

THE SPIRES

— COLLEGE —

Canon and Catalogue

The Spires College - Canon and Catalogue

“Words, especially the written variety, remain the primary currency of ideas, and the diligent study of reading is the diligent study of idea creation and development... and every teacher stупlays a role. Every student must glimpse, as much as possible, the power that comes from the world that reading can bring to light.”

(Lemov et al, *A Practical Guide to Literacy Instruction*, 2016)

Rationale

Research is clear that a young person's ability to read, and enthusiasm for reading, are inextricably linked with their academic and wider success. Whilst many students begin their secondary education with the knowledge and skills required to read with accuracy, fluency and comprehension, some do not. Therefore, it is our aim that The Spires College becomes a 'reading college' where students and staff are proud to think of themselves as readers.

Unlocking our students' potential through reading is a complex task. It involves:

- identifying and intervening with students whose reading knowledge and skills fall below that of their peers;
- promoting the benefits of academic reading and;
- encouraging our students to read for pleasure.

Perhaps the most challenging of the three strands is the latter; we want our students to *enjoy* reading. Research suggests that reading for pleasure can promote better health and wellbeing, support young people to build social connections and relationships with others, and is associated with a range of factors that help increase the chances of social mobility.

To encourage our students to read for pleasure, we have designed The Spires College Canon and a tutor reading programme.

The Spires College Canon

A literary canon is a collection of texts which hold significant value, both in the style of writing and the messages they communicate.

The Spires College canon is a collection of texts that will inform a guided reading programme delivered by tutors with the aim of ensuring our students engage with a rich, varied, diverse and high-quality collection of literature. These challenging, interesting texts have been selected to inspire and engage our students, compelling them to consider the world from different perspectives and through diverse voices.

Each year group has their own suite of texts, respectively providing a plethora of discussion points and opportunities to ignite our students' curiosity about the world around them. Every tutor group within each year team will read the same book simultaneously, meaning students collaboratively develop their cultural capital through shared reading experiences.

The texts children read as they move through their education form the foundation of their knowledge about how literature and society works, so we must select them like the precious resource they are. The Spires College canon is designed to challenge our students, both in

terms of the rigour of the texts, but also in their outlook and messages. The aspirational effects of reading texts considered to be 'great' are clear; if students enjoy them, the fact that they are also *challenging* reads becomes a hurdle to overcome rather than a reason *not* to read them. Our canon will encourage students to reflect on pivotal moments in history, empathise with characters of different ages and ethnicities, experience a range of genres and indulge in an array of writing styles.

The ultimate aim is for our canon to ignite a lifelong passion for reading in every member of our college community.

The Spires College Canon

| Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 |
|--|--|------------------------------------|---|---|
| The House with Chicken Legs by Sophie Anderson | Martyn Pig by Kevin Brooks | More Than This by Patrick Ness | The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas | The Kite Runner by Kahlid Hosseini |
| Martyn Pig by Kevin Brooks | Coram Boy by Jamila Gavin | Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck | The Book of Dust by Philip Pullman | |
| Wolf Hollow by Lauren Wolk | The Bonesparrow by Zana Fraillon | Animal Farm by George Orwell | The House in the Cerulean Sea by Travis Klune | |
| Boy 87 by David Almond | My Swordhand is Singing by Marcus Sedgwick | The Book of Dust by Philip Pullman | | |
| Salt to the Sea by Ruta Sepetys | Deception by Roald Dahl | | | The House in the Cerulean Sea by Travis Klune |

“ One of the greatest gifts a teacher can give students is a book they might never have considered or known, brought to life through great teaching.”

(Lemov et al, A Practical Guide to Literacy Instruction, 2016)

The Spires College Tutor Reading Programme

The tutor reading programme is the model by which the canon will be delivered. Beginning each day with an opportunity to hear great works of fiction being brought to life by enthusiastic and proficient readers is both a privilege and a joy; we hope that our students will be inspired to read widely, broadly and with curiosity and fervour.

The Role of the Tutor

The school day has been designed to accommodate regular, timetabled spaces for reading each day. Following registration, each morning (aside from the day set aside for a year group assembly) will begin with tutors reading aloud to students for fifteen minutes during Period 0.

In order for the reading programme to have a direct impact on our students' ability to read, it is imperative that they are engaged for regular, sustained periods of time. Therefore, it is our expectation that students are registered and settled, ready to read by 8:35. Books will be handed out during registration to ensure the reading can commence punctually.

Tutors will read aloud from their assigned canon text for 15 minutes. Whilst some of our students have the ability to read with intonation and fluency, tackling challenging vocabulary with relative ease, this is not the case for all so it is crucial that the adults in the room read aloud, not the students. A clear benefit is that, when teachers read aloud to their classes, the best reader in the room breathes life into the text by modelling fluency, creating meaning and adding drama. However, whilst they are being read to, it is vital that students track the reading using The Spires College bookmarks provided. Research suggests that for many students it is this tracking process that, over time, improves students' accuracy, vocabulary, pace and expression. Therefore, this is a fundamental expectation of students, and those not engaging in this process should be reminded and compelled to do so.

PowerPoint slides will be provided to all tutors, presenting a synopsis of the text they are reading as well as a sentence identifying the page and line they are reading from each day. These slides can be amended by tutors according to their place in the text. The slides allow students who have experienced periods of absence to pick up the thread of the narrative, and tutees to find their place in the text quickly and easily each day.

When visitors, including Heads of Year and SLT enter the room, tutors are welcome to pass the book to them to pick up the reading, providing an opportunity for tutors to move around the room, supporting students or modelling engagement.

At the end of Period 0, the students should tuck the bookmark back inside their books and carefully store them in the classroom; these books should not be taken home by students.

In order to read aloud with confidence and clarity, tutors should read ahead, checking the meaning and pronunciation of challenging vocabulary. To facilitate this, annotated copies of texts will be provided to support tutors and our Drop and Read provision will continue for years 7 and 8. This time is provided to encourage students to read books of their own choosing in addition to the canon; the idea is that the canon texts supplement and enhance our students' independent reading, not replace it. 'Suggested Reading' lists have been

compiled for KS3 and KS4 students to extend the impact of the canon, and students will be encouraged to read as many of these as possible, earning prizes as they go. Whilst our students read in silence for fifteen minutes each day, tutors may choose to use this opportunity to read ahead in their canon text, thus modelling excellent reading behaviours.

To further support tutors in their delivery of the reading programme, the catalogue within this document contains a synopsis of the narrative in each of the canon's texts, explanations of key areas of context and specific issues tutors should be aware of when tackling each book.

As you reach the end of a chapter or following extended breaks (such as school holidays), tutors may wish to pause in their reading to ask students questions about what they have read. A bank of suggested discussion topics for each text has also been provided within the catalogue. However, these conversations should only be used to gauge students' comprehension and spark curiosity or discussion, not analyse the text; the focus should remain on reading for pleasure, not academic study.

Approximate Timings

We appreciate that tutors will read at slightly different paces. However, to ensure that students within the same year group experience and enjoy the texts together, tutors will need to communicate with each other about their pace through each text. Approximate timings have been provided below to guide you when pacing yourselves. This will be managed by Heads of Year. Reading the texts in advance and taking note of how long this takes will also help inform your pace.

| | Year 7 | Year 8 | | Year 9 | | Year 10 | Year 11 |
|-------------|---|---|-------------|---|-------------|--|--|
| Autumn Term | <i>The House with Chicken Legs</i> by Sophie Anderson | <i>Martyn Pig</i> by Kevin Brooks | Autumn Term | <i>More Than This</i> by Patrick Ness | Autumn Term | <i>The Hate U Give</i> by Angie Thomas | <i>The Kite Runner</i> by Kahlid Hosseini |
| | <i>Martyn Pig</i> by Kevin Brooks | <i>Coram Boy</i> by Jamila Gavin | | | | Spring Term | <i>The Book of Dust</i> by Philip Pullman |
| Spring Term | <i>Wolf Hollow</i> by Lauren Wolk | <i>The Bonesparrow</i> by Zana Fraillon | Spring Term | <i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck | Summer Term | | <i>The House in the Cerulean Sea</i> by Travis Klune |
| | <i>Boy 87</i> by Ele Fountain | <i>My Swordhand is Singing</i> by Marcus Sedgwick | | <i>Animal Farm</i> by George Orwell | | | |
| Summer Term | <i>Salt to the Sea</i> by Ruta Sepetys | <i>Deception</i> by Roald Dahl | Summer Term | <i>The Book of Dust</i> by Philip Pullman | | | |

The Role of the Head of Year

Heads of Year will play a pivotal role in facilitating the effective delivery of the programme and supporting tutors. Maintaining the high standards in the implementation of the reading programme requires diligence, routines and shared high expectations. Therefore, it is

important that Heads of Year are a visible presence in tutor rooms, evaluating engagement and modelling reading behaviours.

