



# CHRISTMAS BOOKCASE

Staff Recommended Reading

December 2011



*Full details can be found on*

[www.millhill.org.uk](http://www.millhill.org.uk)

The Stone Woman  
Glasshopper  
The Player Of Games  
A Short History Of Nearly Everything  
Notes From A Small Island  
The Dinosaur Hunters  
Chocolate Wars  
The Postman Always Rings Twice  
Three Emperors  
The Alchemist  
23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism  
The Battle Hymn Of The Tiger Mother  
The Ancestor's Tale  
Nothing To Envy  
The Hare With Amber Eyes  
A Christmas Carol  
Great Expectations  
Room  
Paddy Clarke Ha! Ha! Ha!  
The Loving Spirit  
Troubles  
A Week In December  
The Feynman Lectures On Physics: Vol 1 & 2  
The Granta Book Of The American Short Story  
Howard's End  
Bryant & May: Ten Second Staircase  
Inner Space  
The Book Of General Ignorance  
Five Minds For The Future  
A Friend Like Henry  
Eat, Pray, Love  
The Elegant Universe  
Life And Fate  
To The Elephant Graveyard  
Catch 22  
Sick Puppy  
Their Eyes Were Watching God  
We Die Alone  
One  
Pigeon English  
A World Of My Own  
To Kill A Mockingbird  
The Wild Places  
The Missing  
Warhorse  
Shadow  
The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter  
Solar  
Enduring Love  
The Snowman  
Starter For Ten  
The Understudy

Tariq Ali  
Isabel Ashdown  
Ian M Banks  
Bill Bryson  
Bill Bryson  
Deborah Cadbury  
Deborah Cadbury  
James M Cain  
Miranda Carter  
Paulo Cahlo  
Ha-Joon Chang  
Amy Chua  
Richard Dawkins  
Barbara Demick  
Edward De Waal  
Charles Dickens  
Charles Dickens  
Emma Donoghue  
Roddy Doyle  
Daphne Du Maurier  
J G Farrell  
Sebastian Faulks  
Richard Feynman  
Richard Ford  
E M Forster  
Christopher Fowler  
Merlin Fraser  
Stephen Fry  
Howard Gardner  
Nuala Gardner  
Elizabeth Gilbert  
Brian Greene  
Vasily Grossman  
Tarquin Hall  
Joseph Heller  
Carl Hiaasen  
Zora Neale Hurston  
David Howarth  
David Karp  
Stephen Kelman  
Robin Knox-Johnston  
Harper Lee  
Robert Macfarlane  
Chris Mooney  
Michael Murpurgo  
Michael Murpurgo  
Carson McCullers  
Ian McEwan  
Ian McEwan  
Jo Nesbo  
David Nichols  
David Nichols

The Bell Jar  
Shantaram  
The Immortal Life Of Henrietta Lacks  
Character  
I Capture The Castle  
The Return Of Captain Emmett  
Maus:A Survivors Tale  
Cannery Row  
Bounce  
Book Of Symbols  
The Slap  
Breakfast Of Champions  
The Age Of Innocence  
On The Slow Train  
On The Slow Train Again  
When God Was A Rabbit  
Revolutionary Road

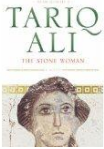
Sylvia Plath  
Gregory David Roberts  
Rebecca Skloot  
Samuel Smiles  
Dodi Smith  
Elizabeth Speller  
Art Spiegelman  
John Steinbeck  
Matthew Syed  
Tachen  
Christos Tsiolkas  
Kurt Vonnegut  
Edith Wharton  
Michael Williams  
Michael Williams  
Sarah Winman  
Richard Yates

## The Stone Woman – Tariq Ali

***Recommended by Sanja Radojevic***

*I am quite interested in the history of Ottoman Empire so this book was recommended to me by one of my friends. It is the part of Islamic Quintet series by Tariq Ali. It is the story about the family of Iskander Pasha (a descendant of the Sultan's favorite courtier). It is very well written and not politically motivated at all. You can learn a lot about life of the characters in the time of the slow and steady decline of the Ottoman Empire. Highly recommended. In fact all five books are very good (Islamic Quintet by Tariq Ali).*

### Synopsis



The Stone Woman is the third novel of Tariq Ali's "Islam Quartet." Like its predecessors - Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree and The Book of Saladin - its power lies both in the story-telling and the challenge it poses to stereotyped images of life under Islam.

## Glasshopper – Isabel Ashdown

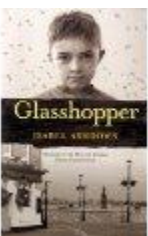
***Recommended by Louise Arnold***

This was written using two narrators, a teenage boy and his alcoholic mother. It tells the story of him growing up with his brothers in the 80s and of how he copes with his mother's addiction. Quite sad and hard-hitting in places.

***Recommended by Sarah Sofroniou***

*Takes you back to life as a schoolchild in the Eighties. This debut novel from Isabel Ashdown got the nostalgia just right for me, but is also a riveting tale.*

### Synopsis



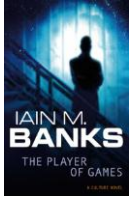
From the suburban disorder of 1980s southern England, 13-year-old Jake watches his world unravel as his father and older brother leave the family home and his mother increasingly finds solace in drink. Even as Jake outwardly shrugs off doubts about his paternity, the question hangs over him like an invisible spectre. A brilliantly structured novel, Glasshopper recreates the time and place of two childhoods and two marriages, evoking a poignant sense of home and family. A masterful debut, it celebrates the enduring optimism of youth, even in the face of tragedy.

## The Player Of Games - Ian M Banks

*Recommended by Oliver Galgut*

*This is a fantastic piece of Sci-Fi fiction and really makes you stop to think about the way our world works.*

### Synopsis



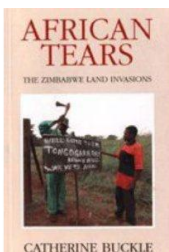
In *The Player of Games*, Iain M. Banks presents a distant future that could almost be called the end of history. Humanity has filled the galaxy, and thanks to ultra-high technology everyone has everything they want, no one gets sick, and no one dies. It's a playground society of sports, stellar cruises, parties, and festivals. Jernau Gurgeh, a famed master game player, is looking for something more and finds it when he's invited to a game tournament at a small alien empire. Abruptly Banks veers into different territory. The Empire of Azad is exotic, sensual and vibrant. It has space battle cruisers, a glowing court-- all the stuff of good old science fiction--which appears old-fashioned in contrast to Gurgeh's home. At first it's a relief, but further exploration reveals the empire to be depraved and terrifically unjust. Its defects are gross exaggerations of our own, yet they indict us all the same. Clearly Banks is interested in the idea of a future where everyone can be mature and happy.

## African Tears - Catherine Buckle

*Recommended by Liz Grainger*

*I have just started reading this book, which was recommended to me by a friend, so far I have not been disappointed. It tells of Cathy Buckle's experiences during Robert Mugabe's reclaim of farm owned by white farmers in the 1990s.*

### Synopsis

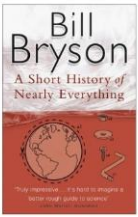


African tears: The Zimbabwean Land Invasion, was the author's first title about the devastation of Zimbabwe's farming sector. In it, she describes how in 1990 she and her husband became the proud owners of Stow Farm, with the approval of the Zanu-PF government. They borrowed money at high interest rates to turn the farm into a viable financial enterprise and within seven years they had paid off the loan and were free of debt. But on 28 February 2000, a mob of men claiming to be veterans of the 1980 War for Independence arrived at their farm gate. The so-called 'war vets' claimed that the farm and everything on it was now their property and that they had come to take back what had been stolen from their ancestors. 'African Tears' is Cathy's horrifying account of what then transpired. It is the story of her family's experiences and describes the horror of having their home, livelihood and investment taken away from them. 'African Tears' is a moving testament to the horror unleashed by President Robert Mugabe's exploitative land policy and the corruption which is running riot in a country that faces both starvation and financial ruin.

## ***A Short History Of Nearly Everything – Bill Bryson***

***Recommended by John Murphy***

### ***Synopsis***



What on earth is Bill Bryson doing writing a book of popular science--*A Short History of Almost Everything*? Largely, it appears, because this inquisitive, much-travelled writer realised, (while flying over the Pacific), that he was entirely ignorant of the processes that created, populated and continue to maintain the vast body of water beneath him.

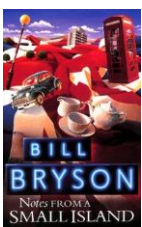
In fact, it dawned on him that "I didn't know the first thing about the only planet I was ever going to live on". The questions multiplied: What is a quark? How can anybody know how much the Earth weighs? How can astrophysicists (or whoever) claim to describe what happened in the first gazillionth of a nanosecond after the Big Bang? Why can't earthquakes be predicted? What makes evolution more plausible than any other theory? In the end, all these boiled down to a single question--how do scientists do science? To this subject Bryson devoted three years of his life, reading books and journals and pestering the people who know (or at least argue about it); and we non-scientists should be pretty grateful to him for passing his findings on to us.

Broadly, his investigations deal with seven topics, all of enormous interest and significance: the origins of the universe; the gradual historical discovery of the size and age of the earth (and the beginnings of the awesome notion of deep time); relativity and quantum theory; the present and future threats to life and the planet; the origins and history of life (dinosaurs, mass extinctions and all); and the evolution of man.

