

I'm not a robot































As Wagner, author and literary critic, has read 50. Mick Connell, director of the National Association for the Teaching of English has read 34. And TES editor Ann Mroz has read 41. (Read the full list and vote for your favourites here.) But, the Department for Education says, these are the 100 classic books that should be read by school pupils. A new initiative has been launched jointly by schools minister Nick Gibb and publishers Penguin Classics, following Mr Gibb's call for more classic literature to be taught in schools. The 100 titles include Jane Eyre and Great Expectations, but also Dante's Inferno and Marcus Aurelius's Meditations. Many of the books are available for free on TES Resources. The books include fiction, non-fiction, poetry and prose, all chosen from the Penguin Black Classic series. This means that their authors died before 1946, and the works are therefore out of copyright. Mr Gibb has said that he hopes these books will encourage classroom discussion about classic literature. "It is important that all pupils in secondary school are taught to read and enjoy challenging books from among the world's greatest literature," he said. But many well-read adults question the choice of books. "I read Great Expectations at 12," said Mick Wagner. "Mistake! The '1,001 Nights' - excellent. Unabridged? My 15-year-old son just got hold of that and it gave him quite a shock." And Mr Connell - who points out that the total of 34 books would have been higher had he been allowed to include other titles by the same authors - highlights some of the authors who have been excluded. "Where are the brilliant, contemporary writers for young and adolescent readers?" he said. "Where are the very best in modern and contemporary literature? Where are the best of the 20th century? Where are the best of the 21st century? Where are the best of the 22nd century? 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revolution, capturing the turmoil and spirit of a pivotal era in history.Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart” is a powerful narrative set in late 19th century Africa, at the cusp of European colonial expansion. It tells the story of Okonkwo, a respected Igbo warrior from Umuofia, and his struggle to maintain his cultural identity in the face of British political and religious influence. Achebe’s novel is a critical examination of the clash between traditional African culture and the forces of colonialism, offering a nuanced perspective on the impact of European imperialism on African societies.Mark Twain’s “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” is a seminal work in American literature, celebrated for its vivid portrayal of a boy’s adventures along the Mississippi River. The novel intertwines themes of freedom, morality, and societal norms through the eyes of its young protagonist, Huck Finn. Twain’s exceptional skill in dialogue and characterization makes this a story of deep human significance, exploring the inherent conflicts between natural instincts and the constraints of society, and the evils of slavery.Emily Bronte’s “Wuthering Heights” is a tale of passion and revenge set in the Yorkshire moors. It centers on the intense and tumultuous relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, an orphan taken in by Catherine’s father. Following Mr. Earnshaw’s death, Heathcliff faces mistreatment and leaves, only to return years later as a wealthy man intent on revenge. Bronte’s novel is a deep exploration of love, jealousy, and social standing, painting a vivid picture of the destructive power of obsession and the complexities of human emotions.Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” is a charming and mischievous narrative about a young boy’s escapades along the Mississippi River. Set in the fictional town of St. Petersburg, inspired by Twain’s own childhood in Hannibal, Missouri, the novel follows Tom Sawyer’s adventures, from fighting in the streets to his infamous whitewashing of a fence. Twain captures the essence of boyhood and adventure in this classic, which continues to delight readers with its humor, vitality, and timeless exploration of youth.George Orwell’s “1984” is a powerful and haunting portrayal of a dystopian future where independent thought is suppressed under an omnipresent, totalitarian regime. The novel follows Winston Smith, an employee at the Ministry of Truth, who becomes disillusioned with his life under the oppressive rule of Big Brother. Orwell’s vision of a world where individual freedom is obliterated and surveillance is omnipresent has remained profoundly influential, serving as a stark warning about the dangers of unchecked governmental power and the erosion of fundamental human rights.George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” is a satirical fable that tells the story of overworked and mistreated animals who revolt against their human farmer, seeking to create an ideal society based on equality, justice, and progress. However, their revolution soon gives way to a new tyranny as oppressive as the one they overthrew. This allegorical novel brilliantly critiques the corrupting influence of power and the cyclical nature of oppression, encapsulating the rise and fall of revolutionary ideals into totalitarianism through its memorable animal characters.