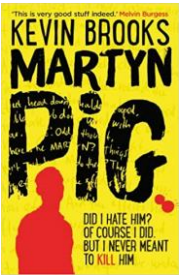
Heads of Year will also be able to use the themes of the texts to inform assemblies and rewards where appropriate.

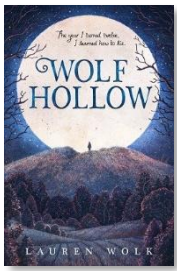
The Canon Catalogue

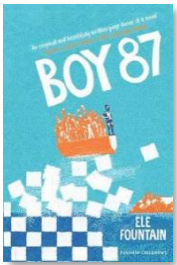
Year 7

| | |
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| Title | <i>The House with Chicken Legs</i> |
| Genre | Fantasy |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The novel contains themes of death and loss. |
| Synopsis | <p>This sparkling debut weaves the captivating folklore of Baba Yaga with the thrills of a classic venturing-out-into-the-world quest, replete with primal conflicts, tantalising twists and an unforgettable protagonist that readers will truly root for.</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Marinka yearns to live in a "normal house" and to have a "normal family", but instead her house has chicken legs, and her grandmother is a Yaga, a Guardian of The Gate between this world and the next. Worse still, in Marinka's eyes, is that it's her destiny to become a Yaga herself, to take on the duty of giving the dead "one last wonderful evening" before they "return to the stars". Baba Yaga has long warned Marinka of the dangers of venturing too far in the world of the living, but her desire "to have friendships that last more than one night" is so strong that she's prepared to risk everything.</p> <p>Teetering on the cusp of childhood and adulthood, Marinka's frustrations and determination to find her own way in the world will strike a chord with young readers. This age-old conflict is delivered with heart and skilfully interwoven with the glorious trimmings of original folklore. Add to this the twists, the unveiling of truths and the critical choices Marinka must make and you have a satisfying novel that's ideal for fans of fantasy and gothic literature. Radiant with wonder and wisdom, this is an exceptional debut.</p> |
| Context | <p>In Slavic folklore, Baba Yaga is a supernatural being who appears as a deformed or ferocious-looking old woman. In Russian folklore, Baba Yaga flies around in a mortar, wields a pestle, and dwells deep in the forest in a hut usually described as standing on chicken legs.</p> <p>Baba Yaga may help or hinder those that encounter her or seek her out. She may play a maternal role and has associations with forest wildlife. According to Vladimir Propp's folktale morphology, Baba Yaga commonly appears as either a donor, villain, or may be altogether ambiguous. Her depictions vary greatly across tales, ranging from a child-eating monster, to helping a protagonist find his missing bride.</p> <p>Andreas Johns identifies Baba Yaga as "one of the most memorable and distinctive figures in eastern European folklore", and observes that she is "enigmatic" and often exhibits "striking ambiguity".</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sophie Anderson uses the device of an epilogue set some months after the main events in the story to reveal the fates of the characters. What is the effect of this device? Does it tie up loose ends for you, or do you prefer to draw your own conclusions about how the protagonists may go on to develop? What other stories with epilogues do you know? Discuss how the students felt about the book compared to their original expectations: When you first saw this book, even before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was going to be? What made you think this? Now you've read it, is it as you expected? Have you read other books like it? How is this one the same? How is it different? Sophie Anderson has said that one minor character from <i>The House with Chicken Legs</i> will be featured in her new novel. Who do the students think it could be? Did any of the characters remind students of people they know or remind them of characters in other books? While you were reading the story, did students feel it was happening now or in the past, being remembered? Can you tell me anything in the writing that made you feel like that? |

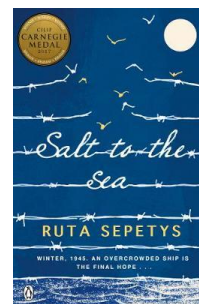


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| Title | <i>Martyn Pig</i> |
| Genre | Thriller |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protagonist's father is verbally abusive and an alcoholic. • The novel discusses themes of bereavement. |
| Synopsis | <p>Darkly funny, strangely moving, and completely riveting, <i>Martyn Pig</i> is a powerful debut novel from a talented British author.</p> <p>Martyn Pig is a boy trapped in a miserable world with a terrible name. His mother has left home and his father is a pathetic, bullying, self-pitying drunk. "Did I hate him? He was a drunken slob and he treated me like dirt. What do you think? Of course I hated him. You would have hated him, too, if you'd ever met him...I hated every inch of him. From his broken-veined, red-nosed face to his dirty, stinking feet. I hated his beery guts. But I never meant to kill him."</p> <p>With his father lying dead at his feet, Martyn Pig has two choices - he can either tell the police what happened, that it was an accident, or he can get rid of the body and pretend to get on with the rest of his life. He decides on the latter and with the help of Alex, the girl next door who has become more to him than just-a-friend, he travels down a frightening road where the escalating lunacy of events is quite breathtaking.</p> <p>Brilliantly paced and plotted, this is an accidental, back to front, murder mystery. The characters and environment are powerfully realised and Martyn's internal dialogue is both authentic and thought-provoking. This compelling book will make you laugh out loud from sheer nervousness at the madness of it all.</p>  |
| Context | <p><i>Martyn Pig</i> is a bildungsroman, or a coming-of-age novel.</p> <p>A bildungsroman relates the growing up or 'coming of age' of a sensitive person who goes in search of answers to life's questions with the expectation that these will result in gaining experience of the world. The genre evolved from folklore tales of a dunce or youngest child going out in the world to seek his fortune. Usually in the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave on his or her journey. In a bildungsroman, the goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty. The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. Typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he or she is ultimately accepted into society—the protagonist's mistakes and disappointments are over. In some works, the protagonist is able to reach out and help others after having achieved maturity.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several times throughout the narrative, as Martyn and Alex work out both the generals and the specifics of how they're going to deal with the situation in which they find themselves, they discuss questions of whether what they're doing is right or wrong, good or evil, moral or immoral. Do the students think Martyn and Alex make the 'right' decisions? Why/why not? • Several times throughout the narrative, Martyn refers to his experience as a kind of waking up or a realisation that 'reality' is different from life as portrayed in books or on television. In particular, he contemplates the differences between childhood fantasy and adult experience, and of being caught up in a murder investigation. What might Kevin Brooks be saying about children's expectations of adult life? • Some people have argued that the book's central theme is freedom. What do the students think Martyn wanted to be free from? Does Martyn achieve his goal? • Brooks chooses to write this story in the first person from Martyn's perspective. Discuss with the students why he might have chosen to do this. Consider how this would engage the likely readers and how this affects what we experience about Martyn's story. • The novel is apparently set during the period in which it was written, around the early part of the 2000's. There is little or no sense that it's much later. Martyn and Alex, for example, don't use mobile phones to communicate and neither appears to have access to a computer. How might more modern children react if the events of <i>Martyn Pig</i> happened to them? Would their access to the internet and modern technologies have changed things? Would it have made things easier or more difficult? |

