoction of knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. In our own culture we find an infinite variety of attitudes and personalities, hatreds and bigotries, and assumptions. With each exposure to those who differ from us, we expand our minds. We may still reject their beliefs and assumptions, but we are one step closer to understanding them.

To expand our grasp of the machinations of history. History and literature are inextricably intertwined. History is not just names and dates and politics and wars and power. History is about people who were products of their time with their own intricately woven value systems. Study of literature enhances our appreciation of history's complexity, which in turn expands our appreciation of present political complexities and better equips us to predict and prepare for the future.

To exercise our brains. Our brains need exercise just like our bodies do. Don't balk at picking up the barbell and doing a few mental curls. Great literature has hidden meanings that won't slap us in the face like children's books will; we'll have to dig and analyse like an adult to find the gold.

To teach us to see individual bias. In a sense, each of us is an unreliable or naive narrator, but most of us mindlessly accept the stories of certain friends or family without qualification. We should remember that they are centres of their own universes, though, just like we are. They are first-person narrators--not omniscient--just like we are. The only thing that suffers when we appreciate individual bias is our own gullibility.

To encourage us to question "accepted" knowledge. As children, most of us were taught to believe what we're told, and those basic hypotheses provide our schemas or building blocks of knowledge. As we grow, we learn to question some ideas while rejecting the offensively alien ideas outright, often without real examination. However, human progress often results from the rejection of assumed "facts." The difficulty lies in spotting our own unexamined assumptions. The more ideas we expose ourselves to, the more of our own assumptions we can root out to question and either discard or ground our lives in.

To help us see ourselves as others do. Literature is a tool of self-examination. You will see your own personality or habits or assumptions in literature. The experience may even be painful. While our ego defence systems help us avoid self-scrutiny and ignore others' observations or reactions to us, literature serves as a mirror, revealing us to ourselves in all our naked, undefended glory.

To see the tragedy. Lenin said "A million deaths are a statistic, but one death is a tragedy." History gives you the statistics. Literature shows you the human tragedy.

To further our mastery of language. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words build and destroy nations. Study of literature hones our language skills and teaches us new and valuable techniques for communication. A master of language can seduce your emotions and inspire you to follow him into death--or he can crush your will with a word. Language is the single most important tool of leadership and great leaders embrace its study.

To recognize language devices and appreciate their emotional power. Like good music, poetry uses wordplay, rhythm, and sounds to lull the reader into an emotional fog, and therein deliver its message. Great leaders learn to harness these techniques of communication and persuasion. Listen closely to effective advertisements and politicians and lawyers. Listen to the pleasing rhythm and wordplay of their mantras and watch the sheep blithely flock to them: "It does not fit--you must acquit!" "Crisp and clean and no caffeine!" Politicians use prolific parallelism: "We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail."

To explore ethical complexities. Only children find ethical rules cut and dried. Literature forces readers to challenge their simplistic ethical conceptions and sometimes their outright condemnation of others' actions. For example, we believe lying is wrong. But what do we mean? Do we never lie? Have you ever met a person rude enough to follow this rule implicitly? Be advised, though: ethical exploration is a mature endeavour; it is not for the thin-skinned.

To see the admirable in everyday life. We are surrounded by unsung nobility and sacrifice. Once we learn to see it in the actions of common folk, our lives will be forever richer, as will our faith in humanity itself.

To learn better ways to behave. An untold amount of our opinions and words and reactions are absorbed during childhood and from our culture. Literature teaches us better courses of action and more effective responses to situations...if we let it.

To know we aren't alone. Others have been where we are, have felt as we feel, have believed as we believe. Paradoxically, we are unique just like everyone else. But we aren't alone. Others were here and they survived...and may have even learned from it--and so may we.

To refine our judgment. This involves several aspects of reading: exposure to new ideas and new ways of looking at old assumptions, expanded vocabulary and understanding, and improved ability to write. Altogether, these benefits refine our ability to think, and thus guide us toward informed, mature judgment.

To learn to support our points of view and trust our own interpretations. We provide evidence for our interpretation of a story or poem when we explicate it. When we build a solid case in support of our opinion, we build self-confidence in our own interpretations of language itself.

To develop empathy for those who are unlike us. Literature can train and exercise our ability to weep for those who are not us or ours. As children, our circles of concern stop with ourselves. As we grow, we expand those circles to our families and friends, and *perhaps* to our neighbourhoods, towns, cities, states or countries. Our study of literature continues to expand that realm of concern beyond the things we physically experience.