“The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald is an iconic novel set in the roaring twenties, epitomizing the glamour and decadence of the Jazz Age. The story revolves around the enigmatic millionaire Jay Gatsby and his lavish parties in West Egg, New York. Gatsby’s mysterious past, rumored involvement in bootlegging, and his unyielding love for Daisy Buchanan form the core of this tragic narrative. Fitzgerald masterfully paints a picture of the era’s excesses and the hollowness of the American Dream, making this a timeless exploration of desire, disillusionment, and the pursuit of unattainable ideals. William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies” is a disturbing tale of civilization versus savagery. It narrates the story of schoolboys stranded on a deserted island who initially embrace the freedom but gradually descend into barbarity. The island, initially a paradise, becomes a sinister backdrop for power struggles, fear, and violence. Golding’s novel is a powerful commentary on the inherent evil in human nature and the thin veneer of societal norms that keep it in check, making it a profound exploration of human psychology and social behavior.Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” is a profound and moving tale of racial injustice, morality, and empathy set in the American South during the 1930s. The story, seen through the eyes of a young girl named Scout, revolves around her father, Atticus Finch, a lawyer who defends a black man unjustly accused of a terrible crime. This novel beautifully blends the innocence of childhood with the grim realities of racial prejudice, creating a powerful narrative that highlights the importance of integrity, courage, and standing up for what is right.Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World” is a groundbreaking dystopian novel set in a future World State, where citizens are genetically engineered and conditioned for their roles in a strictly hierarchical society. The novel anticipates advancements in reproductive technology, psychological manipulation, and classical conditioning, painting a chilling picture of a seemingly perfect yet fundamentally flawed society. Huxley’s exploration of themes such as individuality, freedom, and the cost of stability challenges readers to reflect on the nature of happiness and the dangers of sacrificing human values for technological progress. John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath” is a powerful narrative set during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl in the American Midwest. It follows the story of Tom Joad, the protagonist who, despite his violent actions, emerges as a morally just hero. The novel vividly portrays the plight of dispossessed families and their struggle to find dignity and justice in an era of immense hardship. Steinbeck’s work is a poignant exploration of social injustice, human resilience, and the enduring spirit of those who strive against overwhelming odds, making it a cornerstone of American literature. Paulo Coelho’s “The Alchemist” is a transcendent tale of magic, mysticism, and self-discovery. It tells the story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy, who embarks on a journey to find worldly treasure but discovers a far more valuable form of riches. The novel is a profound meditation on following one’s dreams, understanding one’s destiny, and the importance of listening to the heart. Coelho’s masterful storytelling blends philosophy and adventure, offering readers a guide to recognizing opportunities and learning to decipher the omens along life’s path. William Shakespeare’s “Macbeth” is a tragic exploration of ambition, guilt, and moral corruption. The play revolves around the Scottish general Macbeth, whose desire for power leads him to commit regicide and seize the throne. Driven by prophecies and spurred by his wife, Macbeth spirals into a cycle of murder and paranoia. The play is a profound examination of the consequences of unchecked ambition and the psychological turmoil that comes with guilt and fear, showcasing Shakespeare’s unparalleled understanding of the human condition.J.D. Salinger’s “The Catcher in the Rye” is a seminal work in American literature, capturing the essence of teenage disillusionment and rebellion. The novel follows the story of Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old, as he navigates the complexities of adolescence after leaving his prep school. Holden’s journey through New York City and his candid reflections on the adult world reveal a deep sense of alienation and a quest for identity. Salinger’s portrayal of teenage angst and the struggle for authenticity has made this book a defining work on the pains of growing up. Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale” is a chilling portrayal of a dystopian future where the United States has become the repressive Republic of Gilead. In this society, plummeting birth rates and social unrest have led to the subjugation of women, whose rights are stripped away under a theocratic regime. The novel, through its vivid imagery and powerful narrative, explores themes of power, gender oppression, and resistance. Atwood’s creation is not only a warning about the dangers of extremism and the erosion of women’s rights but also a compelling story of survival and defiance in the face of tyranny.As educators and lifelong learners, we understand the immense value that reading holds for our students - it’s not just about improving literacy skills, but about broadening horizons, fostering empathy, and sparking critical thinking. These books, ranging from the haunting foresight of “1984” to the poignant realism of “The Grapes of Wrath,” are not only essential reads for high school students but are also timeless classics that speak to readers of all ages. They challenge us to consider different perspectives, confront our own biases, and understand the complexity of the human spirit. I encourage educators and parents alike to promote these works, not just as academic requirements, but as venues to deeper understanding and appreciation of our world. Let’s use these stories to ignite conversations, to inspire change, and to continue nurturing a love for reading that will last a lifetime.