

## A-Level Novel Reading List

N. B. The school library has multiple copies of all of the books on this reading list.

<i>The Blind Assassin</i>	Atwood, Margaret	At the end of her life, Iris Griffen takes up her pen to record the secret history of her family, the romantic melodrama of its decline and fall between the two World Wars. Conjuring a world of prosperity and misery, marriage and loneliness, the central enigma of Iris's tale is the death of her sister, Laura Chase, who 'drove a car off a bridge' at the end of the Second World War. Suicide or accident? <i>See also any other Atwood novel!</i>
<i>Emma</i>	Austen, Jane	Beautiful, clever, rich - and single - Emma Woodhouse is perfectly content with her life and sees no need for either love or marriage. Nothing, however, delights her more than interfering in the romantic lives of others. But when she ignores the warnings of her good friend Mr Knightley and attempts to arrange a suitable match for her protégée Harriet Smith, her carefully laid plans soon unravel and have consequences that she never expected. With its imperfect but charming heroine and its witty and subtle exploration of relationships, Emma is often seen as Jane Austen's most flawless work.
<i>Cocaine Nights</i>	Ballard, J.G.	This is the remarkable bestseller from one of the giants of modern British literature - at once an engrossing mystery and an unnerving vision of a society coming to terms with a life of unlimited leisure. When Charles Prentice arrives in Spain to investigate his brother's involvement in the death of five people in a fire in the upmarket coastal resort of Estrella de Mar, he gradually discovers that beneath the civilised, cultured surface of this exclusive enclave for Britain's retired rich there flourishes a secret world of crime, drugs and illicit sex.
<i>The Wasp Factory</i>	Banks, Iain	A narrative told by sixteen-year-old Frank Cauldhame, describing his childhood and all that remains of it. Frank is a murderer. He is friends with a dwarf. He has no genitalia. He also observes many religious rituals of his own invention. As the novel develops, his brother's escape from a mental hospital and impending return lead on to a violent ending and a twist that undermines all that Frank believed about himself...
<i>Regeneration</i>	Barker, Pat	In Craiglockhart war hospital, Doctor William Rivers attempts to restore the sanity of officers from World War I. When Siegfried Sassoon publishes his declaration of protest against the war, the authorities decide to have him declared mentally defective and send him to Craiglockhart. There he meets the aspiring poet Wilfred Owen...
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	Bronte, Emily	The timeless saga of two Yorkshire families in the remote Pennine Hills. The book has been interpreted as an historical romance, a ghostly thriller, a psychological love-story, a religious allegory and a nature poem. One of the greatest novels ever written.
<i>Post Office</i>	Bukowski, Charles	A hilarious novel about life on the lowest rung of society's ladder. Post Office is Bukowski on top (or should that be bottom?) form. It is a semi-autobiographical account of his time working (or avoiding working) for the US Postal Service, and chronicles his life both at work and at home. Henry Chinaski is the arch-misanthrope, an aggressive alcoholic with no desire to achieve anything other than staying alive and staying drunk.
<i>The Big Sleep</i>	Chandler, Raymond	The greatest fictional detective, Los Angeles sleuth Philip Marlowe, is working for the Sternwood family. Old man Sternwood, crippled and wheelchair-bound, is being given the squeeze by a blackmailer and he wants Marlowe to make the problem go away. But with Sternwood's two wild, devil-may-care daughters prowling LA's seedy backstreets, Marlowe's got his work cut out, and that's before he stumbles over the first corpse.
<i>Disgrace</i>	Coetzee, J.M.	Disgrace takes as its central character 52-year-old English professor David Lurie whose preoccupation with Romantic poetry - and romancing his students - threatens to turn him into a "a moral dinosaur". Seeking refuge with his quietly progressive daughter Lucie on her isolated small holding, David finds that the violent dilemmas of the new South Africa are inescapable when the tentative emotional truce between errant father and daughter is ripped apart by a traumatic event that forces Lucie to an appalling disgrace.