To expand our vocabularies. New words are tools for grasping *new ideas*. Each new idea is a building block upon which we may acquire more knowledge. Knowledge is power.



Pearson EdExcel A-level English Literature Specification

On the following pages, I have included information about how the course is assessed. In total you will sit **three exams** on drama, prose and poetry. There is also a **non-examined assessment (coursework essay)** which you will begin towards the end of Year 12 and complete in Year 13.

Component 1: Drama		*Paper code: 9ET0/01
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Externally assessedAvailability: May/JuneFirst assessment: 2017	30% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">one Shakespeare play and one other drama from either tragedy or comedy – both texts may be selected from one or both of these categories.critical essays related to their selected Shakespeare play. Students' preparation is supported by <i>Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology – Tragedy</i> or <i>Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology – Comedy</i>.		
Overview of assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none">Written examination, lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes.Open book – clean copies of the drama texts can be taken into the examination. The Critical Anthology must not be taken into the examination.Total of 60 marks available – 35 marks for Section A and 25 marks for Section B.Two sections: students answer one question from a choice of two on their studied text for both Section A and Section B.Section A – Shakespeare: one essay question, incorporating ideas from wider critical reading (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO5 assessed).Section B – Other Drama: one essay question (AO1, AO2, AO3 assessed).		



Component 2: Prose		*Paper code: 9ET0/02
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Externally assessedAvailability: May/JuneFirst assessment: 2017	20% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">two prose texts from a chosen theme. At least one of the prose texts must be pre-1900.		
Overview of assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none">Written examination, lasting 1 hour and 15 minutes.Open book – clean copies of the prose texts can be taken into the examination.Total of 40 marks available.Students answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two on their studied theme (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4 assessed).		



Component 3: Poetry

***Paper code: 9ET0/03**

- Externally assessed
- Availability: May/June
- First assessment: 2017

**30% of the
total
qualification**

Overview of content

Students study:

- poetic form, meaning and language
 - a selection of post-2000 specified poetry
- and
- a specified range of poetry from:
either
 - a literary period (either pre- or post-1900)
- or*
- a named poet from within a literary period.

Overview of assessment

- Written examination, lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes.
- Open book – clean copies of the poetry texts can be taken into the examination.
- Total of 60 marks available – 30 marks for Section A and 30 marks for Section B.
- Two sections: students answer **one** question from a choice of **two**, comparing an unseen poem with a named poem from their studied contemporary text and **one** question from a choice of **two** on their studied movement/poet.
- Section A – Post-2000 Specified Poetry: **one** comparative essay question on an unseen modern poem written post-2000 and one named poem from the studied contemporary text (AO1, AO2, AO4 assessed).
- Section B – Specified Poetry Pre- or Post-1900: **one** essay question (AO1, AO2, AO3 assessed).

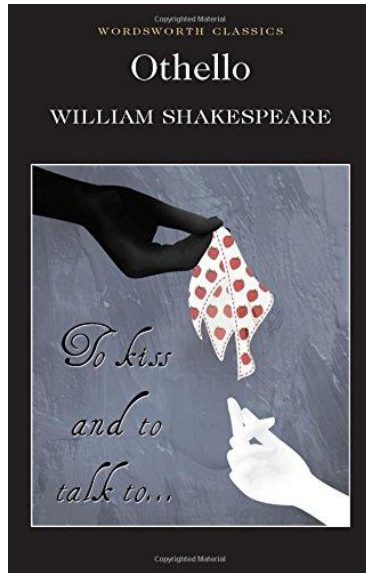


Non-examination assessment		*Code: 9ET0/04
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internally assessed, externally moderated• Availability: May/June• First moderation: 2017	20% of the total qualification	
Overview of content		
Students have a free choice of two texts to study.		
Chosen texts:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• must be different from those studied in Components 1, 2 and 3• must be complete texts and may be linked by theme, movement, author or period• may be selected from poetry, drama, prose or literary non-fiction.		
Overview of assessment		
Students produce one assignment:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• one extended comparative essay referring to two texts (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4, AO5 assessed)• advisory total word count is 2500–3000 words• total of 60 marks available.		

*See *Appendix 3: Codes* for a description of this code and all other codes relevant to this qualification.