## ***Notes From A Small Island - Bill Bryson***

***Recommended by John Murphy***

### ***Synopsis***



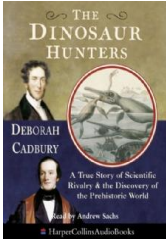
Bill Bryson's hilarious tour of his adopted country: the book that was voted the nation's favourite book on modern Britain in a World Book Day BBC poll. Bill Bryson is an unabashed Anglophile who, through a mistake of history, happened to be born and bred in Iowa. Righting that error, he spent 20 years in England before deciding to repatriate: "I had recently read that 3.7 million Americans according to a Gallup poll, believed that they had been abducted by aliens at one time or another, so it was clear that my people needed me." That comic tone enlivens this account of Bryson's farewell walking tour of the countryside of "the green and kindly island that had for two decades been my home."

## The Dinosaur Hunters – Deborah Cadbury

**Recommended by Andrew Gaylor**

*This book is a fascinating account of how the confusing fragments of prehistory were painstakingly pieced together to build up our understanding of the world of the dinosaurs. Forget 'Jurassic Park' – this is the real story of dinosaurs, and also of the battle between the self-serving and narrow minded members of the intellectual establishment and the brilliant insights and dedication of the early nineteenth century amateur geologists and fossil hunters. This is a compelling book about real people, and it will change your view of dinosaurs and fossils forever!*

### Synopsis



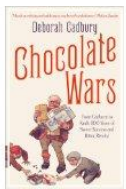
The story of two nineteenth-century scientists who revealed one of the most significant and exciting events in the natural history of this planet: the existence of dinosaurs. In 'The Dinosaur Hunters' Deborah Cadbury brilliantly recreates the remarkable story of the bitter rivalry between two men: Gideon Mantell uncovered giant bones in a Sussex quarry, became obsessed with the lost world of the reptiles and was driven to despair. Richard Owen, a brilliant anatomist, gave the extinct creatures their name and secured for himself unrivalled international acclaim.

## Chocolate Wars – Deborah Cadbury

**Recommended by Andrew Gaylor**

*If you love chocolate, this book is for you! But it also about the challenges of being a business entrepreneur, of setting new standards in business and industry and of the modern world of multinational takeovers. It start with the amazing story of how long it took to come up with the idea of a bar of chocolate and of how difficult it proved to make one, and weaves that into the story of intense competition between manufacturers – both in this country and internationally. This book takes us through the growing importance of advertising, the birth of brands and the financial markets' demand for profit over national interest or social welfare. Chocolate Wars is about the incredible characters in the Cadbury family, but it is also a challenge for us today on the tension between profit and principle.*

### Synopsis



The delicious true story of the early chocolate pioneers by the award-winning writer, and direct descendant of the famous chocolate dynasty, Deborah Cadbury In 'Chocolate Wars' bestselling historian and award-winning documentary maker Deborah Cadbury takes a journey into her own family history to uncover the rivalries that have driven 250 years of chocolate empire-building. In the early nineteenth century Richard Tapper Cadbury sent his son, John, to London to study a new and exotic commodity: cocoa. Within a generation, John's sons, Richard and George, had created a chocolate company to rival the great English firms of Fry and Rowntree, and their European competitors Lindt and Nestlé. The major English firms were all Quaker family enterprises, and their business aims were infused with religious idealism.

In America, Milton Hershey and Forrest Mars proved that they had the appetite for business on a huge scale, and successfully resisted the English companies' attempts to master the American market. As chocolate companies raced to compete around the globe, Quaker capitalism met a challenge that would eventually defeat it. At the turn of the millennium Cadbury, the sole independent survivor of England's chocolate dynasties, became the world's largest confectionary company. But before long it too faced a threat to its very survival, and the chocolate wars culminated in a multi-billion pound showdown pitting independence and Quaker tradition against the cut-throat tactics of a corporate leviathan.

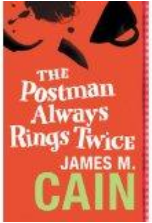
Featuring a colourful cast of savvy entrepreneurs, brilliant eccentrics and resourceful visionaries, 'Chocolate Wars' is the story of a uniquely alluring product and of the evolution, for better and worse, of modern business.

## ***The Postman Always Rings Twice – James M Cain***

***Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe***

*Murder, adultery, passion, crime later made into a “Film Noir” with the most memorable “femme fatale”.*

### **Synopsis**



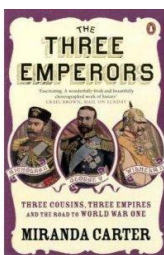
First published in 1934, THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE caused a scandal with its explosive mix of violence and sex, and immediately became a bestseller. The torrid story of Frank Chambers, the amoral drifter, Cora, the sullen and brooding wife, and Nick Papadakis, the amiable but inconvenient husband, has become a classic of its kind, and established Cain as a major novelist with a spare and vital prose style and a bleak vision of America. THE AUTHOR James M. Cain was born in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1892. Having served in the US Army in World War 1, he became a journalist in Baltimore and New York in the 1920s. He later worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Cain died in 1977.

## **Three Emperors – Miranda Carter**

***Recommended by Peter McDonough***

*This is a wonderful book, dealing with the complex relationships between George V, Nicholas II and Kaiser Wilhelm, in the years before and during the Great War. Reading like a cross between Gilbert and Sullivan and a soap opera, the study unveils, in particular, the extraordinary dysfunctionality of the German and Russian royal families. The British royal family is at the same time shown to be archaic and surprisingly ordinary; with George’s key interests being stamp collecting and shooting (the number of animals shot by the trio of emperors simply beggars belief!) Carter does well to both inform and entertain and although there are some instances of repetition and keeping up with the many branches of Victoria’s extended family can be a bit of a challenge, this is a book that never fails to maintain its pace. Highly recommended, especially for students of Russian history.*

### **Synopsis**



Three cousins. Three Emperors. And the road to ruin. As cousins, George V, Kaiser Wilhelm II and the last Tsar Nicholas II should have been friends - but they happened also to rule Europe's three most powerful states. This potent combination together with their own destructive personalities - petty, insecure, bullying, absurdly obsessive (stamp collecting, uniforms) - led not only to their own dramatic fallouts and falls from grace, but also to the outbreak of the First World War.

Miranda Carter's riveting account of how three men who should have known better helped bring down an entire world is a gripping story of abdication, betrayal and murder.

## 23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism' – Ha-Joon Chang

*Recommended by Val Miner*

*This book is one of the most easily accessible books on political economy that I have ever come across. Professor Chang debunks many of the commonly held myths about capitalism and the free market, which I would suggest is essential reading for anyone with a general interest in current affairs. It is easy to read, devoid of jargon and witty. As the title suggests it consists of 23 short, self-contained chapters; just right to dip in and out of during the festive period.*

### Synopsis



In *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism* one of today's most iconoclastic thinkers destroys the biggest myths about the world we live in.

There's no such thing as a 'free' market

Globalization isn't making the world richer

We don't live in a digital world - the washing machine has changed lives more than the internet

Poor countries are more entrepreneurial than rich ones

Higher paid managers don't produce better results

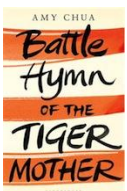
This galvanizing, fact-packed book about money, equality, freedom and greed proves that the free market isn't just bad for people - it's an inefficient way of running economies too. Here Chang lays out the alternatives, and shows there's a better way.

## Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother: Amy Chua

*Recommended By Lindsey Farrant*

*This book has sparked a fierce debate about both Chinese and Western methods of parenting. Amy Chua has been called 'a menace to society' and accused of being an 'inhuman mother'; she has even received death threats. She does not believe there is value in children having play dates, sleepovers, extra-curricular choice, or achieving anything less than A grades and she is brutal in the enforcement of her philosophy. Unquestionably the Draconian methods she uses to micromanage her daughters are often deeply uncomfortable to read. There is, however, also a generous measure of self-deprecation, courage, honesty and humour in evidence (even the family dog, Coco, is believed to possess hidden talents and pushed to achieve to a 'higher level' – to no avail) which rescues it and leads us to revisit and question the brand of uncritical parenting, masked as liberalism, that is all too pervasive in our own society today. Compelling and Challenging!*

### Synopsis



A lot of people wonder how Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids. They wonder what Chinese parents do to produce so many math whizzes and music prodigies, what it's like inside the family, and whether they could do it too. Well, I can tell them, because I've done it...Amy Chua's daughters, Sophia and Louisa (Lulu) were polite, interesting and helpful, they were two years ahead of their classmates in maths and had exceptional musical abilities. But Sophia and Lulu were never allowed to attend a sleepover, be in a school play, choose their own extracurricular activities, get any grade less than an A, and not be the

#1 student in every subject (except gym and drama). And they had to practice their instruments for hours every day, as well as in school breaks and on family holidays. The Chinese-parenting model certainly seemed to produce results. But what happens when you do not tolerate disobedience and are confronted by a screaming child who would sooner freeze outside in the cold than be forced to play the piano? In *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, Amy Chua relates her experiences raising her children the 'Chinese way', and how dutiful, patient Sophia flourished under the regime and how tenacious, hot-tempered Lulu rebelled. It is a story about a mother, two daughters, and two dogs. It's also about Mozart and Mendelssohn, the piano and the violin, and how they made it to Carnegie Hall. It was supposed to be a story of how Chinese parents are better at raising kids than Western ones. But instead, it's about a bitter clash of cultures, a fleeting taste of glory, and how you can be humbled by a thirteen-year-old. Witty, entertaining and provocative, this is a unique and important book that will transform your perspective of parenting forever.