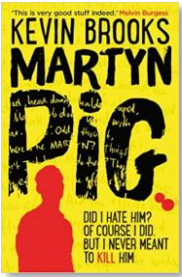
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| Title | <i>Wolf Hollow</i> |
| Genre | Historical Fiction |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The novel contains themes of death and loss. • There are also themes of bullying, aggression and social isolation. |
| Synopsis | <p>It's 1943 and the world is in the throes of WWII. Despite growing up in the shadows cast by two world wars, Annabelle has lived a mostly quiet, steady life in her small Pennsylvania town. Until the day new student Betty Glengarry walks into her class. Betty quickly reveals herself to be cruel and manipulative, and though her bullying seems isolated at first, it quickly escalates. Toby, a reclusive World War I veteran, soon becomes the target of Betty's attacks. While others see Toby's strangeness, Annabelle knows only kindness. And as tensions mount in their small community, Annabelle must find the courage to stand as a lone voice for justice.</p>  <p>The brilliantly crafted debut of Newbery Honor- and Scott O'Dell Award-winning author Lauren Wolk, <i>Wolf Hollow</i> is a haunting tale of America at a crossroads and a time when one girl's resilience, strength, and compassion help to illuminate the darkest corners of history.</p> |
| Context | <p>Echoing the tone and themes found in <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> and <i>Summer of My German Soldier</i>, this WWII story traces the unlikely friendship between a country girl and a shell-shocked veteran. Prejudice is not sugar-coated; Wolk displays deep respect for readers and trusts them to grapple with complex moral themes relating to the social isolation, suspicion and even shame experienced by soldiers returning from WWI with post-traumatic-stress-disorder. The community's treatment of Toby, and Toby's own reclusive tendencies, provide rich opportunities for discussion about our perception of those with mental health illnesses.</p> <p>The wartime agrarian society of Wolk's novel is a patriarchal one where men work the land and go to war while women tend to be homemakers who marry young and look after multiple generations. Still, the novel contains vibrant, headstrong female characters who emerge from their limited roles as self-defined individuals.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some thoughts and actions that cause Annabelle to feel guilty throughout the novel? Do you feel she holds any responsibility for what happened to Betty or Toby? Explain why or why not. • Describe Betty and her behaviour. What reasons would she have to kill the quail? Why do you think Betty acts like such a bully? Is Betty entirely to blame or entirely responsible for her actions towards the quail and the other children? How might you have responded to Betty? Could Annabelle have done anything differently in these circumstances? • When Ruth gets hurt, Annabelle's mother says, "<i>What happened to her was just bad luck.</i>" Annabelle thinks this explanation "<i>only made things worse. How was anyone supposed to stand up straight and open-eyed when luck could decide everything?</i>" Do you believe in luck, good or bad? Explain why or why not. • How and why does Annabelle's relationship with her brother Henry change throughout the book? Does their relationship resemble your own relationship with your siblings? • What surprised you about the ending? Why do you think the author chose this final outcome for her characters? How else could this story have ended? Would any alternative ending feel as truthful? |

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| Title | <i>Boy 87</i> |
| Genre | Bildungsroman |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The novel contains themes of death and loss. • Students may have established views about asylum seekers or immigrants and this may lead to lively debate. |
| Synopsis | <p>Fourteen-year-old Shif and his best friend Bini are ordinary boys with big ambitions, but their world implodes when they attract the attention of the military 'giffa'. Wrenched from their families, they're sent to a remote desert prison, where their cellmates are barely clinging on to life.</p> <p>However, the boys' arrival sparks hope in the imprisoned men, and they give everything to ensure their escape. Reaching the nearest town, Shif has only just begun the perilous journey which he hopes will end in safety and freedom.</p> <p>Set in an unnamed country, this is a timely and important book which illuminates the realities of life as a refugee. The first-person narration simply but powerfully conveys Shif's terror at the violence and cruelty he encounters, as well as his sense of loss. The horrors he is escaping are all too real, but this is ultimately a story about the power of kindness and the strength of the human spirit.</p>  |
| Context | <p><i>Boy 87</i> is the story of one child, who could be one of many many children making that perilous journey to the Mediterranean. Opening and concluding with the same harrowing description of a storm at sea this assured debut novel humanises the headlines we see in news reports every day and reminds us of the tough and terrible choices people have to make.</p> <p>Ele Fountain has not named the country Shif is from, nor the places that he walked through and where he went to get the boat across to Europe. But she has said that every place in the book is based on a real place and the route that Shif and the other people in the book take across the desert to the Mediterranean coast of North Africa is a route that is used by real people.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ele Fountain has said that while she is telling the story of one particular boy, this story also represents the many thousands of young people who are forced into exile because of insecure political situations in their home countries. Do you think that the title <i>Boy 87</i> works well in making the reader realise that the story is both about one person as well as representing many people? Do you think that the title of a book is always significant? Would it feel different if the book was called <i>Shif's Journey</i>? • Throughout the story Shif shows great loyalty and love for his friends and he meets many people who support and help him. In <i>Boy 87</i> we see how important the kindness of other people is in life. Sometimes kindness is shown in small ways and other times in very big and important ways. Is kindness the most important quality in a person? Why/why not? • Even in very difficult situations people show great courage. Think about the ways in which the characters in <i>Boy 87</i> show courage. Are Bini and Shif's mothers brave in the choices they make to send their sons away on their own? Are the men in the prison who help Shif and Bini brave in offering them the opportunity to escape? Is Shif brave when he leaves Bini behind in the desert? • One of the important themes of <i>Boy 87</i> is hope. When Shif and Bini are in the prison, why do the men look at Bini and Shif with hope? Why would it be important to the men to share the stories of their lives with the boys? • Has the novel changed your views on immigration, refugees or asylum seekers? Why? Why not? How do you feel about them? NOTE: It would be worth defining the differences between the terms as context for this conversation. Looking at contrasting newspaper front pages on the topic is also an interesting angle. |

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| Title | <i>Salt to the Sea</i> |
| Genre | Historical Fiction |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a fairly brutal portrayal of human cruelty and war. • Some characters die. • There are bleak descriptions of the harsh realities of war. |
| Synopsis | <p>In 1945, the Second World War is drawing to a bloody end. For the German people and their surrounding allies, it is a time to flee from the approaching Russian army, whose terrifying reputation for rape and slaughter precede them.</p> <p>Without food or possessions, a small group band together in an attempt to reach the boats taking civilians to safety. Among them are Joana, Florian and Emilia - a heavily pregnant 15-year-old Polish girl. Their cross-country trek is brutal and violent - but will the boat be any better?</p> <p>This heart-breaking historical fiction highlights the devastation wrought by war on the lives of innocent civilians. Despite the divide in the group, the protagonists see no differences between themselves. They are all just desperate refugees searching for safety. Each chapter is told from a different character's perspective, allowing insight into their backgrounds and war-torn lives.</p> |
| Context | <p>Ruta Sepetys has written a fictionalised account of the single deadliest maritime tragedy in history, and the least known: the sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff during the evacuation of Germany in 1945. Nine thousand people lost their lives when the ship was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine. The majority of the Gustloff's passengers were civilians, five thousand of which were children.</p> <p>To bring tragedy to the level of human understanding, Sepetys structures the book around four main characters: Joana, Emilia, Florian, and Alfred. Each short chapter is devoted to one character's point of view. Desperately hungry and cold, Joana, Emilia, and Florian trek through snowy forests toward a ship that promises salvation. Meanwhile, Alfred, a low-ranking German stationed aboard the Gustloff, hides in toilets and composes hateful doggerel about Jews and other people Hitler reviles.</p> <p>Despite the fact that the fate of the ship is known – or perhaps because of it – the characters attach themselves to the reader in poignant backstories skillfully woven through the chapters. While the characters become more compelling as the book moves to the inevitable sinking, some readers may be put off by the rapid shifting of perspectives, particularly at the beginning when determining one character from another is difficult. Readers are advised to keep at it until they can settle into the flow.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff invokes stark images of war affecting innocent women and children. Civilians are under attack. What are the lasting impacts of war on youth? Why is showing the civilian side just as important as the soldier/war-front perspective? What do we gain, and what do we lose? • Why do you think the Wilhelm Gustloff is lesser-known in comparison to the sinking of the Titanic? Why is there no major motion picture with Leonardo di Caprio as Florian? • Several of the characters work hard to conceal things about their experience during the war: Emilia hides her pregnancy, Florian hides his mission, Joana hides what happened to her family, Ingrid tries to hide her blindness, and so forth. How does hiding these things both help and hinder the characters as they proceed through the story? Do the extreme events of the evacuation affect the perception of trust for these characters? • Alfred is quite a vain and disillusioned character. What purpose does he serve in the novel? How do you feel about him? • Describe the "Alfred" in the imaginary letters written to Hannelore. How is he different than the "Frick" observed by those with whom he works and interacts on the Wilhelm Gustloff? What does this dual perspective allow readers to understand about his character? • Which character is the bravest and most courageous? Who is the most selfless? • Overall, is this story a tragedy or one of hope? Is <i>Salt to the Sea</i> a survival story? |