<i>Generation X</i>	Coupland, Douglas	The novel which defined modern consumer culture. Andy, Dag and Claire have been handed a society priced beyond their means. Representing the lost Generation X, they work in low-pay, low-prestige, no-future jobs in the service industry and tell disturbing stories that reveal their inner world. The novel portrays the economically bleak and emotionally taut lives of three friends who try to escape the overly commercialized world and rediscover themselves by living simply in California's Mojave Desert.
<i>Libra</i>	DeLillo, Don	A postmodern thriller recounting the story of Lee Harvey Oswald, this novel concentrates on the inner life of the people who shaped the Kennedy assassination. DeLillo is one of the greatest contemporary American writers.
<i>Glamorama</i>	Easton Ellis, Brett	The centre of the fashion world: 1990s Manhattan. Victor Ward, a model with perfect abs and all the right friends, is seen and photographed everywhere, even in places he hasn't been and with people he doesn't know. On the eve of opening the trendiest nightclub in New York history, he's living with one beautiful model and having an affair with another. Now it's time to move to the next stage. But the future he gets is not the one he had in mind.
<i>The Black Dahlia</i>	Ellroy, James	It is Los Angeles, 11th January 1947. A beautiful young woman walked into the night and met her horrific destiny. Five days later, her tortured body was found drained of blood and cut in half. The newspapers called her 'The Black Dahlia'. Two cops are caught up in the investigation and embark on a hellish journey that takes them to the core of the dead girl's twisted life. Ellroy is perhaps the greatest modern crime writer – this novel is the first in his L.A. Quartet.
<i>Birdsong</i>	Faulks, Sebastian	Set before and during the Great War, Birdsong captures the drama of that era on both a national and a personal scale. It is the story of Stephen, a young Englishman, who arrives in Amiens in 1910. His life goes through a series of traumatic experiences, from the clandestine love affair that tears apart the family with whom he lives, to the unprecedented experiences of the war itself.
<i>The Collector</i>	Fowles, John	Withdrawn, uneducated and unloved, Frederick collects butterflies and takes photographs. A chance pools win enables him to capture the art student Miranda and keep her in the cellar of the Sussex house he has bought with the windfall. A battle of wills ensues...
<i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i>	Fowles, John	Of all John Fowles' novels The French Lieutenant's Woman received the most universal acclaim and today holds a very special place in the canon of post-war English literature. From the god-like stance of the nineteenth-century novelist that he both assumes and gently mocks, to the last detail of dress, idiom and manners, his book is an immaculate recreation of Victorian England. Not only is it the epic love story of two people of insight and imagination seeking escape from the cant and tyranny of their age, The French Lieutenant's Woman is also a brilliantly sustained allegory of the decline of the twentieth-century passion for freedom.
<i>The Corrections</i>	Franzen, Jonathan	A huge success in the States, this modern epic focuses on matriarch Enid Lambert's attempts to gather her three grown children back home for Christmas. The Corrections examines their lives: Enid's husband Alfred, sinking into dementia, her sons banker Gary and writer Chip (now in Lithuania) and daughter Denise, a chef, busily re-evaluating her sexual identity. Examines the foibles, fears, neuroses and worries of 21st century family life.
<i>Spies</i>	Frayn, Michael	In Michael Frayn's novel Spies an old man returns to the scene of his seemingly ordinary suburban childhood. Stephen Wheatley is unsure of what he is seeking but, as he walks once-familiar streets he hasn't seen in 50 years, he unfolds a story of childish games colliding cruelly with adult realities. It is wartime and Stephen's friend Keith makes the momentous announcement that his mother is a German spy. Keith's mother does have secrets to conceal but they are not the ones the boys suspect...