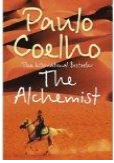
## The Alchemist – Paulo Coelho

*Recommended by Orpy Logan*

*This is a charming story which follows a young Andalusian shepherd into the desert on his quest for a dream and the fulfillment of his destiny. The overall message emphasizes the pleasure and satisfaction to be gained when we try to achieve our dreams. Sometimes the journey can become more important than the destination.*

*Favorite Quote: "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."...*

### Synopsis



Like the one-time bestseller *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *The Alchemist* presents a simple fable, based on simple truths and places it in a highly unique situation. And though we may sense a bestselling formula, it is certainly not a new one: even the ancient tribal storytellers knew that this is the most successful method of entertaining an audience while slipping in a lesson or two. Brazilian storyteller.

Paulo Coelho introduces Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who one night dreams of a distant treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. And so he's off: leaving Spain to literally follow his dream.

Along the way he meets many spiritual messengers, who come in unassuming forms such as a camel driver and a well-read Englishman. In one of the Englishman's books, Santiago first learns about the alchemists--men who believed that if a metal were heated for many years, it would free itself of all its individual properties, and what was left would be the "Soul of the World." Of course he does eventually meet an alchemist, and the ensuing student-teacher relationship clarifies much of the boy's misguided agenda, while also emboldening him to stay true to his dreams. "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy confides to the alchemist one night as they look up at a moonless night.

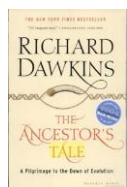
"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself," the alchemist replies. "And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity."

## The Ancestor's Tale- Richard Dawkins

*Recommended by Dominic Lockett*

*A superb, up-to-date and accessible journey back through evolution.*

### Synopsis



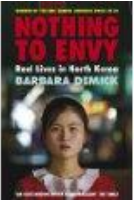
*The Ancestor's Tale* takes us from our immediate human ancestors back through what he calls 'concestors,' those shared with the apes, monkeys and other mammals and other vertebrates and beyond to the dim and distant microbial beginnings of life some 4 billion years ago. It is a remarkable story which is still very much in the process of being uncovered. And, of course from a scientist of Dawkins stature and reputation we get an insider's knowledge of the most up-to-date science and many of those involved in the research. And, as we have come to expect of Dawkins, it is told with a passionate commitment to scientific veracity and a nose for a good story. Dawkins's knowledge of the vast and wonderful sweep of life's diversity is admirable. Not only does it encompass the most interesting living representatives of so many groups of organisms but also the important and informative fossil ones, many of which have only been found in recent years.

## Nothing To Envy – Barbara Demick

*Recommended by Melvyn Bardou*

*It offers an extraordinary insight into the lives of people in North Korea during the past decades. It is a very sad yet highly engaging book which makes you glad to live in a democracy and never, ever want to visit North Korea.*

### Synopsis



North Korea is Orwell's 1984 made reality: it is the only country in the world not connected to the internet; *Gone with the Wind* is a dangerous, banned book; during political rallies, spies study your expression to check your sincerity. After the death of the country's great leader Kim Il Sung in 1994, famine descended: people stumbled over dead bodies in the street and ate tree bark to survive. *Nothing to Envy* weaves together the stories of adversity and resilience of six residents of Chongin, North Korea's third largest city. From extensive interviews and with tenacious investigative work, Barbara Demick has recreated the concerns, culture and lifestyles of North Korean citizens in a gripping narrative, and vividly reconstructed the inner workings of this extraordinary and secretive country.

## The Hare With Amber Eyes - Edward De Waal

*Recommended by Lizzie Worsdale*

*Original, beautifully crafted and finely observed.*

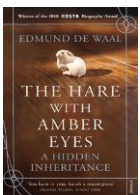
*Recommended by Liz Baker*

*Was one of the best books I have read this year. Winner of the 2010 Costa Biography Award this is a beautifully written, personal and at times painful memoir of the author's remarkable family. Spanning the political turmoil of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Paris, Vienna and occupied Tokyo the story uncovers the journey of a unique collection of Japanese 'netsuke' and the lives of its owners.*

*Recommended by Armande Fryatt*

*I thought it was a fascinating and unique take on a personal history.*

### Synopsis



264 wood and ivory carvings, none of them larger than a matchbox: potter Edmund de Waal was entranced when he first encountered the collection in the Tokyo apartment of his great uncle Iggy. Later, when Edmund inherited the 'netsuke', they unlocked a story far larger than he could ever have imagined...The Ephrussi came from Odessa, and at one time were the largest grain exporters in the world; in the 1870s, Charles Ephrussi was part of a wealthy new generation settling in Paris. Marcel Proust was briefly his secretary and used Charles as the model for the aesthete Swann in *Remembrance of Things Past*. Charles' passion was collecting; the netsuke, bought when Japanese objects were all the rage in the salons, were sent as a wedding present to his banker cousin in Vienna. Later, three children - including a young Ignace - would play with the netsuke as history reverberated around them. The Anschluss and Second World War swept the Ephrussi to the brink of oblivion. Almost all that remained of their vast empire was the netsuke collection, smuggled out of the huge Viennese palace (then occupied by Hitler's theorist on the 'Jewish Question'), one piece at a time, in the pocket of a loyal maid -

and hidden in a straw mattress. In this stunningly original memoir, Edmund de Waal travels the world to stand in the great buildings his forebears once inhabited. He traces the network of a remarkable family against the backdrop of a tumultuous century. And, in prose as elegant and precise as the netsuke themselves, he tells the story of a unique collection which passed from hand to hand - and which, in a twist of fate, found its way home to Japan.

## A Christmas Carol - Charles Dickens

*Recommended by Richard Warden*

*It was the first Dickens book I ever read, and besides being short (it is a 'novella'), it gave me a wonderful introduction to the immense wit and wisdom of Charles Dickens and the beauty and intricacy of his use of the English language. It is a morality tale, drawing energy from the shocking social injustices of the day, characterized in Ebenezer Scrooge who ultimately turns away from cruelty to compassion; it concerns the supernatural (with its Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet To Come) and yet is utterly 'down to earth' it is set in the past but its positive message has contemporary and universal resonance; it is a very 'readable' story, but it also presents a reading challenge; it has historical importance, being credited with restoring the Christmas season to one of merriment and festivity, both in Britain and America.*

### Synopsis



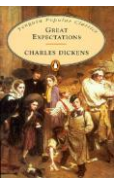
A morality tale, drawing energy from the shocking social injustices of the day, characterized by Ebenezer Scrooge who ultimately turns away from cruelty to compassion; it concerns the supernatural (with its Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come) and yet is utterly 'down to earth'; it is set in the past but its positive message has contemporary and universal resonance; it is a very 'readable' story, but it also presents a reading challenge; it has historical importance, being credited with restoring the Christmas season to one of merriment and festivity, both in Britain and America.

## Great Expectations - Charles Dickens

*Recommended by Daniel Bingham*

*Many of Dickens most remarkable characters can be found in these pages. As a bonus, it's a thrilling rollercoaster of a ride.*

### Synopsis



I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.' Great Expectations charts the progress of Pip from childhood through often painful experiences to adulthood, as he moves from the Kent marshes to busy, commercial London, encountering a variety of extraordinary characters ranging from Magwitch, the escaped convict, to Miss Havisham, locked up with her unhappy past and living with her ward, the arrogant, beautiful Estella. In this compelling story, Dickens shows the dangers of being driven by desire for wealth and social status. Pip must establish his own sense of self against the plans which others seem to have for him, and thus discover a firm set of values and priorities. Whether such values will allow one to prosper in the complex world of early Victorian England is, however, the major question posed by Great Expectations, one of Dicken's most fascinating, and disturbing, novels. This edition uses the text of the Clarendon edition, with a new Introduction and Explanatory Notes. The Appendices give the original, discarded ending, Dicken's brief working notes, and the serial instalments and chapter divisions in different editions. An absorbing mystery as well as a morality tale, the story of Pip, a poor village lad, and his expectations of wealth is Dickens at his most deliciously readable. The cast of characters includes kindly Joe Gargery, the loyal convict Abel Magwitch and the haunting Miss Havisham. If you have heartstrings, count on them being tugged.

## Room – Emma Donoghue

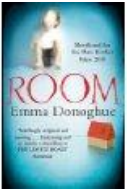
*Recommended by Sarah Sofroniou*

*Told by the 5-year-old narrator, this story is funny, sad and poignant in equal measures. Very well told and hard to put down.*

*Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs*

*These are the books I read in the summer and I would recommend them!*

### Synopsis



Jack is five. He lives with his Ma. They live in a single, locked room. They don't have the key. Jack and Ma are prisoners.

## Paddy Clarke Ha! Ha!Ha! - Roddy Doyle

*Recommended by John Murphy*

*Stories from Ireland past.*

### Synopsis



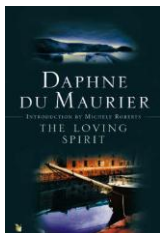
In Roddy Doyle's Booker Prize-winning novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, an Irish lad named Paddy rampages through the streets of Barrytown with a pack of like-minded hooligans, playing cowboys and Indians, etching their names in wet concrete and setting fires. Roddy Doyle has captured the sensations and speech patterns of preadolescents with consummate skill, and managed to do so without resorting to sentimentality. Paddy Clarke and his friends are not bad boys; they're just a little bit restless. They're always taking sides, bullying each other and secretly wishing they didn't have to. All they want is for something--anything--to happen.