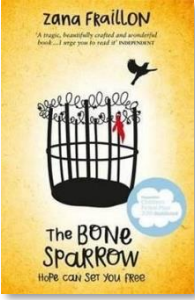


Year 8

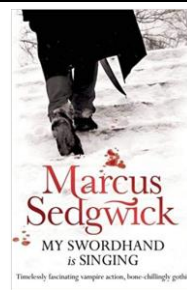
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| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The protagonist's father is verbally abusive and an alcoholic. The novel discusses themes of bereavement. |
| Synopsis | <p>Darkly funny, strangely moving, and completely riveting, <i>Martyn Pig</i> is a powerful debut novel from a talented British author.</p> <p>Martyn Pig is a boy trapped in a miserable world with a terrible name. His mother has left home and his father is a pathetic, bullying, self-pitying drunk. "Did I hate him? He was a drunken slob and he treated me like dirt. What do you think? Of course I hated him. You would have hated him, too, if you'd ever met him...I hated every inch of him. From his broken-veined, red-nosed face to his dirty, stinking feet. I hated his beery guts. But I never meant to kill him."</p> <p>With his father lying dead at his feet, Martyn Pig has two choices - he can either tell the police what happened, that it was an accident, or he can get rid of the body and pretend to get on with the rest of his life. He decides on the latter and with the help of Alex, the girl next door who has become more to him than just-a-friend, he travels down a frightening road where the escalating lunacy of events is quite breathtaking.</p> <p>Brilliantly paced and plotted, this is an accidental, back to front, murder mystery. The characters and environment are powerfully realised and Martyn's internal dialogue is both authentic and thought-provoking. This compelling book will make you laugh out loud from sheer nervousness at the madness of it all.</p>  |
| Context | <p><i>Martyn Pig</i> is a bildungsroman, or a coming-of-age novel.</p> <p>A bildungsroman relates the growing up or 'coming of age' of a sensitive person who goes in search of answers to life's questions with the expectation that these will result in gaining experience of the world. The genre evolved from folklore tales of a dunce or youngest child going out in the world to seek his fortune. Usually in the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave on his or her journey. In a bildungsroman, the goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty. The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. Typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he or she is ultimately accepted into society—the protagonist's mistakes and disappointments are over. In some works, the protagonist is able to reach out and help others after having achieved maturity.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several times throughout the narrative, as Martyn and Alex work out both the generals and the specifics of how they're going to deal with the situation in which they find themselves, they discuss questions of whether what they're doing is right or wrong, good or evil, moral or immoral. Do the students think Martyn and Alex make the 'right' decisions? Why/why not? Several times throughout the narrative, Martyn refers to his experience as a kind of waking up or a realisation that 'reality' is different from life as portrayed in books or on television. In particular, he contemplates the differences between childhood fantasy and adult experience, and of being caught up in a murder investigation. What might Kevin Brooks be saying about children's expectations of adult life? Some people have argued that the book's central theme is freedom. What do the students think Martyn wanted to be free from? Does Martyn achieve his goal? Brooks chooses to write this story in the first person from Martyn's perspective. Discuss with the students why he might have chosen to do this. Consider how this would engage the likely readers and how this affects what we experience about Martyn's story. The novel is apparently set during the period in which it was written, around the early part of the 2000's. There is little or no sense that it's much later. Martyn and Alex, for example, don't use mobile phones to communicate and neither appears to have access to a computer. How might more modern children react if the events of <i>Martyn Pig</i> happened to them? Would their access to the internet and modern technologies have changed things? Would it have made things easier or more difficult? |


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| Title | <i>Coram Boy</i> |
| Genre | Historical Fiction |
| Be aware... | • |
| Synopsis | <p>Three narratives are combined in a story of love, friendship and betrayal.</p> <p>One is the story of 'The Coram Man', Otis, and his simpleton son, Meshak, who is forced to travel across England, finding women in desperate need of their illegitimate babies being taken away to a good home, the Coram Hospital in London. Instead, Otis murders the babies and buries them by the roadside, to the helpless horror of his son.</p> <p>The second is the story of Alexander Ashbrook, the heir to the Ashbrook manor. While Alex's father, Sir William Ashbrook, wants his eldest son to learn the ropes of running the household and all that comes with it, Alexander wants to pursue his musical talents and work at Gloucester Cathedral as a composer and musician. This leads to family conflict.</p> <p>The final story is of Aaron, and his friend Toby. Aaron is the illegitimate son of Alexander Ashbrook, and the daughter of the Ashbrook's governess, Melissa. When Melissa becomes pregnant by Alexander, her mother arranges for Otis to take the child, telling Melissa it was stillborn. But Meshak manages to save Melissa's baby, Aaron, and he grows up with Toby, the son of an African slave, inseparable friends.</p> <p>The harsh realities of 18th century life, of slavery, prejudice, tragedy, corruption, and of the haves and the have-nots are woven together incredibly intricately and yet quite simply told.</p> |
| Context | <p>The Foundling Hospital in London, England, was founded in 1739 by the philanthropic sea captain Thomas Coram. It was a children's home established for the 'education and maintenance of exposed and deserted young children.' In the 18th century, illegitimacy carried deep stigma, especially for the mother but also for the child. All the children at the Foundling Hospital were those of unmarried women.</p> <p>The first children were admitted to the Foundling Hospital in 1741, into a temporary house located in Hatton Garden. At first, no questions were asked about child or parent, but a note was made of any 'particular writing, or other distinguishing mark or token' which might later be used to identify a child if reclaimed. These were often marked coins, trinkets, pieces of fabric or ribbon, playing cards, as well as verses and notes written on scraps of paper.</p> <p>On reception, children were sent to wet nurses in the countryside, where they stayed until they were about four or five years old. At sixteen, girls were generally apprenticed as servants for four years; at fourteen, boys were apprenticed into a variety of occupations, typically for seven years.</p> <p>In 1756, a basket was hung outside the Foundling hospital; the maximum age for admission was raised from two months to twelve, and a flood of children poured in from country workhouses. In less than four years 14,934 children were presented, and a vile trade grew up among vagrants, who sometimes became known as 'Coram Men', of promising to carry children from the country to the hospital, an undertaking which they often did not perform or performed with great cruelty. Of these 15,000, only 4,400 survived to be apprenticed out.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Foundling Hospital that the book is based upon was a real children's home in the 18th century and became one of the most 'fashionable' charities for the rich to be seen to support. Are children's charities such as Barnardo's held in the same regard today and are all charitable causes 'equal'? Why/why not? • Encourage the students to consider what they know or have learned about life in the 18th century and use this to explore why unmarried mothers might have chosen to surrender their children in the 1700s. Did these mothers make the 'right' choice for their children? • Alexander says he cannot live without music. Is his choice to leave his family to pursue his dream of a career in music a selfish one? Why/why not? • "How a society treats its poor and most vulnerable citizens, particularly children, is always the measure of its humanity." This statement was made by the UK Mission to the UN. To what extent do the students agree with this statement? How is this idea reflected in <i>Coram Boy</i> and have things changed today? |



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| Title | <i>The Bonesparrow</i> |
| Genre | Bildungsroman |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The novel contains descriptions of violence. It is set in a refugee camp so can be harrowing. |
| Synopsis | <p><i>The Bone Sparrow</i> has been described by readers as captivating, powerful, disturbing, necessary, enlightening and much more. It tells the story of Subhi, a refugee who was born in an Australian detention centre to a mother who had fled violence in her Burmese homeland.</p> <p>Born in a refugee camp, all Subhi knows of the world is that he's at least 19 fence diamonds high, the nice Jackets never stay long, and at night he dreams that the sea finds its way to his tent, bringing with it unusual treasures. And one day it brings him Jimmie: an illiterate young girl who lives near the refugee camp.</p> <p>Carrying a notebook that she's unable to read and wearing a sparrow made out of bone around her neck - both talismans of her family's past and the mother she's lost - Jimmie strikes up an unlikely friendship with Subhi beyond the fence.</p> <p>As he reads aloud the tale of how Jimmie's family came to be, both children discover the importance of their own stories in writing their futures.</p> <p><i>The Bone Sparrow</i> is a beautiful, heart-breaking, hopeful and deeply moving novel that explores a tragic and relevant topic with incredibly skill. Fraillon doesn't shy away from showing the bleakness of the refugee camp, but the novel is anything but. Subhi's irrepressible spirit brightens the camp, and the novel itself.</p>  |
| Context | <p>Refugees and migration are potentially controversial issues dealt with in <i>The Bone Sparrow</i>.</p> <p>Burma (also known as Myanmar) is a large country in South East Asia, with a population of around 58 million. Around two thirds of the population are ethnically Bamar (Burman) with the remainder being made up of over 100 different ethnic groups.</p> <p>Of the various ethnic groups that make up Burma's population, the Rohingya have perhaps endured the most. A Muslim minority in a predominantly Buddhist country, they reside in Rakhine (Arakan) state in western Burma, bordering Bangladesh. Burma's government have consistently refused to acknowledge the Rohingya as citizens of Burma, instead claiming they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.</p> <p>The situation further deteriorated in 2012 when communal violence between the Buddhist Rakhine community and the Muslim Rohingya erupted in Rakhine state. Over 130,000 Rohingya currently live in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in appalling conditions.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Bone Sparrow</i> deals with some harrowing situations and circumstances that many people would find very challenging. The book deals with a number of different coping mechanisms that people might use to stay strong (resilient) in times of hardship or trauma. What coping strategies do the characters use and which do you think is the most effective? Why? Subhi also focuses on his 'Someday' as a method of staying strong. Instead of thinking about his current circumstances, he imagines what his life will be like in the future. Discuss how imagining a 'Someday' could help you deal with a difficult situation. Are there dangers in doing this? <i>The Bone Sparrow</i> is, in many ways, several stories within a story. In particular the central relationship between Subhi and Jimmie is built around the stories laid down by Jimmie's mum and the time she spends with Subhi reading these. Why might we choose to deal with real-life issues through story? Is a story shared (read) more powerful than a story made (written)? The idea of people who have been forgotten by the outside world is a recurring theme in <i>The Bone Sparrow</i> and is dealt with from a number of different perspectives. How are the Rohingya presented as a forgotten, invisible or ignored people (in their own country of Burma and internationally)? Mental health and wellbeing is a recurring theme in the book and is explored in both the adult and child characters. Why does Subhi talk to the Shakespeare duck? |