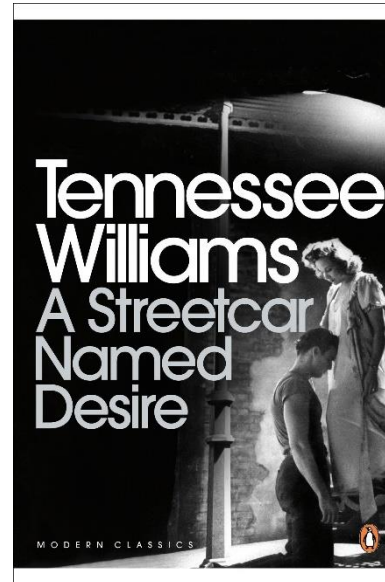
Year 12 & 13: Some set texts for September and beyond

The most important thing you can do to prepare for September is read the set texts so you are familiar with the plot and characters. Below is a list of the key texts we will explore together in class - we recommend reading the starred ones first and summarising chapters/scenes in note-form as you go:



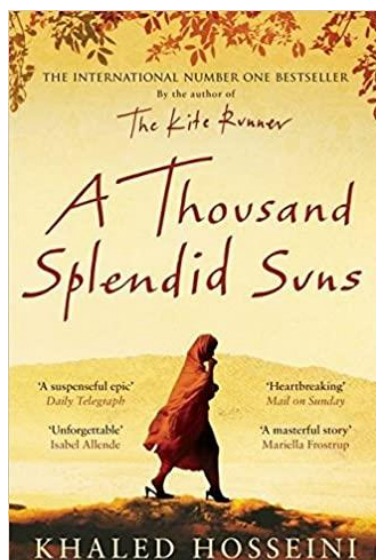
Othello (Autumn 2022)

Shakespeare's timeless tragedy of jealousy, racial prejudice and manipulation.



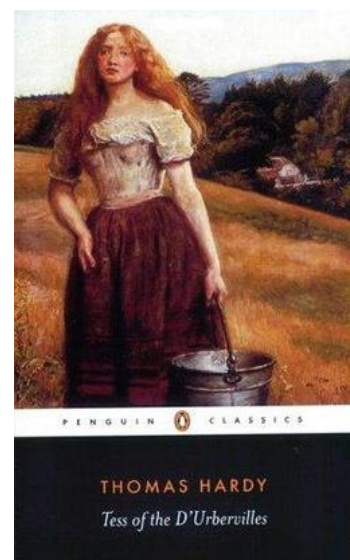
*A Streetcar Named Desire** (Autumn 2021)

Tennessee Williams' play about the neurotic, fragile Blanche DuBois is arguably the greatest American tragedy.



*A Thousand Splendid Suns** (Autumn 2021)

Hosseini's tale of suffering, love and loss in Afghanistan.



Tess of the D'Urbervilles (Spring/Summer 2022)

Hardy's tragic tale is an exploration of fate and free will.

Literature Kit List

In order to be prepared for your English A level, these are some things you'll need to have with you:



Files/folders. You may also want to put some dividers in each and definitely some plastic wallets to store handouts, etc.

Highlighters

Post –its

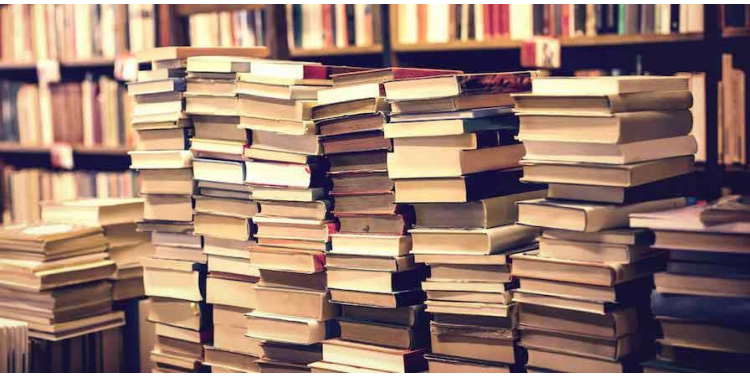
File paper to write on during lessons (no more exercise books!)

Memory stick. You can store other students' research and presentations this way, as well as your own.

Some students also like to have their own laptop but this is not essential. Increasingly we use programmes like OneNote, OneDrive and Microsoft Teams to share resources and there is a lot of high-quality content online you may wish to access on your own device.

However, we are still committed to the printed word! We will give you some booklets and resources but you will need to buy your own copies of set texts. These can normally be bought in paperback and often quite cheaply from Amazon, Waterstones, Forbes, WH Smith or independent second-hand book shops.





Starter Activity 1: The Ultimate English Literature Questionnaire!