## The Loving Spirit - Daphne Du Maurier

*Recommended by Liz Stewart*

*This is the first novel that Daphne Du Maurier wrote. It was written in 1929. Set in Cornwall it tells the story of four generations of a family of shipbuilders. I first read it when I was 16 at that time I loved anything to do with the sea and with Cornwall. It is a mixture of History, Adventure and Romance.*

### Synopsis



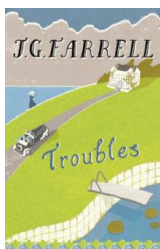
Cornwall, 1900s. Plyn Boat Yard is a hive of activity, and Janet Coombe longs to share in the excitement of seafaring: to travel, to have adventures, to know freedom. But constrained by the times, instead she marries her cousin Thomas, a boat builder, and settles down to raise a family. Janet's loving spirit - the passionate yearning for adventure and for love - is passed down to her son, and through him to his children's children. As generations of the family struggle against hardship and loss, their intricately plotted history is set against the greater backdrop of war and social change in Britain. Her debut novel, *The Loving Spirit* established du Maurier's reputation and style with an inimitable blend of romance, history and adventure.

## Troubles – J G Farrell

*Recommended by Philip Thonemann*

*It is a funny depiction of a ridiculously run-down hotel in Ireland in 1919, just before the Irish Civil War led to the independence of the South. There are undoubted elements of *Fawlty Towers*. Yet as well as being amusing, it shows, without any lecturing or abstract reasons, why the English had to leave.*

### Synopsis



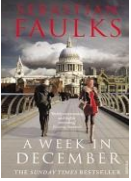
Major Brendan Archer travels to Ireland - to the Majestic Hotel and to the fiancée he acquired on a rash afternoon's leave three years ago. Despite her many letters, the lady herself proves elusive, and the Major's engagement is short-lived. But he is unable to detach himself from the alluring discomforts of the crumbling hotel. Enconced in the dim and shabby splendour of the Palm Court, surrounded by gently decaying old ladies and proliferating cats, the Major passes the summer. So hypnotic are the faded charms of the Majestic, the Major is almost unaware of the gathering storm. But this is Ireland in 1919 - and the struggle for independence is about to explode with brutal force.

## A Week In December- Sebastian Faulks

*Recommended by Rachel Bradley*

*His character portraits are superb and the moral messages contained in the story highly apposite for our times.*

### Synopsis



The story is set in [London, England](#) over a week in December, 2008. The book's peripheral characters play an important part in the general theme of the book. Life for John's wife, in particular, is lonely and boring. John can't engage with her at any level, her children are mysterious teenagers and she feels isolated. She and her circle of friends measure each other on how rich or how thin they are. Radley Scott, a secondary school teacher, becomes dangerously entangled in the fantasy world of "Parallax" the virtual reality game where his character is a sexually aggressive bully. Amanda can't let go of the past, when she used to rule the roost in London, but now stuck in the country with her boozy husband Roger; she can't wait to get back at the least opportunity. The novel touches on themes that are issues that we face every day: mental illness, terrorism, the recession, and a sense of trying to survive in a world of madness, consumerism and greed. Although the novel explores grim reality, there is hope, and love, a thin seam, but nonetheless, is still there.

## The Granta Book Of The American Short Story –Volume 1 – Richard Ford

*Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe*

*Contains all the best American writers including F.Scott Fitzgerald, Richard Yates and my favourite short story, "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson.*

### Synopsis



Richard Ford, who is among the finest of American novelists and short story writers, edits and introduces this volume. First published by Granta in 1992, it became the definitive anthology of American short fiction written in the last half of the twentieth century - an 'exemplary choice' in the words of the "Washington Post" - with stories by writers such as Eudora Welty, John Cheever, and Raymond Carver (and forty others) demonstrating how much memorable power can lie in the briefest narration. Along with "The Granta Book of the American Short Story: Volume 2", this book constitutes an important reflection and judgment of recent American writing - as well as the superb pleasure yielded by the stories themselves.

## Howard's End - E M Forster

*Recommended by Elaine Coyle*

*I love Forster's writing. His prose captures a certain truth and his ideas – connection, loyalty and the position of females in society – still resonate with readers today. Margaret is a complex and heroic character but not in the way you'd expect and I found the ending thoroughly satisfying. A great read.*

### Synopsis



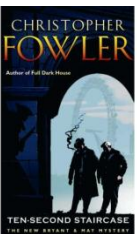
In *Howard's End*, E.M. Forster unveils the English character as never before, exploring the underlying class warfare involving three distinct groups--a wealthy family bound by the rules of tradition and property, two independent, cultured sisters, and a young man living on the edge of poverty. The source of their conflict--*Howards End*, a house in the countryside which ultimately becomes a symbol of conflict within British society.

## Bryant & May: Ten Second Staircase – Christopher Fowler

*Recommended by David Proudlock*

*This is from a series of books that feature two elderly detectives: Arthur Bryant and John May. They run the Peculiar Crimes Unit for a sceptical metropolitan police, investigating crimes in London. These characters are very amusing and Fowler has a huge knowledge of London history, so you get to know a lot about that as well as enjoying the witticisms and eccentricities of the protagonists. The crimes are, indeed, peculiar and the investigations take many twists and turns. A fascinating series.*

### Synopsis



A controversial artist is found dead in her own art installation inside a riverside gallery with locked doors and windows - the only witness is a small boy who insists the murderer was a masked man on a horse. A television presenter is struck by lightning while indoors... Two seemingly impossible crimes that only Arthur Bryant and John May of the Met's Peculiar Crimes Unit might be able to solve. But Bryant has lost his nerve following a disastrous public appearance, and May is fighting to keep the unit from closure. Worse still, the case of the Leicester Square Vampire, an unsolved mystery from the past that changed both their lives, has returned to haunt them.

With a sinister modern-day highwayman bringing terror to the London streets in a series of crimes each more puzzling than the last, the elderly detectives track their suspect to an exclusive private school and a deprived housing estate. But just when they need all the help they can get to uncover a new breed of criminal, the highwayman is hailed a national hero, and the public turns against them...

Bryant & May are back on the case in an adventure that explores the dark side of celebrity, the conflicts of youth, age and class, and the peculiar myths of old London.

## Inner Space –Merlin Fraser

**Recommended by Jonathan Edwards**

*The first book of a British detective trilogy that blends mystery, science fiction with a touch of romance to great effect.*

### Synopsis



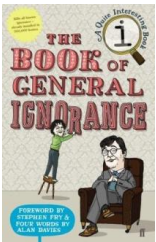
How well do you know your best friend? How would you react if he was suddenly arrested for murder? At 45 years of age with a broken, childless marriage behind him, Detective Inspector Nick Burton is just coasting through life. That is until the day his boss, Chief Superintendent Dan Davies, is arrested and charged with murder. In denial Nick's attempts to get at the truth are further hampered when Dan dies while in custody. Question is: did he commit suicide to avoid prosecution and imprisonment? Or was he murdered to prevent a scandal?

## The Book Of General Ignorance-Stephen Fry

**Recommended by John Murphy**

*Because I enjoy watching QI on TV*

### Synopsis



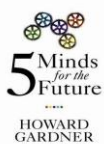
The indispensable compendium of popular misconceptions, misunderstandings and common mistakes culled from the hit BBC show, QI. The noticeably stouter QI Book of General Ignorance sets out to show you that a lot of what you think you know is wrong. If, like Alan Davies, you still think the Henry VIII had six wives, the earth has only one moon, that George Washington was the first president of the USA, that Bangkok is the capital of Thailand, that the largest living thing is a blue whale, that Alexander Graeme Bell invented the telephone, that whisky and bagpipes come from Scotland or that Mount Everest is the world's tallest mountain, then there are at least 200 reasons why this is the book for you.

## Five Minds For The Future - Howard Gardner

**Recommended by William Montgomery**

*Gardner is best known for his theory of Multiple Intelligence but I found that book less reader friendly. Five minds for the future is a must read for our students as they think about what to do beyond Mill Hill. Gardner identifies five key elements that we should look to instill in our lives; the disciplined mind, the ethical mind, the respectful mind, the synthesizing mind and the creative mind. In an increasingly computerized world what attributes will be those that we value as a society and which will be valued by our employers?*

### Synopsis



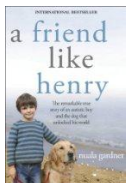
We live in a time of vast changes. And those changes call for entirely new ways of learning and thinking. World-renowned for his theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner takes that thinking to the next level in this book, drawing from a wealth of diverse examples to illuminate his ideas. Concise and engaging, "Five Minds for the Future" will inspire lifelong learning in any reader as well as provide valuable insights for those charged with training and developing organizational leaders - both today and tomorrow.

## A Friend Like Henry – Nuala Gardner

*Recommended by Liz Grainger*

*Owning a golden Retriever myself, I wanted to see what had been achieved with this very loving, good natured breed of dog. This is a true story about two Autistic children born to the same parents, locked in their own world and their mother's despair at trying to reach out to them. Her love for her children and the patience and tireless energy she has caring for them when no other help is available, bring tears to your eyes. We also have the DVD of this book in the library.*

### Synopsis



This is the inspiring account of a family's struggle to break into their son's autistic world - and how a beautiful retriever dog made the real difference.

Dale was still a baby when his parents realised that something wasn't right. Worried, his mother Nuala took him to see several doctors, before finally hearing the word 'autism' for the first time. Scared but determined that Dale should live a fulfilling life, Nuala describes her despair at her son's condition, her struggle to prevent Dale being excluded from a 'normal' education and her sense of hopeless isolation. Dale's autism was severe and violent and family life was a daily battleground.