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| Title | <i>My Swordhand is Singing</i> |
| Genre | Horror/Gothic Historical Fiction |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The novel is about vampires and vampire hunters which some students may be disinclined to engage with. |
| Synopsis | <p>In the bitter cold of an unrelenting winter, Tomas and his son, Peter, arrive in Chust. Despite the villagers' lack of hospitality, they settle there as woodcutters. But there are many things Peter does not understand. Why does Tomas dig a channel of fast-flowing waters around their hut so they live on an isolated island? Why does Tomas carry a long battered box everywhere they go - and refuse to tell Peter of its contents?</p> <p>When a band of gypsies comes to the village, Peter's drab existence is turned upside down. He is infatuated by the beautiful gypsy princess, Sofia, and intoxicated by her community's love of life. He even becomes drawn into their deadly quest - for these travellers are Vampire Slayers, and Chust is a community to which the dead return to wreak revenge on the living.</p> <p>Stylishly written and set in the forbidding and remote landscapes of the 17th century, this is a story of a father and his son, of loss, redemption and resolution.</p> <p>A sense of hardship, bitter cold and fear penetrates the text, resulting in a chilling page-turner.</p> |
| Context | <p>Based on original vampire lore, <i>My Swordhand Is Singing</i> reads less like a vampire book (the word "vampire" is never used) than an ancient tale from the Brothers Grimm. Whilst it references folklore associated with vampirism and the novel is driven by vampire hunters, the narrative focuses on the characters themselves and their relationships with each other.</p> <p>Set in a deep-forest in a 17th century Germanic world, the novel references the vampirism traditions of Eastern Europe. The book begins around St Andrew's Eve with villagers painting window frames in tar. Many consider 29th November to be the Slavic equivalent of the Halloween, as this is when spirits go out into the world. However, according to local superstitions, people can keep the evil spirits away by painting tar along window and door frames. St George's Eve (22nd April) was referred to in Stoker's <i>Dracula</i> as a night when evil spirits are particularly dangerous and determined; as Spring emerges and daylight hours extend, the opportunity for ghosts and monsters to do their evil bidding is reduced. Extra precautions must be taken to not fall victim to prowling creatures on this unholy night. Windows should be anointed with tar in the form of a cross. Indeed, every object in a home should have tar upon it. Special attention should be paid to doorways—especially their keyholes—and chimneys for both are favourite entryways for vampires. Some believe that you should put a knife or scythe under your head when you sleep, with the cutting edge outward, so the vampire will be cut when trying to waylay you.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each generation has its own incarnation of vampires that change over time. For example, Bram Stoker's monstrous, traditional depiction of a vampire is very different to the romantic version made popular in the <i>Twilight</i> series. How would you describe the representation of vampires in <i>My Swordhand is Singing</i> and how is it similar or different to other versions you have read or seen? The novel has a very distinctive cold and bleak atmosphere. Why is this so important in the story? How did the writer create this? Superstition, suspicion and traditions are important to the community in <i>My Swordhand is Singing</i>. What traditions or superstitions do our communities have? Why? Alongside the vampire hunting, <i>My Swordhand is Singing</i> tells the story of a young boy growing up in a poor community in the early 17th Century. What can we learn about life during this time period? Many people describe the ending as 'bittersweet'. Can you explain why? Do you agree? |



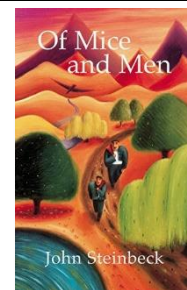
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| Title | <i>Deception</i> |
| Genre | Short Stories |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a collection of short stories, so the management of pace and time is important. If possible, avoid stopping in the middle of too many of the short stories as this will mean they are broken down into little chunks which affects the flow and, potentially, engagement. |
| Synopsis | <p>Why do we lie? Why do we deceive those we love most? What do we fear revealing? In these ten tales of deception, master storyteller Roald Dahl explores our tireless efforts to hide the truth about ourselves.</p> <p>Here, among many others, you'll read about how to get away with the perfect murder, the old man whose wagers end in a most disturbing payment, how revenge is sweeter when it is carried out by someone else and the card sharp so good at cheating he does something surprising with his life.</p>  |
| Context | <p>Stories included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Lady Love, My Dove The Mildenhall Treasure Parson's Pleasure The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar The Umbrella Man The Bookseller Vengeance is Mine Inc. Lamb to the Slaughter Mr Botibol Man from the South <p>Many of these stories were published during the 1950s and 60s so the representations of gender, race and society reflect the ideologies of this time period. This may need discussing as you read the stories with students.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which of Dahl's children stories do you remember? Did you have a favourite? Why? In which of the stories is the deception the greatest (largest or most impressive)? Why? Is lying ever the right thing to do? Reading a short story is quite different to reading a novel. Do you enjoy it more or less? Why? Dahl was sometimes described by his critics as the 'Master of Nastiness'. Why do you think this is? Can you remember any of his famous children stories that were 'nasty'? Does this short story collection seem 'nasty'? <p>Lamb to the Slaughter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How could we describe the crime as the 'perfect murder'? Why and how does Mrs Maloney get away with her crime? <p>The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you describe Henry at the start of the novel? How does he change by the end and why? Why is Henry's name interesting? How does it make him seem? |

Year 9

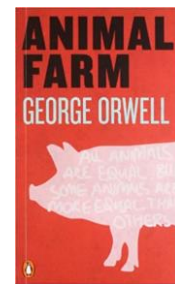
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| Title | <i>More Than This</i> |
| Genre | Dystopian |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is some mild bad language. • There is one brief reference to masturbation. |
| Synopsis | <p>From two-time Carnegie Medal winner Patrick Ness comes an enthralling and provocative new novel chronicling the life - or perhaps afterlife - of a teen trapped in a crumbling, abandoned world. A boy called Seth drowns, desperate and alone in his final moments, losing his life as the pounding sea claims him.</p> <p>But then he wakes. He is naked, thirsty, starving. But alive. How is that possible? He remembers dying, his bones breaking, his skull dashed upon the rocks.</p> <p>So how is he here? And where is this place? It looks like the suburban English town where he lived as a child, before an unthinkable tragedy happened and his family moved to America.</p> <p>But the neighbourhood around his old house is overgrown, covered in dust and completely abandoned.</p> <p>What's going on? And why is it that whenever he closes his eyes, he falls prey to vivid, agonizing memories that seem more real than the world around him?</p> <p>Seth begins a search for answers, hoping that he might not be alone, that this might not be the hell he fears it to be, that there might be more than just this...</p> |
| Context | <p><i>More Than This</i> is a young adult novel that is difficult to describe. On one hand, it is a philosophical exploration of narrative, the afterlife, the nature of storytelling, and reality. On the other hand, it is a young adult dystopian novel that explores topics such as death, sexuality, family, and friendship.</p> <p>What is fascinating about <i>More Than This</i> is its ambiguity. At first we are led to believe Seth's interpretation of his surroundings as a personal hell, but as the novel develops, we receive conflicting events and pieces of information that make it difficult to fully understand and know the setting of the novel. Various theories develop as the narrative progresses. Although Seth believes that he is in hell, paying consequences for actions he committed in life, the narrative takes a dystopic, post-apocalyptic turn. It is revealed that Seth is now living in the "real" world, and that the world that he used to live in was merely a virtual (online) space that society created to escape the pressures of living in a decaying and fractured world.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The line between life and death is usually very clear, but not in this novel. What do you think happens to Seth after he drowns? Does he actually return to England? Is it all in his mind? Does it matter? In what ways does death make Seth better at being alive? • When Seth finds himself back in his English hometown, he suspects that he is in hell. Why? What makes him think that he deserves to be in hell? Does he? • Regine tends to be pessimistic. Tomasz tends to be optimistic. How do they depend on each other? Why does Seth need both of them? • Why is the Driver pursuing Seth and his friends? What is its ultimate goal? Who (or what) do you think controls the Driver? What is the reason for the Driver's act of mercy at the end of the novel? • Seth's brother was abducted when their family lived in England. Why does Seth feel responsible? Should he? Who else bears responsibility? • "I can't be anyone's everything," Gudmund tells Seth. "Not even yours". What does Seth initially want from Gudmund? Why does he feel betrayed by Gudmund? What does Seth come to understand about Gudmund? |