1. Which book are you currently reading or have you just read?
2. Who was your favourite author when you were a child? Why?
3. What was your favourite book when you were a child?
4. Which magazine(s) or websites did you read as a child?
5. Which magazine(s) or websites do you read now?
6. Which literary character would you like to take out on a date and why?
7. Which literary character would you least like to be stranded on a desert island with and why?
8. In which literary/fictional location would you most like to live?
9. Which is the best TV/film adaptation of a book you have seen?
10. Which person, real or fictional, living or deceased, would you most like to have a 'one-to-one' with?
11. What is your favourite book?
12. Who is your favourite author?
13. What is the most memorable line delivered in a film?
14. What is your favourite film?
15. What is your least favourite book and why?

Jot down your answers and be ready to share them with the rest of the group!



Activity 2: Tragedy Research Task

During the course, you will study two tragic plays: the Shakespeare classic *Othello* and Tennessee Williams' modern American tragedy, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

To prepare for this, use the internet and the recommended texts below to research tragedy and its history. Use your research to create a 3-4 page booklet about tragedy. You have the freedom to lay out your work in a way that is useful to you.

Useful research resources:

1) The British Library



The British Library's website is a treasure trove of information and they have a huge number of articles and resources on tragedy.

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/themes/tragedies>

2) The RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company)



The RSC have lots of information about Shakespeare's tragedies on their website.

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeares-plays/tragedies-comedies-histories>

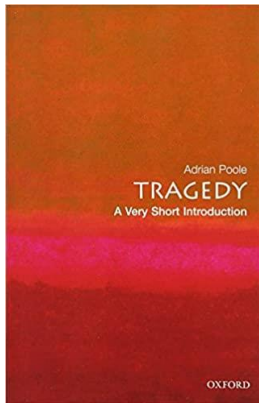
If possible, we also highly recommend seeing a live performance at the Globe Theatre in London. It's a lot of fun and it will also help you understand the original dramatic context of Shakespeare's plays.

3) National Theatre

National Theatre

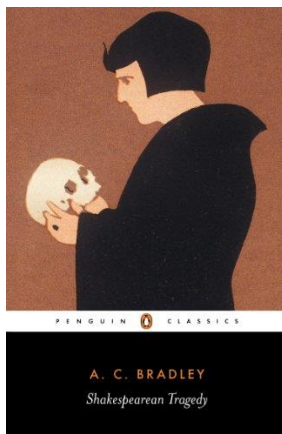
Visit their YouTube channel. They have some excellent introductory videos about Greek tragedy and *Othello*.

4) *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* by Adrian Poole (available on Amazon)



An easy-to-read but comprehensive introduction to the history of tragedy.

5) *Shakespearean Tragedy* by A.C. Bradley (available on Amazon)



For those looking to delve more deeply into the subject, Bradley's essays on Shakespeare's tragic plays (including *Othello*) are a fantastic entry points into literary criticism.



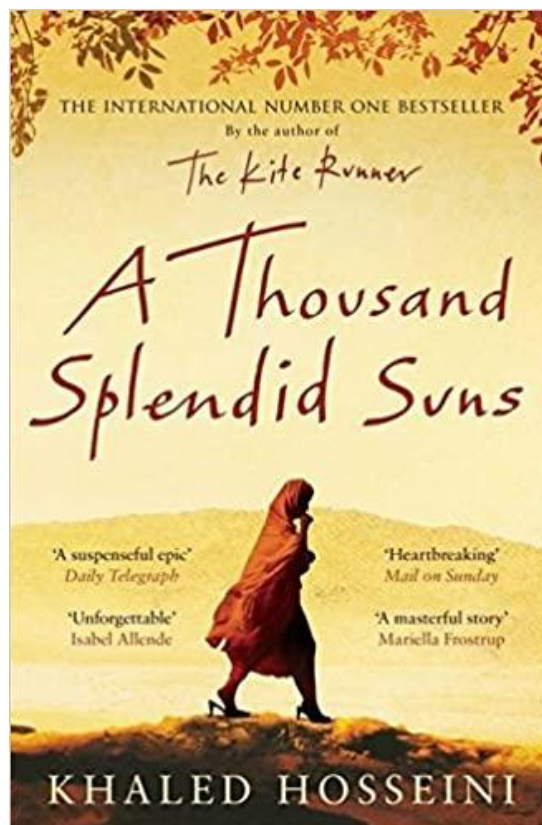
Activity 3: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Research

Your first novel will be *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini. As well as reading the text, it is important to have some awareness of the **historical and biographical context**.

Create **an A3 context poster** on the following:

- **The history of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the present (the Soviet Invasion in the 1980s, the Mujahedeen, the Taliban and Sharia law, September 11th and the American occupation).**
- **Khaled Hosseini's life** (biography)

You should use the internet to do some research and split your poster into clear sections. You may also wish to read *The Kite Runner* by the same author and watch the film adaptation.