<i>Pattern Recognition</i>	Gibson, William	One of the best novels of the last few years! Talented, vulnerable heroine Cayce Pollard is an adept "coolhunter" with an intuitive gift for telling whether any image or logo will be a commercial flop. When she's consulted by top ad agency Blue Ant and gives the thumbs-down to their designer's latest concept, the edgy urban paranoia begins. The big admen are all too interested in Cayce's private hobby: mystery fragments of haunting movie footage, released anonymously on the Web... [see also the sequel <i>Spook Country</i> ]
<i>Carter Beats the Devil</i>	Gold, Glen David	Glen David Gold's impressive debut <i>Carter Beats The Devil</i> is an inspired delight, a dazzling combination of fact and fiction. Charles Carter is given his stage name 'Carter the Great' by the legendary Harry Houdini and the jazz age of the early 1900s is clearly well researched, yet the romance and strong cast of characters must owe more to the imagination than to history. The novel begins in 1923 with the most daring performance of Carter's life. Unfortunately, two hours into the performance, US President Harding is dead and the magician must flee the country, pursued by the Secret Service...
<i>The End of the Affair</i>	Greene, Graham	An emotionally anguished account of one man's hatred for his ex-lover, <i>The End of the Affair</i> is a pathos-laden examination of a three-way collision between Maurice Bendrix, a novelist, a dutifully married woman, Sarah Miles, and her dreary civil-servant husband. The lovers meet at a party thrown by Sarah's husband, and proceed to liberate each other from boredom and routine unhappiness, with tragic consequences. A great novel!
<i>The Go-Between</i>	Hartley, L.P.	In elegiac, wistful and perfectly controlled prose Hartley tells a story of lost innocence. The young Leo is delighted to be a guest at Brandham Hall, the awe-inspiring seat of the rich and worldly Maudsley family. But although apparently accepted and even feted by them, his reactions to the events around him show that he is an outsider struggling to make sense of a complex world, with tragic consequences.
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	Hemingway, Ernest	Hemingway took great personal interest in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. This novel blends a love story with a tale of that war: it tells the story of Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades attached to an antifascist guerilla unit in the mountains during the Spanish Civil War. As an expert in the use of explosives, he is given an assignment to blow up a bridge to accompany a simultaneous attack on the city of Segovia.
<i>Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow</i>	Hoeg, Peter	One snowy day in Copenhagen, six-year-old Isaiah falls to his death from a city rooftop. The police pronounce it an accident. But Isaiah's neighbour, Smilla, suspects murder. She embarks on a dangerous quest to find the truth, following a path of clues as clear to her as footsteps in the snow. A complex and extremely enjoyable crime thriller.
<i>Brave New World</i>	Huxley, Aldous	Far in the future, the World Controllers have created the ideal society. Through clever use of genetic engineering, brainwashing and recreational sex and drugs all its members are happy consumers. Bernard Marx seems alone in feeling discontent. Harboring an unnatural desire for solitude, and a perverse distaste for the pleasures of compulsory promiscuity, Bernard has an ill-defined longing to break free...
<i>The Remains of the Day</i>	Ishiguro, Kazuo	A beautiful story about the collapse of British imperialism, told through the microcosm of a butler in a great house. In Stevens, the ageing butler of Darlington Hall, Ishiguro creates a character who is at times coldly inhuman and at times alarmingly human in his relationships with other characters. He is a character who treats the death of his father as an irritation during an important international conference; but who, through character flaws of his own, convinces us he is nothing more than an ordinary man.
<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>	Kesey, Ken	Chief Bromden, half American-Indian, whom the authorities believe is deaf and dumb, tells the story of a mental institution ruled by Big Nurse on behalf of the all-powerful Combine. Into this terrifying grey world comes McMurphy, a brawling gambling man, who wages total war on behalf of his cowed fellow-inmates. What follows is at once hilarious and heroic, tragic and ultimately liberating. Since its first publication in 1962, Ken Kesey's astonishing first novel has achieved the status of a contemporary classic.

<i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i>	Larsson, Stieg	The greatest crime novel of the last decade, Larsson's story is an instant classic. Harriet Vanger disappeared off a rich family's private island. Nobody saw her leave, there was no sign of her disappearance and no corpse. Her uncle, however, is convinced that a family member murdered her. Forty years later, journalist Mikael Blomqvist takes on the investigation of her disappearance, hooking up with Lisbeth, an intelligent but defiant 23 year-old hacker. This thrilling novel encompasses serial killers, sex and corruption. (See also the other books in the Millenium Trilogy)
<i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i>	Lawrence, D.H.	Perhaps the most famous of Lawrence's novels, the 1928 <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> is no longer distinguished for the once shockingly explicit treatment of its subject matter - the adulterous affair between a sexually unfulfilled upper-class married woman and the gamekeeper who works for the estate owned by her husband. It's apparent that the novel is memorable for better reasons: namely, Lawrence's masterful and lyrical writing, and a story that takes us bodily into the world of its characters.
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	Marquez, Gabriel Garcia	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> is a journey through the story of the Buendias family, living in Macondo in the heart of the South American jungle. The family is filled with inimitable characters who live through love, civil war, tragedy - so far, so good. But what sets this book apart is Marquez's distinctive style wherein metaphor becomes reality - at one point a character is nervous and so a host of yellow butterflies fly out of her mouth. A dazzling and engrossing piece of magic realism.
<i>The Road</i>	McCarthy, Cormac	McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel: A man and his young son make their slow way across a blasted landscape towards the sea. There is a rodent life of hiding and scavenging. They follow the road, but sleep out of sight of it whenever they can. The world came to an end some years before in a nuclear war...
<i>No Country for Old Men</i>	McCarthy, Cormac	Llewlyn Moss, hunting antelope near the Rio Grande, stumbles upon a transaction gone horribly wrong. Finding bullet-ridden bodies, several kilos of heroin, and a caseload of cash, he faces a choice - leave the scene as he found it, or cut the money and run. Choosing the latter, he knows will change everything. And so begins a terrifying chain of events, in which each participant seems determined to answer the question: how does a man decide in what order to abandon his life?
<i>Cloud Atlas</i>	Mitchell, David	A dazzling interweaving of six very different stories and genres, this hyper-modern novel is amazingly crafted and brilliantly entertaining. The reader is catapulted through time and space via six linked narratives which range from the story of an exploited nineteenth century explorer to a post-apocalyptic Hawaii via a Blade-runner-esque tale of clones in Korea. It's astoundingly original and absolutely gripping - one for the philosophers among you.
<i>Beloved</i>	Morrison, Toni	In the troubled years following the Civil War, the spirit of a murdered child haunts the Ohio home of a former slave. This angry, destructive ghost breaks mirrors, leaves its fingerprints in cake icing, and generally makes life difficult for Sethe and her family; nevertheless, the woman finds the haunting oddly comforting for the spirit is that of her own dead baby, never named, thought of only as <i>Beloved</i> .
<i>Norwegian Wood</i>	Murakami, Haruki	This novel threw Murakami onto the international stage - he's now a cult novelist worldwide with the highest critical acclaim to boot. A whimsical yet deep look at young love - Toru Watanabe is looking back on the love and passions of his life and trying to make sense of it all. As his first love Naoko sinks deeper into mental despair, he is inexorably pushed to find a new meaning and a new love in order to survive.
<i>Lolita</i>	Nabokov, Vladimir	Humbert Humbert is a middle-aged, fastidious college professor. He also likes little girls. And none more so than Lolita, who he'll do anything to possess. Is he in love or insane? A silver-tongued poet or a pervert? A tortured soul or a monster? Or is he all of these? <i>Lolita</i> is also an allegory of what happens when a European first encounters the new world of America and all its seductive, consumerist glories.