But the Gardner's lives were transformed when they welcomed a gorgeous Golden Retriever into the family. The special bond between Dale and his dog Henry helped them to produce the breakthrough in Dale they had long sought. From taking a bath to saying 'I love you', Henry helped introduce Dale to all the normal activities most parents take for granted, and set him on the road to being the charming and well-adjusted young man he is today.

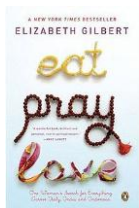
This is a heartrending and fascinating account of how one devoted and talented dog helped a little boy conquer his autism.

## Eat, Pray, Love – Elizabeth Gilbert

*Recommended by Lisa Silverman*

*The novel is based on a true story of a successful 30-something woman who, having gone through a painful divorce, decides to leave her life in New York and spend a year travelling. She spends 4 months in Italy, eating; 4 months in India in an ashram, meditating and praying and finally 4 months in Bali enjoying herself and ultimately falling in love. The book is essentially one woman's journey of self-discovery through a lot of emotional pain to a place of peace and contentment. It's an engaging book to read and is both entertaining and inspiring.*

### Synopsis



At 32 years old, Gilbert was educated, had a home and a husband, and successful career as a writer.

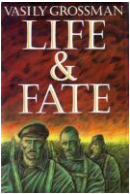
However, she was not happy; she was depressed with her marriage, often spending the night crying on her bathroom floor. She divorced her husband and entered into a relationship with another man, but this relationship did not work out either. She decided that she needed a change. She spent the next year traveling the world. She spent four months in Italy, eating and enjoying life (Eat). She spent four months in India, trying to find her spirituality (Pray). She ended the year in Bali, Indonesia, looking for "balance" of the two and love (Love).

## Life and Fate – Vasily Grossman

*Recommended by Harriet Curtis*

*...It was a challenge. There are nearly 900 pages and there is the added complication of characters with various Russian names. But the brilliance with which Grossman tells the story of the Shaposhnikov family living in Russia during the Second World War justifies the effort. It is more than a description of the Battle of Stalingrad, the Russian Labour Camps and the Lubyanka Prison. It is a story about the victory of the human spirit over evil....*

### Synopsis



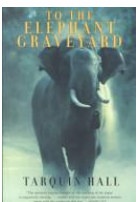
A book judged so dangerous in the Soviet Union that not only the manuscript but the ribbons on which it had been typed were confiscated by the state, *Life and Fate* is an epic tale of World War II and a profound reckoning with the dark forces that dominated the twentieth century. Interweaving a transfixing account of the battle of Stalingrad with the story of a single middle-class family, the Shaposhnikovs, scattered by fortune from Germany to Siberia, Vasily Grossman fashions an immense, intricately detailed tapestry depicting a time of almost unimaginable horror and even stranger hope. *Life and Fate* juxtaposes bedrooms and snipers' nests, scientific laboratories and the Gulag, taking us deep into the hearts and minds of characters ranging from a boy on his way to the gas chambers to Hitler and Stalin themselves.

## To The Elephant Graveyard – Tarquin Hall

*Recommended by Liz Grainger*

*If you enjoy travel writing, then go on a journey with Tarquin Hall while he takes you through the ever decreasing forests in search of a killer elephant. You will then realise why the elephants have changed into killers because of their suffering at human hands and the destruction of their natural habitat.*

### Synopsis



On India's northeast frontier, a killer elephant is on the rampage, stalking Assam's paddy fields and murdering dozens of farmers. Local forestry officials, powerless to stop the elephant, call in one of India's last licensed elephant hunters and issue a warrant for the rogue's destruction. Reading about the ensuing hunt in a Delhi newspaper, journalist Tarquin Hall flies to Assam to investigate. 'To the Elephant Graveyard' is the compelling account of the search for a killer elephant in the northeast corner of India, and a vivid portrait of the Khasi tribe, who live intimately with the elephants. Though it seems a world of peaceful coexistence between man and beast, Hall begins to see that the elephants are suffering, having lost their natural habitat to the destruction of the forests and modernization. Hungry, confused, and with little forest left to hide in, herds of elephants are slowly adapting to domestication, but many are resolute and furious.

## CATCH-22 –Joseph Heller

*Recommended by Oliver Galgutt*

*It is a well written, witty and thoroughly enjoyable satire about War and the way militaries operate throughout the world.*

### Synopsis



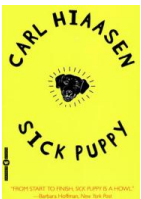
Joseph Heller's satirical war novel *Catch-22* depicts the absurdity and inhumanity of warfare through the experiences of Yossarian, a bombardier pilot stationed on the island of Pianosa (near Italy) in World War II. Heller does not tell Yossarian's story chronologically. Instead, the novel revolves around episodes in Yossarian's life (particularly the gruesome death of Snowden, a young airman) and employs flashbacks and digressions to jump back and forth between events. He desperately tries to be declared insane by the Air Force in order to go home. However during the process he slowly watches each of his friends and crew die off in the horrors of war.

## Sick Puppy – Carl Hiaasen

*Recommended by Jeffrey G Watson*

*I've read and enjoyed all of Hiaasen's books. 'Sick Puppy' was for me the best of them all and a real return to form for Hiaasen. Buy this book if you love to laugh out loud as the scenes are painted out and the imagery builds in your head. Great characters combined with Hiaasen's trademark tactic of creating totally believable situations and then just tipping them over the edge into almost riotous farce.*

### Synopsis



Carl Hiaasen's characters ride and flail on little verbal hurricanes, and his literary storm shows no signs of dying down. *Sick Puppy* shares Dave Barry's giddy gift for finding humour in South Florida horrors, and a bit of Elmore Leonard's genius for pitch-perfect dialogue spouted smartly by criminals who are as dumb as stumps. The title of Hiaasen's eighth novel could apply to most of its characters, but it chiefly refers to an ebullient Labrador retriever named Boodle and the millionaire eco-terrorist Twilly Spree. Let's just say that Twilly has a singular affliction: poor anger management in the face of environmental irresponsibility. When he spots Boodle's owner, Palmer Stoa, tossing litter from a car, Twilly goes to Stoa's home and removes the glass eyeballs from the animals that the bloated lobbyist had shot and mounted on his walls. Boodle gulps down the eyeballs, sustaining no small amount of digestive difficulties.

## We Die Alone - David Howarth

*Recommended by Adam Morton*

*Snowblind, shot, frost bitten, starving and buried alive... 'We Die Alone' tells the true story of Jan Baalsrud; a Norwegian commando, hunted by German soldiers across the arctic and kept alive only by his instinct to survive and the selfless help of complete strangers. His escape across a frozen lake, on a sledge pulled by reindeer, pursued by Germans on skis is quite incredible. This is an outrageous story of human endurance, survival and spirit.*

### Synopsis



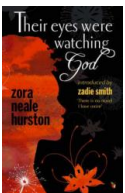
In March 1943 a team of expatriate Norwegian commandos sailed from the Shetland Islands for Nazi-occupied Norway. Their mission was to organise and support the Norwegian resistance. They were betrayed. And only one man survived a terrifying ambush by Nazi soldiers. This is the incredible and gripping story of his escape. Crippled by frostbite and snow-blind, hunted by the Germans, Jan Baalsrud, the sole survivor, managed to find a tiny Arctic village. There, delirious and close to death, he found villagers willing to risk their lives to save him. *We Die Alone* is his incredible story - an incomparable epic of survival in the most hostile conditions.

## Their Eyes Were Watching God – Zora Neale Hurston

*Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe*

*For me, Their Eyes Were Watching God is one of the very greatest American novels of the 20th century. It is so lyrical it should be sentimental; it is so passionate it should be overwrought, but it is instead a rigorous, convincing and dazzling piece of prose, as emotionally satisfying as it is impressive. There is no novel I love more.*

### Synopsis



*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an American classic, is a luminous and haunting novel about Janie Crawford, a Southern black woman in the 1930s whose journey from a free-spirited girl to a woman of independence and substance has inspired writers and readers for close to seventy years.

This poetic, graceful love story, rooted in black folk traditions and steeped in mythic realism, celebrates, boldly and brilliantly, African-American culture and heritage. And in a powerful, mesmerizing narrative, it pays quiet tribute to a black woman, who, though constricted by the times, still demanded to be heard. Originally published in 1937, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* met significant commercial but divided critical acclaim. Somewhat forgotten after her death, Zora Neale Hurston was rediscovered by a number of black authors in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and reintroduced to a greater readership by Alice Walker in her 1972 essay *In Search of Zora Neale Hurston*, written for *Ms.* magazine. Long out of print, the book was reissued after a petition was circulated at the Modern Language Association Convention in 1975, and nearly three decades later *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered a seminal novel of American fiction.

## One – David Karp

*Recommended by Peter Lawson*

*An American study of how an orthodoxy prescribed by the state can take over an individual's mind. A bit like 1984.*

### Synopsis

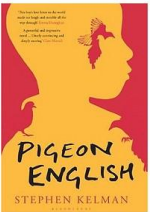


In a dateless future, the State has eliminated poverty and crime and brought the happiness of conformity to its citizens. All members of the state are equal in every way. Professor Burden believes he too is a loyal citizen, but the Department of Internal Examination discovers that he harbors unconscious doubts that he thinks he may be smarter than others, that he may have talents that others do not possess and brands him a heretic. Since individualism is a threat to the State, Burden's identity must be obliterated in order to save him.