Sixth Form Recommended Reading List

You should aim to read *at least two* of these novels each half term as well as reading your chosen newspaper on a weekly basis. You will also find it highly beneficial to read some poetry, travel writing, biography and autobiography, speeches, letters, diaries and journals and short stories.

China Achebe

Things Fall Apart

Margaret Atwood

Alias Grace

The Handmaid's Tale

Maya Angelou

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Gather Together in My Name

And Still I Rise

Iain Banks

The Wasp Factory

The Bridge

The Crow Road

Pat Barker

The Ghost Road

Regeneration

Julian Barnes

A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters

H. E. Bates

The Darling Buds of May

Fair Stood the Wind for France

Alan Bennett

Talking Heads

Talking Heads 2

Writing Home

John Bunyan

The Pilgrim's Progress

Anthony Burgess

A Clockwork Orange

Phineas Finn

Barchester Towers

Louis De Bernières

Captain Corelli's Mandolin

The War of Don Emanuel's Nether Parts

Mikhail Bulgakov

The Master and Margarita

Charlotte Bronte

Wuthering Heights

Wilkie Collins

The Moonstone

The Woman in White

Seamus Deane

In the Dark

Daniel Defoe

Moll Flanders

Robinson Crusoe

Charles Dickens

Hard Times

Great Expectations

Roddy Doyle

Paddy Clarke. Ha, Ha, Ha.

Margaret Drabble

A Summer Birdcage

Daphne Du Maurier

My Cousin Rachel

Rebecca

Jamaica Inn

George Eliot

The Mill on the Floss

Middlemarch

Nan Bennett

The Clothes They Stood Up In

Sebastian Faulks

Birdsong

Charlotte Gray

The Girl at the Lion D' Or

E. M. Foster

A Passage to India

A Room with a View

Howard's End

Frederick Forsyth

The Day of the Jackal

The Dogs of War

The Devil's Alternative

John Fowles

The Magus

The Collector

Jostein Gaarder

Sophie's World

Alex Garland

The Beach

Maggie Gee

The Ice People

David Guterson

Snow Falling on Cedars

East of the Mountains

Joseph Meller

Catch 22

Frank Herbert

Dune

Patricia Highsmith

The Talented Mr Ripley

Aldous Huxley

Brave New World

Kazuo Ishiguro

Never Let Me Go

Christopher Isherwood

The Berlin Novels

Goodbye to Berlin

Henry James

Washington Square

James Joyce

Dubliners

A Portrait of the Artist at a Young Age

Thomas Keneally

The Playmaker

Schindler's List

John le Carre

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy

Smiley's People

Little Drummer Girl

The Night Manager

Penelope Lively

Oleander, Jacaranda

Eric Lomax

The Railway Man

W. Somerset Maugham

The Moon and Sixpence

Of Human Bondage

The Painted Veil

Ian McEwan

Enduring Love

Frank McCourt

Angela's Ashes

Nick Hornby

About A Boy

Keri Hulme

The Bone People

David Nicholls

One Day

Michael Ondaatje

The English Patient

Melvin Peake

Gormanghast

Tony Parsons

Men from Boys

Sylvia Plath

The Bell Jar

E. Annie Proulx

The Shipping News

J. D. Salinger

The Catcher in the Rye

Vikram Seth

An Equal Music

A Suitable Boy

Mary Shelly

Frankenstein

Muriel Spark

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

John Steinbeck

East of Eden

The Grapes of Wrath

Of Mice and Men

Laurence Sterne

The Life and Opinions of Tristram

Shandy

David Mitchell

Ghostwritten

Cloud Atlas

Toni Morrison

Beloved

J. R. R. Tolkien

The Lord of the Rings

Leo Tolstoy

Anna Karenina

War and Peace

Rose Tremain

Evangelista's Fan

John Updike

Rabbit

Toward the End of Time

Alice Walker

The Color Purple

Evelyn Waugh

Brideshead Revisited

Officers and Gentlemen

Fay Weldon

The Life and Loves of a She Devil

The cloning of Joanna May

H. G. Wells

The War of the Worlds

The History of Mr Polly

Mary Wesley

The Camomile Lawn

Harnessing Peacocks

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Tom Wolfe

The Bonfire of the Vanities

A Man in Full

R. L. Stevenson

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Bram Stoker

Dracula

Dylan Thomas

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog

Leslie Thomas

The Virgin Soldiers

Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own

Between the Acts

To the Lighthouse

Rafi Zabor

The Bear Comes Home