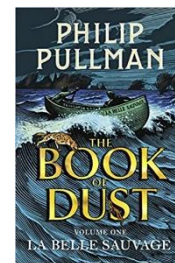
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| Title | <i>Of Mice and Men</i> |
| Genre | Tragedy |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The novella was written in 1937 so there is some archaic vocabulary. • The theme of violence steadily increases as the novel continues. • The dialogue is written in non-standard dialect to reflect the setting of the novel. • Children enjoy giving the ending away! |
| Synopsis | <p>Set during the Great Depression, two migrant workers - George, an intelligent and calm man, and Lennie, a large, incredibly strong man with learning difficulties - are in Soledad. Their dream is to settle down on their own piece of land one day. Lennie's part of the dream is merely to tend rabbits, as he loves touching soft things. It soon becomes clear that the two are close and George is Lennie's protector.</p> <p>After being hired at a farm, the pair are confronted by Curley—The Boss's small, aggressive son. He starts to target Lennie. Curley's flirtatious and provocative wife poses a problem as well. In contrast, the pair also meets Candy, an elderly ranch handyman with one hand, and Slim, an intelligent and gentle jerkline-skinner. They also meet Crooks, a black stable hand who lives segregated from the other men.</p> <p>In spite of problems, their dream leaps towards reality when Candy offers to pitch in \$350 with George and Lennie so that they can buy a farm at the end of the month, in return for permission to live with them. The trio are ecstatic, but their joy is overshadowed when Curley attacks Lennie, who defends himself by crushing Curley's fist.</p> <p>Later, Lennie accidentally kills a puppy while stroking it. Curley's wife enters the barn and tries to speak to Lennie, admitting that she is lonely. She offers to let Lennie stroke her hair, but panics and begins to scream when she feels his strength. Lennie becomes frightened, unintentionally breaking her neck. He then runs away. When the other ranch hands discover her corpse, George hurries to find Lennie.</p> <p>Finding him at the river, the two sit together whilst George retells the beloved story of the dream, knowing it is something they will never share. He then shoots Lennie to save him from enduring the punishment that the other ranch workers are likely to inflict upon him.</p> |
| Context | <p>Steinbeck sets <i>Of Mice and Men</i> in the Dust Bowl against the backdrop of Depression-era America. The economic conditions of the time victimised workers like George and Lennie, whose quest for land was thwarted by cruel and powerful forces beyond their control, but whose tragedy was marked, ultimately, by steadfast compassion and love.</p> <p>Racism increased during the Great Depression and racial violence, which had been decreasing, rose again during the economic downturn. Although Crooks has a stable job, his character reflects the discrimination that many black Americans had to endure during this period in the USA.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to think about the choice that George makes at the end of the novel. Do students feel he made the 'right' choice? Why/why not? • George and Lennie's dream represents the classic 'American dream'; they aspire to own a plot of land they can tend themselves and are prepared to work hard to achieve it. However, due to the poor economy of the 1930s, their dream seems somewhat unachievable. Do the students believe that any dream can be achieved through hard work, or are some people always more likely to achieve their dreams than others? Why? • To what extent do the characters sympathise with Curley's Wife? Although we learn a little about her dreams to become an actress and Curley's expectations of her as a wife, we never learn her name, and as the only female character, she is clearly isolated. Does this excuse her behaviour? How responsible is she for her own death and that of Lennie? • Crooks lives a segregated life away from the other ranch workers because he is black. What impact might this social isolation have had on him? Does this excuse or explain the way he speaks to Lennie? Discuss racism in the 1930s and consider unpicking Curley's Wife's reference to lynching. How important do the students think it is to read novels that expose the systematic racism of the black community? |



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| Title | <i>Animal Farm</i> |
| Genre | Allegory and Political Satire |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The novel acts as an allegory for the political landscape of the Russian Revolution. It would be advisable to identify the historical figure each character is meant to represent. |
| Synopsis | <p>The animals at the poorly-run Manor Farm suffer neglect at the hands of the irresponsible farmer Mr. Jones. One of the pigs, Old Major, proposes overthrowing the humans. When Old Major dies, two young pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, assume command and stage a revolt, driving Mr. Jones off the farm and renaming the property Animal Farm. They adopt the Seven Commandments of Animalism, the most important of which is, "All animals are equal". Food is plentiful, and the farm runs smoothly. The pigs elevate themselves to positions of leadership. Following an unsuccessful attempt by Mr. Jones and his associates to retake the farm, Snowball announces his plans to modernise it by building a windmill. When Napoleon argues against this idea, his dogs chase Snowball away and Napoleon declares himself supreme commander.</p> <p>Napoleon forms a committee of pigs to run the farm. The animals work harder with the promise of easier lives with the windmill. When the animals find the windmill collapsed after a violent storm, Napoleon and Squealer convince the animals that Snowball is trying to sabotage their project and begin to purge the farm of animals Napoleon accuses of consorting with his old rival. Despite their hardships, the animals are easily placated by Napoleon's retort that they are better off than they were under Mr. Jones.</p> <p>A neighbouring farmer attacks the farm, blowing up the restored windmill. Although the animals win the battle, they do so at great cost, as many, including Boxer the workhorse, are wounded. He is taken away in a knacker's van, and a donkey called Benjamin alerts the animals to this. We then learn that Napoleon had secretly engineered the sale of Boxer to the knacker, allowing him and his inner circle to acquire money to buy whisky.</p> <p>Years pass, the windmill is rebuilt, and another windmill is constructed, which makes the farm a good amount of income. However, the ideals that Snowball discussed, including stalls with electric lighting, heating, and running water, are forgotten, with Napoleon advocating that the happiest animals live simple lives. The pigs start to resemble humans, as they walk upright, carry whips, drink alcohol, and wear clothes. The Seven Commandments are abridged to just one phrase: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Napoleon holds a dinner party for the pigs and local farmers, with whom he celebrates a new alliance. The men and pigs start playing cards, praising each other while cheating at the game. Both Napoleon and one of the farmers play the Ace of Spades at the same time and begin fighting loudly over who cheated first. When the animals outside look at the pigs and men, they can no longer distinguish between the two.</p> |
| Context | <p>According to Orwell, the fable reflects events leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and then on into the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union. Orwell, a democratic socialist, was a critic of Stalin and hostile to Moscow-directed Stalinism. The Soviet Union, he believed, had become a brutal dictatorship built upon a cult of personality and enforced by a reign of terror. Orwell wrote the book between November 1943 and February 1944, when the UK was in its wartime alliance with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany, and the British people held Stalin in high esteem, a phenomenon Orwell hated.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throughout the novel, the natural characteristics of each animal features heavily in their motives and declarations. How do the actions of Napoleon (a pig), Boxer (a horse), Benjamin (a donkey) and the dogs and sheep reflect the traits normally associated with the animal? Do you feel that Orwell purposely chose certain types of animals to assume certain roles? The pigs rise to power quickly in the novel. How do they achieve this power and how do they maintain it? What lessons might Orwell want readers to learn from this? <i>Animal Farm</i> is replete with subtle and not so-subtle lessons on blind conformity and the misuse of power. What are some of the lessons the students have taken away from the novel regarding the dangers of 'following the herd' and submission? Among the various characters in the novel, whom do you feel is the noblest or most worthy? Which animal would be best suited to lead a group against Napoleon and the pigs? What qualities would this animal need to possess to do so? |