<i>The English Patient</i>	Ondaatje, Michael	Haunting and harrowing, as beautiful as it is disturbing, <i>The English Patient</i> tells the story of the entanglement of four damaged lives in an Italian monastery as the second world war ends. The exhausted nurse, Hana; the maimed thief, Caravaggio; the wary sapper, Kip: each is haunted by the riddle of the English patient, the nameless, burn victim who lies in an upstairs room and whose memories of passion, betrayal and rescue illuminate this book like flashes of sheet lightning.
<i>The Bell Jar</i>	Plath, Sylvia	<i>The Bell Jar</i> tells the story of a gifted young woman's mental breakdown beginning during a summer internship as a junior editor at a magazine in New York City in the early 1950s. The real Plath committed suicide in 1963 and left behind this scathingly sad, honest and perfectly-written book, which remains one of the best-told tales of a woman's descent into insanity.
<i>The Shipping News</i>	Proulx, E. Annie	Annie Proulx's highly acclaimed, international best-seller and Pulitzer prize-winning novel. Quoye is a hapless, hopeless hack journalist living and working in New York. When his no-good wife is killed in a spectacular road accident, Quoye heads for the land of his forefathers -- the remotest corner of far-flung Newfoundland. With 'the aunt' and his delinquent daughters - Bunny and Sunshine - in tow, Quoye finds himself part of an unfolding, exhilarating Atlantic drama.
<i>The Fountainhead</i>	Rand, Ayn	<i>The Fountainhead</i> has become an enduring piece of literature, more popular now than when published in 1943. On the surface, it is a story of one man, Howard Roark, and his struggles as an architect in the face of a successful rival, Peter Keating, and a newspaper columnist, Ellsworth Toohey. But the book addresses a number of universal themes: the strength of the individual, the tug between good and evil, the threat of fascism. The confrontation of those themes, along with the amazing stroke of Rand's writing, combine to give this book its enduring influence.
<i>The Dice Man</i>	Rhinehart, Luke	The cult classic that can still change your life... Let the dice decide! This is the philosophy that changes the life of bored psychiatrist Luke Rhinehart - and in some ways changes the world as well. Because once you hand over your life to the dice, anything can happen. Entertaining, humorous, scary, shocking, subversive, <i>The Dice Man</i> is one of the cult bestsellers of our time.
<i>The God of Small Things</i>	Roy, Arundhati	Another Booker Prize winner, this is a gloriously evocative tragedy set in Kerala. It's about the events surrounding a Christian family in an Indian setting, and while the story itself is gripping, the inventive and original style of Roy's writing stands out. You might be interested to know that Roy has not written a novel since and is now an international campaigner against the Indian government's Narmada Dam project - her work on this subject is intensely political and well worth reading.
<i>Midnight's Children</i>	Rushdie, Salman	A swirling and evocative magical realist epic covering the emergence of Modern India. Saleem is born at the midnight of India's independence and joins 1000 children born at that time, each with an amazing talent. Amazon says 'Quite simply, <i>Midnight's Children</i> is amazing-fun, beautiful, erudite, both fairy tale and political narrative told through a supernatural narrator who is caught between different worlds'.
<i>The Reader</i>	Bernhard Schlink	For 15-year-old Michael Berg, a chance meeting with an older woman leads to far more than he ever imagined. The woman in question is Hanna, and before long they embark on a passionate, clandestine love affair which leaves Michael both euphoric and confused. For Hanna is not all she seems. Years later, as a law student observing a trial in Germany, Michael is shocked to realize that the person in the dock is Hanna. The woman he had loved is a criminal. Much about her behaviour during the trial does not make sense. But then suddenly, and terribly, it does - Hanna is not only obliged to answer for a horrible crime, she is also desperately concealing an even deeper secret. 'A tender, horrifying novel that shows blazingly well how the Holocaust should be dealt with in fiction.
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	Scott Fitzgerald, F.	Set in the post-Great War Long Island/New York world of the rich. The narrator, Nick Carraway, sympathetically records the pathos of Gatsby's romantic dream which founders on the reality of corruption, the insulated selfishness of Tom and Daisy, and the cutting edge of violence.