## Pigeon English – Stephen Kelman

*Recommended by Laura Sutherland*

### Synopsis



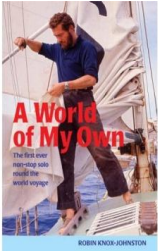
Newly arrived from Ghana with his mother and older sister, eleven-year-old Harrison Opoku lives on the ninth floor of a block of flats on an inner-city housing estate. The second best runner in the whole of Year 7, Harri races through his new life in his personalised trainers - the Adidas stripes drawn on with marker pen - blissfully unaware of the very real threat all around him. With equal fascination for the local gang - the Dell Farm Crew - and the pigeon who visits his balcony, Harri absorbs the many strange elements of his new life in England: watching, listening, and learning the tricks of urban survival. But when a boy is knifed to death on the high street and a police appeal for witnesses draws only silence, Harri decides to start a murder investigation of his own. In doing so, he unwittingly endangers the fragile web his mother has spun around her family to try and keep them safe. A story of innocence and experience, hope and harsh reality, Pigeon English is a spellbinding portrayal of a boy balancing on the edge of manhood and of the forces around him that try to shape the way he falls.

## A World of My Own - Robin Knox-Johnston

*Recommended by Dominic Lockett*

*Although an account of an extraordinary feat of seamanship and exploration, it is written with great humility and a quietly understated humour.*

### Synopsis



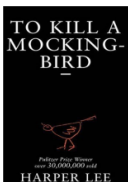
On Friday 14 June 1968 Suhaili, a tiny ketch, slipped almost unnoticed out of Falmouth harbour steered by the solitary figure at her helm, Robin Knox-Johnston. Ten and a half months later Suhaili, paintwork peeling and rust streaked, her once white sails weathered and brown, her self-steering gone, her tiller arm jury rigged to the rudder head, came romping joyously back to Falmouth to a fantastic reception for Robin, who had become the first man to sail round the world non-stop single-handed. By every standard it was an incredible adventure, perhaps the last great uncomputerised journey left to man. Every hazard, every temptation to abandon the astounding voyage came Robin's way, from polluted water tanks, smashed cabin top and collapsed boom to lost self-steering gear and sheared off tiller, and all before the tiny ketch had fought her way to Cape Horn, the point of no return, the fearsome test of any seaman's nerve and determination. *A World of My Own* is Robin's gripping, uninhibited, moving account of one of the greatest sea adventures of our time. An instant bestseller, it is now reissued for a new generation of readers to be enthralled and inspired.

## To Kill A Mockingbird – Harper Lee

*Recommended by Louise Arnold*

*This beautifully and innocently told through the eyes of a nine year old girl nick – named "Scout". If felt like I had spent the summer with her and her brother Jem and father Atticus and the people in their small town deep in South America. If you have never read this book then I urge you to and if you have already –then read it again!!!*

### Synopsis



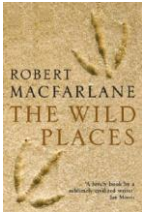
In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, author Harper Lee uses memorable characters to explore Civil Rights and racism in the segregated southern United States of the 1930s. Told through the eyes of Scout Finch, you learn about her father Atticus Finch, an attorney who hopelessly strives to prove the innocence of a black man unjustly accused of rape; and about Boo Radley, a mysterious neighbor who saves Scout and her brother Jem from being killed.

## The Wild Places-Robert Macfarlane

*Recommended by Jonathan Edwards*

*A loving exploration of Britain's remaining truly wild places some remote, others just around the corner. An evocative and well-written natural-history adventure.*

### Synopsis



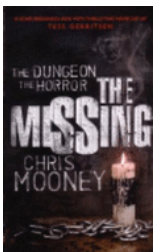
Are there any genuinely wild places left in Britain and Ireland? Or have we tarmacked, farmed and built ourselves out of wildness? In this celebrated book Robert Macfarlane embarks on a series of beautifully described journeys in search of the wildness that remains in these islands. That is the question that Robert Macfarlane poses to himself as he embarks on a series of breathtaking journeys through some of the archipelago's most remarkable landscapes. He climbs, walks, and swims by day and spends his nights sleeping on cliff-tops and in ancient meadows and wildwoods. With elegance and passion he entwines history, memory, and landscape in a bewitching evocation of wildness and its vital importance.

## The Missing-Chris Mooney

*Recommended by Liz Evesham*

*Fast-paced, gripping and totally absorbing. A real detective story with unexpected twists and turns...the ideal way to unwind!*

### Synopsis



When Boston CSI Darby McCormick finds a raving and emaciated woman hiding at the scene of a violent kidnap, she runs a DNA search to identify the Jane Doe. The result confirms she was abducted five years earlier and has somehow managed to escape from the dungeon in which she's been caged. With a teenage couple also missing and Jane Doe seriously ill, the clock is ticking for Darby as she hunts for the dungeon before anyone else disappears or dies. And when the FBI takes over the investigation, it becomes clear that a sadistic serial killer has been on the prowl for decades - and is poised to strike again at any moment. A killer with links to horrors that Darby has desperately tried to bury in her past.

## WarHorse – Michael Morpurgo

*Recommended by Liz Grainger*

*I would like to recommend the Michael Morpurgo books to those of you with younger teenagers. He is one of the authors featured in our Top 10 4<sup>th</sup> form reading survey, and as he has recently had a display at the War Museum in London and currently has a stage show production of War Horse.*

### Synopsis



A thoroughbred horse, Joey, is passed through a succession of owners until he finally finds himself in the thick of the action in the First World War. He is then captured by the English and is finally reunited with his original, loving owners.

## Shadow – Michael Morpurgo

*Recommended by Liz Grainger*

*Although these books are for the younger reader, they are quite factual and Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, which is mentioned in the book, actually exists for refugees.*

### Synopsis



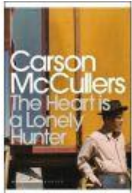
A stunning and moving new novel from Michael Morpurgo, the nation's favourite storyteller – featuring the bravest dog in all the world...This is the story of Aman, as told in his own words – a boy from Afghanistan fleeing the horror of the Afghan war. When a western dog shows up outside the caves where Aman lives with his mother, Aman is initially repulsed – it is not customary for people to keep dogs as pets in his part of the world. But when Aman and his mother finally decide to make a bid for freedom, the dog Aman has called Shadow will not leave their side. Soon it becomes clear: the destinies of boy and dog are linked, and always will be...

## The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter –Carson McCullers

*Recommended by Emily Kaplan*

*McCullers' lyrical prose paints a vivid, if not bleak, picture of America in the late 1930s. In many ways similar to contemporary American author John Steinbeck, McCullers explores the hopelessness of the American pursuit of happiness and the untenability of the great American Dream through the lives of ordinary men and women. A wonderful novel.*

### Synopsis



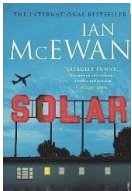
*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* was Carson McCullers' first novel, written in 1940. Set in a small town in the American South, it is the story of a group of people who have little in common except that they are all hopelessly lonely. A young girl, a drunken socialist and a black doctor are drawn to a gentle, sympathetic deaf mute, whose presence changes their lives. This powerful exploration of alienation is both moving and perceptive.

## Solar – Ian McEwan

*Recommended by Richard Searby*

*Ian McEwan's work is usually linked with crisis, trauma and the macabre. This novel, published in 2010, is very different. Its protagonist, Michael Beard, a top scientist whose best years are behind him, is explored as an initially comic but increasingly grotesque figure. There are some scenes of true farce, such as Beard's attempt to deliver crisply a lecture whilst struggling with the after-effects of some dodgy salmon for his lunch. However, by the close of the story he has become repellent, his appetite for food and wine only matched by his voracious sexual needs. McEwan blends the bleaker sides of the man's character with his absurdities, his professional eminence and, as a backdrop to all of this, there is a debate continuing about the validity of theories of climate change.*

### Synopsis



Michael Beard is a Nobel prize-winning physicist whose best work is behind him. Trading on his reputation, he speaks for enormous fees, lends his name to the letterheads of renowned scientific institutions and half-heartedly heads a government-backed initiative tackling global warming. A compulsive womaniser, Beard finds his fifth marriage floundering. But this time it is different: she is having the affair, and he is still in love with her.

When Beard's professional and personal worlds collide in a freak accident, an opportunity presents itself for Beard to extricate himself from his marital mess, reinvigorate his career and save the world from environmental disaster. Ranging from the Arctic Circle to the deserts of New Mexico, SOLAR is a serious and darkly satirical novel, showing human frailty struggling with the most pressing and complex problem of our time. A story of one man's greed and self-deception, it is a profound and stylish new work from one of the world's great writers.

## Enduring Love-Ian McEwan

*Recommended by Daniel Bingham*

*Uneasy read follows one of the great openings in modern fiction.*

### Synopsis



Joe planned a postcard-perfect afternoon in the English countryside to celebrate his lover's return after six weeks in the States. The perfect day turns to nightmare, however, when they are involved in freak ballooning accident in which a boy is saved but a man is killed. In itself, the accident would change the couple and the survivors' lives, filling them with an uneasy combination of shame, happiness, and endless self-reproach. But fate has far more unpleasant things in store for Joe. Meeting the eye of fellow rescuer Jed Parry, for example, turns out to be a very bad move. For Jed is instantly obsessed, making the first of many calls to Joe and

Clarissa's London flat that very night. Soon he's openly shadowing Joe and writing him endless letters. (One insane epistle begins, "I feel happiness running through me like an electrical current. I close my eyes and see you as you were last night in the rain, across the road from me, with the unspoken love between us as strong as steel cable.") Worst of all, Jed's version of love comes to seem a distortion of Joe's feelings for Clarissa. Apart from the incessant stalking, it is the conditionals--the contingencies--that most frustrate Joe, a scientific journalist. If only he and Clarissa had gone straight home from the airport... If only the wind hadn't picked up... If only he had saved Jed's 29 messages in a single day... Ian McEwan has long been a poet of the arbitrary nightmare, his characters ineluctably swept up in others' fantasies, skidding into deepening violence, and--worst of all--becoming strangers to those who love them. Even his prose itself is a masterful and methodical exercise in de-familiarisation. But *Enduring Love* and its underrated predecessor, *Black Dogs*, are also meditations on knowledge and perception as well as brilliant manipulations of our own expectations. By the novel's end, you will be surprisingly unafraid of hot-air balloons, but you won't be too keen on looking a stranger in the eye.