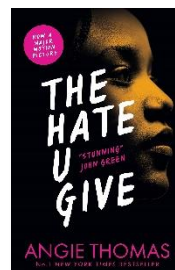


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| Title | <i>The Book of Dust Volume One: La Belle Sauvage</i> |
| Genre | Fantasy Bildungsroman |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some subtle references to sexual abuse. • There is some violence and themes of threat. • There is some mild bad language. |
| Synopsis | <p>Malcolm Polstead is the kind of boy who notices everything but is not much noticed himself. And so perhaps it was inevitable that he would become a spy...</p> <p>Malcolm's father runs an inn called the Trout, on the banks of the river Thames, and all of Oxford passes through its doors. Malcolm and his dæmon, Asta, routinely overhear news and gossip, and the occasional scandal, but during a winter of unceasing rain, Malcolm catches wind of something new: intrigue.</p> <p>He finds a secret message inquiring about a dangerous substance called Dust--and the spy it was intended for finds him.</p> <p>When she asks Malcolm to keep his eyes open, Malcolm sees suspicious characters everywhere; Lord Asriel, clearly on the run; enforcement agents from the Magisterium; an Egyptian named Coram with warnings just for Malcolm; and a beautiful woman with an evil monkey for a dæmon. All are asking about the same thing: a girl--just a baby--named Lyra.</p> <p>Lyra is the kind of person who draws people in like magnets. And Malcolm will brave any danger, and make shocking sacrifices, to bring her safely through the storm.</p> |
| Context | <p>Many describe this novel as a prequel to Pullman's famous trilogy. However, Philip Pullman calls it an "equel" that sits <i>alongside His Dark Materials</i>.</p> <p><i>The Book of Dust</i> is a work in three parts, like <i>His Dark Materials</i>. The work can be read on its own, without having to have read the original series. This volume and the second (<i>The Secret Commonwealth</i>) cover two parts of Lyra's life: starting at the beginning of her story, ten years before <i>Northern Lights</i>, and returning to her 20 years later in <i>The Secret Commonwealth</i>. The scope of the third volume is still under wraps.</p> <p>It's worth noting that <i>La Belle Sauvage</i> is darker in tone and content than the <i>His Dark Materials</i> trilogy.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some ways, Malcolm Polstead is an unlikely hero. However, he is undoubtedly heroic in this novel. In what ways does Malcolm challenge our expectations of a hero and why is this important in the novel? • Consider that <i>La Belle Sauvage</i> is a quest story in which, during a perilous journey, a young hero acquires both strength and wisdom. In what way is Malcolm transformed by the novel's end? • How do daemons function in Pullman's novels? What do they represent? If you were to have a daemon, what form would it take and why? Talk about how Bonneville abuses his own daemon. What does such an action say about him? • What is the Dust which infuses both <i>His Dark Materials</i> as well as this book? Characters discover it, study it, or attempt to destroy it. Some readers consider Dust the dark matter of the universe; some see it as representing the change during puberty when the daemons take their settled form; some think of it as "original sin." How do you see it? Any ideas? |

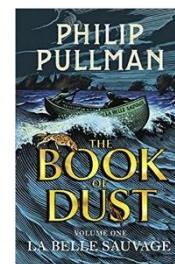


Year 10

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| Title | <i>The Hate U Give</i> |
| Genre | Teen drama |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The novel references themes of racism, including references to racist language, violence, police brutality and riots. The novel contains a broad range of expletives. Much of the dialogue is written using the sociolect of African American colloquialisms. |
| Synopsis | <p>16 year old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: Garden Heights, the poor neighbourhood where she lives, and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. The uneasy balance between these worlds is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend Khalil at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed.</p> <p>Soon afterward, his death is a national headline. Some are calling him a thug, maybe even a drug dealer and a gangbanger (gang member). Protesters are taking to the streets in Khalil's name. Starr agrees to an interview with police about the shooting after being encouraged by her Uncle Carlos, who is also a detective.</p> <p>Starr's identity as the witness is initially kept secret from everyone outside Starr's family, including her younger brother Sekani. Keeping the secret from her white boyfriend Chris and her best friends Hailey and Maya – who all attend Williamson Prep – weighs on Starr, as does her need to keep her Williamson and Garden Heights personalities separate.</p> <p>After a grand jury fails to indict the white officer, Garden Heights erupts into both peaceful protests and riots. Her increasing identification with the people of Garden Heights causes tension with Starr's friends, especially with her boyfriend Chris.</p> <p>The climax of the novel occurs during the riot following the grand jury decision when Starr, her siblings and boyfriend successfully defend Starr's father's store from a local drug lord as well as the riots. Starr promises to keep Khalil's memory alive and to continue her advocacy against injustice.</p> |
| Context | <p>Shaken by the 2009 police shooting of Oscar Grant, then-college student Angie Thomas began the project as a short story for her senior project in Belhaven University's creative writing program. While writing the short story, the project quickly expanded, though Thomas put it aside for a few years after graduation. Speaking to her hometown newspaper, Thomas said, "I wanted to make sure I approached it not just in anger, but with love even". The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Sandra Bland drew Thomas back to expand the project into a novel, which she titled after Tupac Shakur's "THUG LIFE" concept: "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody". Events surrounding the killings of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile and Michael Brown, and widespread ensuing Black Lives Matter protests against systematic racism and police brutality, also informed moments in the book.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starr talks about how she's different "versions" of herself; she's one person in Garden Heights and a different person at her school, Williamson Prep. Is this something the students can relate to? Starr's family situation is somewhat complicated. She lives with her parents her brother and half-brother. Seven's half-sister is also in Starr's life, as is her uncle whom she sees as a second father figure. How does Starr define family? How does her definition compare to our students' definitions of family? After Khalil dies, parts of his life are shared in conversations, news media, and social media. How do the messages differ from each medium? Was one more reliable? Who got his story wrong? What might have been a more reliable source for information on Khalil? What does this suggest about how black people are represented in the media more generally? What can we learn from this? At the end of the novel, Starr vows to "never be quiet." Angie Thomas says, "I look at books as being a form of activism because a lot of times they'll show us a part of the world we may not have known about." Has this book changed or reaffirmed your views on the world? How so? How can you take steps to use your voice to promote social justice? |
| Title | <i>The Book of Dust Volume One: La Belle Sauvage</i> |



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| Genre | Fantasy Bildungsroman |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some subtle references to sexual abuse. • There is some violence and themes of threat. • There is some mild bad language. |
| Synopsis | <p>Malcolm Polstead is the kind of boy who notices everything but is not much noticed himself. And so perhaps it was inevitable that he would become a spy...</p> <p>Malcolm's father runs an inn called the Trout, on the banks of the river Thames, and all of Oxford passes through its doors. Malcolm and his dæmon, Asta, routinely overhear news and gossip, and the occasional scandal, but during a winter of unceasing rain, Malcolm catches wind of something new: intrigue.</p> <p>He finds a secret message inquiring about a dangerous substance called Dust--and the spy it was intended for finds him.</p> <p>When she asks Malcolm to keep his eyes open, Malcolm sees suspicious characters everywhere; Lord Asriel, clearly on the run; enforcement agents from the Magisterium; an Egyptian named Coram with warnings just for Malcolm; and a beautiful woman with an evil monkey for a dæmon. All are asking about the same thing: a girl--just a baby--named Lyra.</p> <p>Lyra is the kind of person who draws people in like magnets. And Malcolm will brave any danger, and make shocking sacrifices, to bring her safely through the storm.</p> |
| Context | <p>Many describe this novel as a prequel to Pullman's famous trilogy. However, Philip Pullman calls it an "equel" that sits <i>alongside His Dark Materials</i>.</p> <p><i>The Book of Dust</i> is a work in three parts, like <i>His Dark Materials</i>. The work can be read on its own, without having to have read the original series. This volume and the second (<i>The Secret Commonwealth</i>) cover two parts of Lyra's life: starting at the beginning of her story, ten years before <i>Northern Lights</i>, and returning to her 20 years later in <i>The Secret Commonwealth</i>. The scope of the third volume is still under wraps.</p> <p>It's worth noting that <i>La Belle Sauvage</i> is darker in tone and content than the <i>His Dark Materials</i> trilogy.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some ways, Malcolm Polstead is an unlikely hero. However, he is undoubtedly heroic in this novel. In what ways does Malcolm challenge our expectations of a hero and why is this important in the novel? • Consider that <i>La Belle Sauvage</i> is a quest story in which, during a perilous journey, a young hero acquires both strength and wisdom. In what way is Malcolm transformed by the novel's end? • How do daemons function in Pullman's novels? What do they represent? If you were to have a daemon, what form would it take and why? Talk about how Bonneville abuses his own daemon. What does such an action say about him? • What is the Dust which infuses both <i>His Dark Materials</i> as well as this book? Characters discover it, study it, or attempt to destroy it. Some readers consider Dust the dark matter of the universe; some see it as representing the change during puberty when the daemons take their settled form; some think of it as "original sin." How do you see it? Any ideas? |