<i>Perfume</i>	Suskind, Patrick	A murder was the start of his obsession. It was after that first crime that he knew he was a genius, that he understood his destiny. He, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, the fishmonger's bastard, was to be the greatest perfumier of all time...
<i>The Secret History</i>	Tartt, Donna	This is one of those rare books: an intelligent and complex literary novel that remains eminently readable. The claustrophobic Gothic setting of a New Hampshire College provides the backdrop for this psychological tale of friendship and murder. The narrator of this story is a boy who leaves California to attend a college in New England. He falls in with a group of students of Ancient Greek. One night, four of their number work themselves into a trance-like condition, and murder a local farmer.
<i>Anna Karenina</i>	Tolstoy, Leo	Acclaimed by many as the world's greatest novel, this is the story of a wife, Anna Karenina, who abandons her empty existence as the wife of a Petersburg government minister for a passionate relationship with a young officer, Count Vronsky.
<i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	Twain, Mark	One of the finest novels ever written and one of the first to be written in dialect. Huck, the disreputable boy in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer", was beaten whenever his drunken father was sober enough to hold the strap. He was 14 when he got away from him, and met old Jim, also on the run. Together on a raft they tumbled in and out of experiences.
<i>The Color Purple</i>	Walker, Alice	Winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1983, <i>The Color Purple</i> is a feminist novel about an abused and uneducated black woman's struggle for empowerment. The novel was praised for the depth of its female characters and for its eloquent use of black English vernacular.
<i>Brideshead Revisited</i>	Waugh, Evelyn	Written at the end of the World War II, this novel mourns the passing of the aristocratic world which Waugh knew in his youth and recalls the sensuous pleasures denied him by the austerities of war. In so doing, it provides a study of the conflict between the demands of religion and of the flesh.
<i>Oranges are Not the Only Fruit</i>	Winterson, Jeanette	In <i>Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i> , Winterson knits a complicated picture of teenage angst and lesbianism through a series of layered narratives, incorporating and subverting fairytales and myths, to present a coherent whole, within which her stories can stand independently. Imaginative and mischievous, she is a born storyteller, teasing and taunting the reader to reconsider their worldview.
<i>Native Son</i>	Wright, Richard	Gripping and furious, 'Native Son' follows Bigger Thomas, a young black man who is trapped in a life of poverty in the slums of Chicago. Unwittingly involved in a wealthy woman's death, he is hunted relentlessly by prejudiced officials. The novel shocked readers on its first publication in 1940 and went on to make Richard Wright the first bestselling black writer in America.
<i>Revolutionary Road</i>	Richard Yates	Hailed as a masterpiece from the moment of its first publication, " <i>Revolutionary Road</i> " is the story of Frank and April Wheeler, a bright, beautiful, and talented couple whose empty suburban life is held together by the dream that greatness is only just round the corner. With heartbreaking compassion and clarity, Richard Yates shows how Frank and April mortgage their hopes and ideals, betraying in the end not only each other, but their own best selves.

Updated June 2010 RAR/HMR