## The Snowman – Jo Nesbo

*Recommended by Suzanne Reynolds*

*Recommended by Mark Northern*

*Another Scandinavian author. I preferred this to Stieg Larsson. My wife didn't.*

### Synopsis



“The night the first snow falls a young boy wakes to find his mother gone. He walks through the silent house, but finds only wet footprints on the stairs. In the garden looms a solitary figure: a snowman bathed in cold moonlight, its black eyes glaring up at the bedroom windows. Round its neck is his mother's pink scarf.”

Amazon

## Starter For Ten – David Nichols

*Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs*

*I read this book in the summer and would recommend it.*

### Synopsis



It's 1985 and Brian Jackson has arrived at university with a burning ambition - to make it onto TV's foremost general knowledge quiz. But no sooner has he embarked on 'The Challenge' than he finds himself falling hopelessly in love with his teammate, the beautiful and charismatic would-be actress, Alice Harbinson. When Alice fails to fall for his slightly over-eager charms, Brian comes up with a foolproof plan to capture her heart once and for all. He's going to win the game, at any cost, because - after all - everyone knows that what a woman really wants from a man is a comprehensive grasp of general knowledge . . . *Starter For Ten* is a comedy about love, class, growing-up and the all-important difference

between knowledge and wisdom. Are you up to the challenge of the funniest novel in years?

## The Understudy - David Nichols

*Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs*

*I read this book in the summer and would recommend it.*

### Synopsis



The unsuccessful actor provides such a wonderfully condensed metaphor for human disappointment and resentment that he's been used by dramatists from John Osborne to Ricky Gervais. David Nicholls was just such an actor before turning to writing and, in his second novel he conjures with painful authenticity the stale loneliness that pervades the understudy's tiny dressing room as the star's applause drifts in from the wings. Failure is underlined for his eponymous character by the fact that his parents named him Stephen McQueen.

Understudying the brilliant Josh Harper, a Jude Law-type, Stephen finds himself negotiating a series of misadventures, including falling in love with Josh's wife, while still forlornly hoping for the big break that will make his young daughter proud and his ex-wife remorseful.

Though the ending is worthy of the Richard Curtis films Stephen despises, this bitterly funny book is a delightful reminder of how much acting we all do in the name of love.

## The Bell Jar – Sylvia Plath

*Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe*

*She is famed for her poetry but I believe her prose is better! Check out her short stories too.*

### Synopsis



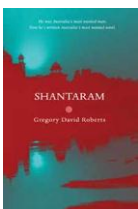
Plath was an excellent poet but is known to many for this largely autobiographical novel. *The Bell Jar* tells the story of a gifted young woman's mental breakdown beginning during a summer internship as a junior editor at a magazine in New York City in the early 1950s. The real Plath committed suicide 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.

## Shantaram - Gregory David Roberts

*Recommended by Rachel Bradley*

*'Shantaram' is an amazing story – based on the true life exploits of the author and set mainly in Bombay. It is a fascinating insight into India at its best and worst: well written, well paced, thought provoking and exciting. Although it is a long book, in the end, you will be wishing you could carry on reading!*

### Synopsis



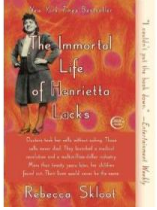
In 1978, gifted student and writer Greg Roberts turned to heroin when his marriage collapsed, feeding his addiction with a string of robberies. Caught and convicted, he was given a nineteen-year sentence. After two years, he escaped from a maximum-security prison, spending the next ten years on the run as Australia's most wanted man. Hiding in Bombay, he established a medical clinic for slum-dwellers, worked in the Bollywood film industry and served time in the notorious Arthur Road prison. He was recruited by one of the most charismatic branches of the Bombay mafia for whom he worked as a forger, counterfeiter, and smuggler, and fought alongside a unit of mujaheddin guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan. His debut novel, 'Shantaram', is based on this ten-year period of his life in Bombay. The result is an epic tale of slums and five-star hotels, romantic love and prison torture, mafia gang wars and Bollywood films. A gripping adventure story, 'Shantaram' is also a superbly written meditation on good and evil and an authentic evocation of Bombay life.

## The Immortal Life Of Henrietta Lacks – Rebecca Skloot

*Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs*

*I read this book in the summer and would recommend it.*

### Synopsis



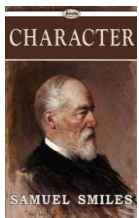
Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. Born a poor black tobacco farmer, her cancer cells -- taken without her knowledge -- became a multimillion-dollar industry and one of the most important tools in medicine. Yet Henrietta's family did not learn of her 'immortality' until more than twenty years after her death, with devastating consequences . . . Balancing the beauty and drama of scientific discovery with dark questions about who owns the stuff our bodies are made of, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is an extraordinary journey in search of the soul and story of a real woman, whose cells live on today in all four corners of the world.

### Character - Samuel Smiles

*Recommended by William Montgomery*

*I picked this up at a book shop in Hay-on-Wye during the literary festival held there. Printed in 1812 it was a fascinating read that focuses on the important character traits that we should all have and much of it still rings true today. It also provides an insight in to the times through its content and style; you rarely read of impressive women with outstanding virtues for instance and there is a strong military link to a large number of those who are considered to be outstanding pillars of society. Despite this drawback the character traits are ones that we can identify in those that we respect and I think it would be a particularly good read for those considering, or currently in, leadership posts here.*

### Synopsis



The classic work for those who want to improve their lives by improving themselves. Samuel Smiles discusses the underlying principles that can lead anyone to success, including work, courage, self-control, duty, and truthfulness--virtues that sound old-fashioned to many but are nevertheless the real keys to a happy life.

### I Capture The Castle – Dodi Smith

*Recommended by Laura Sutherland*

*An old friend of mine! This book is a love story set in the 1930s. The Mortmain family is poor but exotic and the story beautifully told.*

### Synopsis



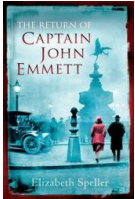
'I write this sitting in the kitchen sink' is the first line of this timeless, witty and enchanting novel about growing up. Cassandra Mortmain lives with her bohemian and impoverished family in a crumbling castle in the middle of nowhere. Her journal records her life with her beautiful, bored sister, Rose, her fadingly glamorous stepmother, Topaz, her little brother Thomas and her eccentric novelist father who suffers from a financially crippling writer's block. However, all their lives are turned upside down when the American heirs to the castle arrive and Cassandra finds herself falling in love for the first time.

## The Return Of Captain John Emmett – Elizabeth Speller

*Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs*

*I read this book in the summer and would recommend it.*

### Synopsis



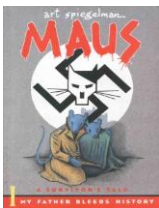
1920. The Great War has been over for two years, and it has left a very different world from the Edwardian certainties of 1914. Following the death of his wife and baby and his experiences on the Western Front, Laurence Bartram has become something of a recluse. Yet death and the aftermath of the conflict continue to cast a pall over peacetime England, and when a young woman he once knew persuades him to look into events that apparently led her brother, John Emmett, to kill himself, Laurence is forced to revisit the darkest parts of the war. As Laurence unravels the connections between Captain Emmett's suicide, a group of war poets, a bitter regimental feud and a hidden love affair, more disquieting deaths are exposed. Even at the moment Laurence begins to live again, it dawns on him that nothing is as it seems, and that even those closest to him have their secrets ...

## Maus: A Survivors Tale - Art Spiegelman

*Recommended by Adam Morton*

*The only comic book to ever be awarded a Pulitzer Prize, it sees the author narrate his father's story of life as a Polish Jew in World War Two. This incredibly powerful book is a harrowing read, but ultimately an uplifting one and it quite rightly deserves its place amongst the most revered works on the subject of the holocaust.*

### Synopsis



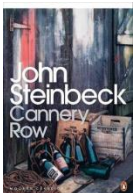
A story of a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe and his son, a cartoonist who tries to come to terms with his father's story and history itself.

## Cannery Row- John Steinbeck

*Recommended by Luke Stubbles*

*An interesting look at relationships and how trying to do what you feel is the right thing can often be the wrong thing to do.*

### Synopsis

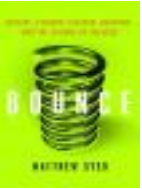


In the din and stink that is Cannery Row a colourful blend of misfits - gamblers, whores, drunks, bums and artists - survive side by side in a jumble of adventure and mischief. Lee Chong, the astute owner of the well-stocked grocery store, is also the proprietor of the Palace Flophouse that Mack and his troupe of good-natured 'boys' call home. Dora runs the brothel with clockwork efficiency and a generous heart, and Doc is the fount of all wisdom. Packed with invention and joie de vivre *Cannery Row* is Steinbeck's high-spirited tribute to his native California.

## Bounce – Matthew Syed

*Recommended by Graeme Turner*

### Synopsis



Can we really ALL be the best? Is the idea of innate ability holding us back? Could the ability to fail – and then get over it – be fundamental to success?