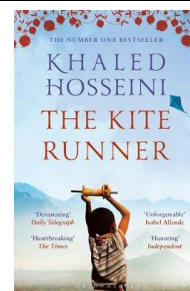



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| Title | <i>The House in the Cerulean Sea</i> |
| Genre | Fantasy comedy |
| Be aware... | • |
| Synopsis | <p>A magical island. A dangerous task. A burning secret.</p> <p>Linus Baker leads a quiet, solitary life. At forty, he lives in a tiny house with a devious cat and his old records. As a Case Worker at the Department in Charge of Magical Youth, he spends his days overseeing the well-being of children in government-sanctioned orphanages.</p> <p>When Linus is unexpectedly summoned by Extremely Upper Management, he's given a curious and highly classified assignment: travel to Marsyas Island Orphanage, where six dangerous children reside: a gnome, a sprite, a wyvern, an unidentifiable green blob, a were-Pomeranian, and the Antichrist. Linus must set aside his fears and determine whether or not they're likely to bring about the end of days.</p> <p>But the children aren't the only secret the island keeps. Their caretaker is the charming and enigmatic Arthur Parnassus, who will do anything to keep his wards safe. As Arthur and Linus grow closer, long-held secrets are exposed, and Linus must make a choice: destroy a home or watch the world burn.</p> <p>An enchanting story, masterfully told, <i>The House in the Cerulean Sea</i> is about the profound experience of discovering an unlikely family in an unexpected place—and realizing that family is yours.</p> |
| Context | The House in the Cerulean Sea is a story born from the Sixties Scoop, which refers to Canada removing indigenous children from their own families and placing them into white families. This practice continued for about twenty years and is still having an effect today. The book speaks of prejudice and social exclusion in all forms: racism, homophobia, transphobia etc. |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the students did you relate to the most? Or rather, which of them would you like to be for a day? • "Change often starts with the smallest of whispers. Like-minded people building it up to a roar." Linus clearly changes in the book, and it seems that the villagers are coming along as well. Could the events of this book start a ripple of change in DICOMY and Extremely Upper Management? • Linus is a very lonely man and prior to investigating the Marsyas Island Orphanage, his only friend and family is his aloof cat Calliope. While building a family and a home becomes important for Linus as the story progresses, why wasn't this a priority in his past? Why is he so isolated as an adult, and do you think this can be attributed to what his home life was like growing up? • What were you expecting of Arthur? Did you believe that he was simply a headmaster, or did you suspect that he had powers? What did you think about his big reveal? • When JK Rowling wrote Harry Potter, she conceived of Dumbledore as a gay character. And yet, his sexual orientation was never overtly addressed in the book. TJ Klune is queer, and he believes that "it's important— now more than ever— to have accurate, positive, queer representation in stories". Have you been reading more diversely or sought out more queer characters or authors? |



Year 11

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| Title | <i>The Kite Runner</i> |
| Genre | Bildungsroman |
| Be aware... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a brief and subtle reference to sexual abuse of a child. |
| Synopsis | <p>An utterly absorbing and emotionally devastating account of betrayal and redemption amidst the turbulence of Afghanistan, Hosseini's intensely powerful novel revolves around Amir and his attempts to right a grievous wrong from his past. Lyrical, evocative and immensely moving, <i>The Kite Runner</i> has rightly become a modern classic.</p> <p>Independent Afghanistan, 1975. Twelve-year-old Amir is desperate to win the local kite-fighting tournament and his loyal friend Hassan promises to help him. But neither of the boys can foresee what will happen to Hassan that afternoon, an event that is to shatter their lives. After the Russians invade and the family is forced to flee to America, Amir realises that one day he must return to Afghanistan under Taliban rule to find the one thing that his new world cannot grant him: redemption.</p> |
| Context | <p>Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, on March 4, 1965, and was the oldest of five children. Just as he describes in <i>The Kite Runner</i>, Kabul was a cosmopolitan city at the time: Western culture, including movies and literature, mixed with Afghan traditions, such as kite fighting in the winter.</p> <p>While Khaled Hosseini has said before that his first novel is largely fictional, he acknowledges that the Afghanistan he knew as a child inspired it. Like his main character, Amir, Khaled Hosseini enjoyed Western films and kite fighting. He also lived in a pre-revolutionary Afghanistan that had not yet been ravaged by the Soviet invasion and subsequent Taliban rule. In a 2003 interview with Newsline, Khaled Hosseini said the passages in the book most resembling his life are those of Amir and Baba as immigrants in the United States. When the Hosseinis arrived in California, they had difficulty adjusting to the new culture, and for a short time his family lived on welfare. He also remembers the local flea market where he and his father worked briefly among other Afghans, just as Amir and Baba did in the book.</p> <p>Hosseini felt deeply influenced by what he recalled of his homeland, and he began writing <i>The Kite Runner</i> in March 2001. Two years later, in the midst of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Riverhead Books published the book.</p> |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did <i>The Kite Runner</i> teach you about Afghanistan? About friendship? About forgiveness, redemption, and love? The strong underlying force of this novel is the relationship between Amir and Hassan. Discuss their friendship. Why is Amir afraid to be Hassan's true friend? Why does Amir constantly test Hassan's loyalty? Why does he resent Hassan? After the kite running tournament, why does Amir no longer want to be Hassan's friend? Who suffers the most in <i>The Kite Runner</i>? Why? Do you think Baba had regrets about how he treated his sons? What did you like and dislike about Baba? How was he different in the U.S. than in Afghanistan? Did he love Amir? Did the book change your feelings on immigration? Why or why not? Which parts of the immigrant experience seemed the hardest to you? |



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| Title | <i>The House in the Cerulean Sea</i> |
| Genre | Fantasy comedy |
| Be aware... | • |
| Synopsis | <p>A magical island. A dangerous task. A burning secret.</p> <p>Linus Baker leads a quiet, solitary life. At forty, he lives in a tiny house with a devious cat and his old records. As a Case Worker at the Department in Charge of Magical Youth, he spends his days overseeing the well-being of children in government-sanctioned orphanages.</p> <p>When Linus is unexpectedly summoned by Extremely Upper Management, he's given a curious and highly classified assignment: travel to Marsyas Island Orphanage, where six dangerous children reside: a gnome, a sprite, a wyvern, an unidentifiable green blob, a were-Pomeranian, and the Antichrist. Linus must set aside his fears and determine whether or not they're likely to bring about the end of days.</p> <p>But the children aren't the only secret the island keeps. Their caretaker is the charming and enigmatic Arthur Parnassus, who will do anything to keep his wards safe. As Arthur and Linus grow closer, long-held secrets are exposed, and Linus must make a choice: destroy a home or watch the world burn.</p> <p>An enchanting story, masterfully told, <i>The House in the Cerulean Sea</i> is about the profound experience of discovering an unlikely family in an unexpected place—and realizing that family is yours.</p>  |
| Context | The House in the Cerulean Sea is a story born from the Sixties Scoop, which refers to Canada removing indigenous children from their own families and placing them into white families. This practice continued for about twenty years and is still having an effect today. The book speaks of prejudice and social exclusion in all forms: racism, homophobia, transphobia etc. |
| Conversation Starters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the students did you relate to the most? Or rather, which of them would you like to be for a day? • "Change often starts with the smallest of whispers. Like-minded people building it up to a roar." Linus clearly changes in the book, and it seems that the villagers are coming along as well. Could the events of this book start a ripple of change in DICOMY and Extremely Upper Management? • Linus is a very lonely man and prior to investigating the Marsyas Island Orphanage, his only friend and family is his aloof cat Calliope. While building a family and a home becomes important for Linus as the story progresses, why wasn't this a priority in his past? Why is he so isolated as an adult, and do you think this can be attributed to what his home life was like growing up? • What were you expecting of Arthur? Did you believe that he was simply a headmaster, or did you suspect that he had powers? What did you think about his big reveal? • When JK Rowling wrote Harry Potter, she conceived of Dumbledore as a gay character. And yet, his sexual orientation was never overtly addressed in the book. TJ Klune is queer, and he believes that "it's important— now more than ever— to have accurate, positive, queer representation in stories". Have you been reading more diversely or sought out more queer characters or authors? |