



READING LIST



GCSE

Maya Angelou: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

The autobiography of a black American woman: inspiring and thought-provoking.

Iain Banks: *The Wasp Factory*

A controversial, adult book: not for the faint-hearted.

Albert Camus: *The Outsider*

A man commits murder for no reason: an intriguing work.

Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

The great detective tackles bizarre mysteries, using his famous intellect.

Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

A strange, exciting adventure about growing up.

George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss*

The dramatic and moving story of an unconventional girl's struggles.

Jostein Gaarder: *Sophie's World*

This is an imaginative introduction to world philosophy.

Harper Lee: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

A funny and dramatic story of childhood in the USA in the 1930s.

George Orwell: *Animal Farm*

Animals take over a farm. Orwell explores political ideas in a fairy story style.

John Steinbeck: *Of Mice and Men*

A touching story of friendship and hardship in the depression years in the USA.

Bram Stoker: *Dracula*

The original, powerful account of this familiar story.

POETRY

The anthology *The Rattle Bag* (edited by Heaney and Hughes) is excellent for dipping into. Individual poets worth trying: ee cummings, Dylan Thomas, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams.

CHALLENGING AUTHORS:

Hermann Hesse, Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, John Fowles, Georges Perec, Marcel Proust, Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire.

EASY/FUN AUTHORS:

P D James, Ruth Rendell, Stephen King, Terry Pratchett, Douglas Adams, Isaac Asimov, J R R Tolkien.

CLASSICS:

Try: Homer, Plato, Sophocles, Ovid, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Austen.

And for those of you who wish to stretch yourselves further, here are some more:

A LEVEL

CLASSICS

Geoffrey Chaucer (1345–1400)

The Canterbury Tales are excellent, varied, funny and linguistically inventive. You can get modernisations of Chaucer's Middle English, but they lose a lot.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

You would study at least two texts for A Level, but you should also look at *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In fact all Shakespeare is interesting and important.

John Bunyan (1628–1688)

The Pilgrim's Progress is a unique work. It is intensely religious, but to a modern reader it is also very strange.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)

Gulliver's Travels is an important and amusing book.

Jane Austen (1775–1817)

Austen's novels are brilliantly clever and witty. She is an analyst of the society of her day. *Emma* is generally considered to be the best.

Mary Shelley (1797–1851)

Frankenstein is much more than a horror story. It is a philosophical enquiry into the nature of humanity.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

His books are imaginative, strange, exciting, emotional and strongly critical of the inequalities of Victorian society. *Great Expectations* would be a good one to start with. *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* are highly regarded. *Dombey and Son* is great.

George Eliot (1819–1880)

Her books present subtle psychological portraits of the central characters. *The Mill on the Floss* would be a good place to start. *Middlemarch* is thought to be the best.

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924)

Heart of Darkness is a short, intense, extraordinary book. *The Secret Agent* is equally original. *Nostromo* is more challenging.

James Joyce (1882–1941)

A Portrait of the Artist... is a readable and engaging version of Joyce's life story. *Dubliners* contains one of the finest stories in the language. *The Dead*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are experimental in form. In many ways they mark the death of the English novel.

POETRY

Before Shakespeare

Chaucer is the giant figure. There is a range of verse before him. *Beowulf* (c. 700), recently translated by Seamus Heaney, is fascinating. Closer to Shakespeare, there is the manic **John Skelton (1460–1529)**, **Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593)** and **Edmund Spenser (1552–1599)**.

The Metaphysicals

These poets are grouped together because they shared concerns (about religion in particular) and stylistic approaches (the use of witty, extended metaphors, known as conceits): **John Donne (1572–1631)**, **George Herbert (1593–1633)**, **Andrew Marvell (1621–1678)**.

John Milton (1608–1674)

Paradise Lost is the great English epic. Milton's style was very influential.

Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

A friend of Swift's, **Pope** wrote satirical, humorous poems.

The Eccentrics

Christopher Smart (1722–71), **William Cowper (1731–1800)** and **John Clare (1793–1864)** might be grouped together, as three odd poets, who each struggled with mental illness, but were able to produce poems of unique power and interest.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)

Wordsworth, along with **Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834)**, is the first English Romantic poet. He used the ordinary language of everyday speech; he valued nature; he was concerned with the spiritual; he wrote directly about himself; he valued emotions above reason. Compare him to **William Blake (1757–1827)**.

Shelley and Keats

Percy Shelley (1792–1822) and **John Keats (1795–1821)** were admirers of Wordsworth, who developed his Romantic vision, taking it to new extremes of emotionalism and spiritualism.

The Later Romantics

In the shadow of those above, these poets managed to produce some extremely original and fascinating work: **Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892)**, **Robert Browning (1812–1889)**, **Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)** and **William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)**.

The Twentieth Century

T S Eliot's (1888–1965) modernism marks an attempted break with Romanticism. W H Auden (1907–1973), Seamus Heaney (b. 1939) and Geoffrey Hill (b. 1932) are worth consideration.

AMERICAN LITERATURE

Edgar Allan Poe

Poe wrote horror stories and imaginative poetry.

Emerson and Thoreau

They wrote essays and poetry that helped to define American ideas about nature, spirituality and individualism.

Herman Melville

Moby Dick is a brilliant and enormous work. *Bartleby the Scrivener* is interesting.

Emily Dickinson

Her poems are short, precise and complex.

Walt Whitman

The great American poet: wild, expansive, elaborate.

William Faulkner

Experimental novelist in the modernist tradition: *As I Lay Dying* is his most famous work.

John Steinbeck

The Grapes of Wrath and *Of Mice and Men* are great novels of the American depression years.

Toni Morrison

A contemporary American, who writes often about the experiences of Black Americans: *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* are highly regarded.

John Kennedy Toole

He committed suicide, because he could not get *A Confederacy of Dunces* published. It is an offensive and bizarre book.

Twentieth Century Poets

Try Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, ee cummings, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery.

Others

Maya Angelou is popular. Hawthorne and Fenimore Cooper were nineteenth century novelists. Bret Easton Ellis is a controversial, contemporary novelist. Norman Mailer and Truman Capote were celebrity writers in the 1950s and 1960s. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was a cult classic. J D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* was once essential reading for any teenage outsider. Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* is definitely worth a try.

WORKS IN TRANSLATION

Homer, Plato, Sophocles, Ovid, Virgil

There are some great and important works from the ancient world that are well worth reading.

Dante

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, especially his *Inferno* (hell) is of first-rate importance.

Montaigne

The greatest essay writer of the western tradition, **Montaigne** is humane, self-aware and surprisingly modern.

Cervantes

Don Quixote is another key work. It is very funny.

Goethe

Faust Part 2 is particularly unusual and inspiring.

Dostoyevsky

Crime and Punishment is essential reading: dark, troubling, extraordinary. Other Russian writers: Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov.

Kafka

Kafka writes of a nightmare world. Try *The Trial* and the short stories *Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal Colony*.

Hesse

Hesse is another extraordinary German writer of the twentieth century. *Steppenwolf* is the most famous. *Narziss and Golmund* is the best.

Poets

Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarme, Rilke, Pessoa, Montale, Akhmatova are amongst the best in the west. Chinese and Japanese poetry is worth seeking out too.

Proust

A challenge, but one worth attempting.

Camus and Sartre

The Outsider is accessible.