Matthew Syed, bestselling writer and international table-tennis champion (after many hours of practice) takes us on a revelatory exploration of being the best and the true nature of talent. In so doing he debunks many cherished myths – that we can be born brilliant (and that child prodigies prove it); that we are restricted by our genetic make-up; and that social background matters. He also makes some surprising discoveries, including the impact on performance of intense religious belief, why athletes and others ‘choke’ and how a Hungarian man turned his daughters into three of the best chess players in history.

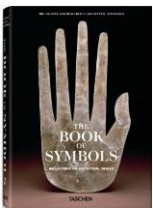
Entertaining, provoking and positive, ‘Bounce’ reveals how we can ALL be exceptional.

## Book Of Symbols –Taschen

**Recommended By Victoria Dempster**

*Quirky and interesting writing next to beautiful illustrations –perfect layout with finger hold indexes and ribbons for markers. A book that you can dip into to find treasures and anecdotes about the world.*

### Synopsis



*The Book of Symbols* combines original and incisive essays about particular symbols with representative images from all parts of the world and all eras of history. The highly readable texts and over 800 beautiful full-color images come together in a unique way to convey hidden dimensions of meaning. Each of the c. 350 essays examines a given symbol's psychic background, and how it evokes psychic processes and dynamics. Etymological roots, the play of opposites, paradox and shadow, the ways in which diverse cultures have engaged a symbolic image—all these factors are

taken into consideration.

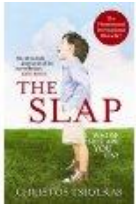
*The Book of Symbols* sets new standards for thoughtful exploration of symbols and their meanings, and will appeal to a wide range of readers: artists, designers, dreamers and dream interpreters, psychotherapists, self-helpers, gamers, comic book readers, religious and spiritual searchers, writers, students, and anyone curious about the power of archetypal images.

## The Slap – Christos Tsiolkas

*Recommended by Sarah Sofroniou*

*Highly entertaining, sometimes shocking account of the repercussions felt by a whole network of friends and family after an incident at an Australian/Greek family BBQ. Opinions were very divided in our household about each character in this book.*

### Synopsis



At a suburban barbecue one afternoon, a man slaps an unruly boy. The boy is not his son. It is a single act of violence, but this one slap reverberates through the lives of everyone who witnesses it happen.

## Breakfast Of Champions - Kurt Vonnegut

*Recommended By Philip Thonemann*

*It is hugely eccentric, and silly (with lots of little cartoon sketches), yet also deeply serious. The narrator takes a view of humanity which is strangely, refreshingly, detached, as if he is a visitor from another galaxy. This is the typical view taken by a philosopher, which presumably is partly why I liked it.*

### Synopsis

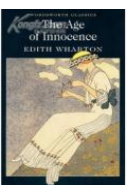


*Breakfast of Champions*, or *Goodbye Blue Monday* is a 1973 novel by the American author Kurt Vonnegut. Set in the fictional town of Midland City, it is the story of "two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast." One of these men, Dwayne Hoover, is a normal-looking but deeply deranged Pontiac dealer and Burger Chef franchise owner who becomes obsessed with the writings of the other man, Kilgore Trout, taking them for literal truth. Trout, a largely unknown pulp science fiction writer who has appeared in several other Vonnegut novels, looks like a crazy old man but is in fact relatively sane. As the novel opens, Trout journeys toward Midland City to appear at a convention where he is destined to meet Dwayne Hoover and unwittingly inspire him to run amok.

## The Age Of Innocence Ewan Frone- Edith Wharton

*Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe*

### Synopsis



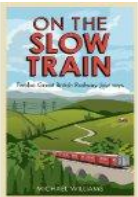
Widely regarded as one of Edith Wharton's greatest achievements, *The Age of Innocence* is not only subtly satirical, but also a sometimes dark and disturbing comedy of manners in its exploration of the 'eternal triangle' of love. Set against the backdrop of upper-class New York society during the 1870s, the author's combination of powerful prose combined with a thoroughly researched and meticulous evocation of the manners and style of the period, has delighted readers since the novel's first publication in 1920. In 1921 *The Age of Innocence* achieved a double distinction - it won the Pulitzer Prize and it was the first time this prestigious award had been won by a woman author.

## On The Slow Train – Michael Williams

**Recommended by Steve Plummer**

*These enchanting books give descriptions of various railway journeys in Britain which are still able to be enjoyed, whether on the romantic night sleeper from Euston to the Scottish Highlands or meandering routes through central Wales and along the Cambrian coast. Both books are a treat for non railway buffs and 'bashers' alike, opening windows to parts of Britain that we thought had long disappeared.*

### Synopsis

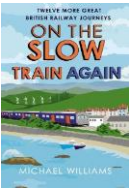


An unashamed tug at the heartstrings for a lost era, a time before Dr Beeching chopped the heart out of the British countryside. Renowned railway writer Michael Williams takes us on 12 of the most beautiful and historic railway journeys in Britain.

## On The Slow Train Again – Michael Williams

**Recommended by Steve Plummer**

### Synopsis



In a follow-up to the hugely successful *On The Slow Train*, here are twelve more of the most beautiful and historic railway journeys in Britain. Extravagantly well-reviewed, the *Daily Mail* eulogised author Michael Williams' ability to recreate 'a magical world barely changed since the golden age of rail'.

## When God Was A Rabbit – Sarah Winman

**Recommended by Louise Arnold**

*This covers everything – humour, sadness, murder, suicide, love, loss, kid-napping, and terrorists. The book begins in Essex in the 1970s and follows a young girl and her older brother growing up over 40 years. Along with exciting and interesting family and friends and a move to Devon. A very different style of book.*

**Recommended by Berinda Banks**

*When you think you have lost someone you have loved all your life, what happens? This book made me laugh out loud while I thought about what makes a good relationship- is it for how we see ourselves reflected by another, through the comfort of familiarity and shared experience, or is it about really seeing and loving someone you grew up with, however much they change? What happens if that reflection of yourself, built up over many years, distorts or disappears- what does this do to your self-image? Strip away the intimacy of memory and would you even like someone who had no recollection of you?*

*I loved reading this book- I read it by a pool in the south of France and picking it up now it still smells of summer, sunshine and the laughter generated by a little girl who decided to call her rabbit, 'God'.*

**Recommended by Stephanie Isaacs**

*I read this book in the summer and would recommend it.*

## Synopsis



1968. The year Paris takes to the streets. The year Martin Luther King loses his life for a dream. The year Eleanor Maud Portman is born.

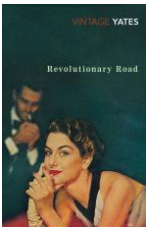
Young Elly's world is shaped by those who inhabit it: her loving but maddeningly distractible parents; a best friend who smells of chips and knows exotic words like 'slag'; an ageing fop who tapdances his way into her home, a Shirley Bassey impersonator who trails close behind; lastly, of course, a rabbit called God. In a childhood peppered with moments both ordinary and extraordinary, Elly's one constant is her brother Joe. Twenty years on, Elly and Joe are fully grown and as close as they ever were. Until, that is, one bright morning when a single, earth-shattering event threatens to destroy their bond forever. Spanning four decades and moving between suburban Essex, the wild coast of Cornwall and the streets of New York, this is a story about childhood, eccentricity, the darker side of love and sex, the pull and power of family ties, loss and life. More than anything, it's a story about love in all its forms.

## Revolutionary Road – Richard Yates

**Recommended By Thishani Wijesinghe**

*The recent film adaptation starring DiCaprio and Winslet did not do this justice!*

## Synopsis



Originally published in 1961 to great critical acclaim, Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* subsequently fell into obscurity in the UK, only to be rediscovered in a new edition published in 2001. Its rejuvenation is due in large part to its continuing emotional and moral resonance for an early 21st-century readership. April and Frank Wheeler are a young, ostensibly thriving couple living with their two children in a prosperous Connecticut suburb in the mid-1950s. However, like the characters in John Updike's similarly themed *Couples*, the self-assured exterior masks a creeping frustration at their inability to feel fulfilled or happy in their relationships or careers. Frank is mired in a well-paid but boring office job and April is a housewife still mourning the demise of her hoped-for acting career. Determined to identify themselves as superior to the mediocre sprawl of suburbanites who surround them, they decide to move to France where they will be better able to develop their true artistic sensibilities, free of the consumerist demands of capitalist America. However, as their relationship deteriorates into an endless cycle of squabbling, jealousy and recriminations, their trip and their dreams of self-fulfillment are thrown into jeopardy. Yates's incisive, moving and often very funny prose weaves a tale that is at once a fascinating period piece and a prescient anticipation of the way we live now. Many of the cultural motifs now seem quaintly dated--the early evening cocktails, Frank's illicit lunch breaks with his secretary, the way Frank isn't averse to knocking April around when she speaks out of turn all seem to belong to a different world--and yet the quiet desperation at thwarted dreams reverberates as much now as it did 40 years ago.

## Note from the Librarian

I would like to thank Jonathan Edwards for taking the photograph on the front cover and to everyone else who has recommended a book and hope that the titles inspire you to read them.

In last years' reading list I recommended the book by Tony Fitzjohn called *Born Wild*, we now have the DVD called *Walking With Lions* which I would like to recommend. Tony Fitzjohn is giving a lecture at the school in March and I will be selling copies of his book which Tony will be signing on the night.

*Wishing You All A Very Merry Christmas And A  
Happy New Year*



*Elizabeth Grainger  
Piper Library*

