

VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Text List for study in 2020 and 2021

The following texts proposed by the English and EAL Text Advisory Panel have been approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) as suitable for study in Units 3 and 4 in 2020 and 2021. Texts were selected in accordance with the following criteria and guidelines.

Criteria for text selection

Each text selected for the VCE English and EAL text list will:

- have literary merit
- be an excellent example of form and genre
- sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
- reflect current community standards and expectations in the context of senior secondary study of texts.

The text list as a whole will:

- be suitable for a diverse student cohort from a range of backgrounds and contexts, including students studying English as an additional language
- reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
- include texts by Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- include a balance of new and established works*, including a Shakespearean text
- include texts that display affirming perspectives
- reflect engagement with global perspectives.

*Established works include texts that are recognised as having enduring artistic value.

Guidelines for text selection

The text list for VCE English and EAL must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The text list must contain a total of 36 texts:
 - 20 for List 1: Reading and creating texts
 - 16 for List 2: Reading and comparing texts (eight pairs).
- List 1 must represent a range of texts in the following approximate proportions:
 - eight novels
 - two collections of short stories
 - two collections of poetry or songs
 - three plays
 - three multimodal texts**
 - two non-fiction texts.

****Multimodal texts are defined as combining two or more communication modes; for example, print, image and spoken text, as in films or graphic novels.**

- List 2 must include eight pairs that:
 - are connected by themes, issues and ideas
 - represent a range of texts, such as novels, short stories, poetry, plays, multimodal (including film) and non-fiction
 - include a range of combinations of texts, such as a novel and a film or a non-fiction text and a play.

For **VCE EAL students only**, one text in each pair will be nominated for achievement of Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts.

- The text list must also contain:
 - at least five texts for List 1 and four texts for List 2 by Australian authors
 - print and multimodal texts that are widely available
 - titles that are different from those on the VCE Literature text list.
- The text list must be reviewed annually, with approximately 25 per cent of the texts being changed. No text will appear for more than four consecutive years or fewer than two years.
- As 2019 will be the third year of implementation, four texts have been replaced in List 2.
- Texts will be accompanied by full bibliographic details where necessary.

Information for schools

Teachers must consider the text list in conjunction with the relevant text selection information published on page 17 of the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language Study Design 2017–2020* for Units 3 and 4.

VCE English students

A total of four texts across the Units 3 and 4 sequence must be selected from the text list published annually by the VCAA.

For Unit 3 Area of Study 1, students must read and study two selected texts from List 1.

For Unit 4 Area of Study 1, students must read and study one pair of texts (that is, two texts) from List 2.

At least two set texts must be selected from the following categories: novels, plays, collections of short stories, collections of poetry.

VCE EAL students

A total of three texts across the Units 3 and 4 sequence must be selected from the text list published annually by the VCAA.

VCE EAL students must read and study one selected text from List 1 and a pair of texts (that is, two texts) from List 2.

Two texts must be used for Unit 3 Area of Study 1 – one selected from List 1 and one of the pair selected from List 2.

The pair of texts from List 2 should be used for Unit 4 Area of Study 1.

In either Unit 3 or 4, at least one set text must be a written text in one of the following forms: a novel, a play, a collection of short stories or a collection of poetry.

All students

No more than one of the selected texts may be a multimodal text, for example, a film or graphic novel. A multimodal text may be selected from either List 1 or List 2, but not from both. Other multimodal texts may be used to support the study of selected texts.

At least one of the selected texts must be by an Australian, as indicated on the text list.

The annotations in this document are provided to assist teachers with selection of texts in accordance with the requirements in the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language Study Design*; they do not constitute advice about the teaching, learning or assessment of texts.

When selecting texts that do not come from the multimodal category, it is important to avoid genre confusion. A film version of a novel, short story, play or non-fiction text is not acceptable for the purposes of the examination, although it might be used in the classroom for teaching purposes.

While the VCAA considers all the texts on the text list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that with some texts there may be sensitivities in relation to certain issues. In selecting texts for study, teachers should make themselves aware of these issues prior to introducing the text to students.

The VCAA does not prescribe editions; any complete edition may be used. The bibliographic information in this document is provided to assist teachers to obtain texts and is correct, as far as possible, at the time of publication. Publishing details may change from time to time and teachers should consult the *VCAA Bulletin* regularly for any amendments or alterations to the text list.

Key to codes

List 1 is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. List 2 is presented in pairs, with the nominated EAL text in the first column.

Abbreviations in brackets after the titles signify the following:

(A) This text meets the Australian requirement.

(#) Bracketed numbers indicate the number of years that a text has appeared on the VCE English and EAL text list; (1) for example, indicates that 2019 is the first year that a text has appeared on the text list.

(EAL) This indicates that, for **VCE EAL students only**, the text is nominated for achievement of Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts.

List 1

Novels

- Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart* (1)
Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice* (1)
Doerr, Anthony, *All the Light We Cannot See* (2)
Grenville, Kate, *The Lieutenant* (A) (4)
Jordan, Toni, *Nine Days* (A) (2)
London, Joan, *The Golden Age* (A) (4)
Piper, Christine, *After Darkness* (A) (3)
St John Mandel, Emily, *Station Eleven* (2)

Short stories

- Kennedy, Cate, *Like a House on Fire* (A) (3)

Stories for study: 'Flexion', 'Ashes', 'Laminex and Mirrors', 'Tender', 'Like a House on Fire', 'Five-Dollar Family', 'Cross-country', 'Sleepers', 'Whirlpool', 'Cake', 'White Spirit', 'Little Plastic Shipwreck', 'Waiting', 'Static', 'Seventy-Two Derwents'.

- Munro, Alice, *Runaway* (1)

Stories for study: all.

Plays

- Euripides, *The Women of Troy* (2)
Rayson, Hannie, *Extinction* (A) (3)
Shakespeare, William, *Much Ado About Nothing* (1)

Poetry/songs

- Skrzynecki, Peter, *Old/New World: New & Selected Poems* (A) (4)
Wordsworth, William, *William Wordsworth: Poems selected by Seamus Heaney* (1)

Multimodal texts

Films

Hitchcock, Alfred (director), *Rear Window* (3)

Polley, Sarah (director), *Stories We Tell* (3)

Other

Satrapi, Marjane, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Jonathan Cape (3)

Non-fiction texts

Boo, Katherine, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (4)

Capote, Truman, *In Cold Blood* (3)

List 2

For **VCE EAL students only**, one text in each pair is nominated for achievement of Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts. This text is indicated by (EAL).

Pair 1

Non-fiction text

Davidson, Robyn, *Tracks* (A) (4) (EAL)

Multimodal text – Film

de Heer, Rolf, *Charlie's Country* (A) (2)

Pair 2

Multimodal text – Film

Frears, Stephen, *The Queen* (1) (EAL)

Novel

Malouf, David, *Ransom* (A) (4)

Pair 3

Non-fiction text

Funder, Anna, *Stasiland* (A) (4) (EAL)

Novel

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go* (2)

Pair 4

Non-fiction text

Szubanski, Magda, *Reckoning* (A) (2) (EAL)

Novel

Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake* (4)

Pair 5

Play

Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible* (4) (EAL)

Novel

Ham, Rosalie, *The Dressmaker* (A) (1)

Pair 6

Play

Ziegler, Anna, *Photograph 51* (2) (EAL)

Novel

Atwood, Margaret, *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (4)

Pair 7

Play

Mailman, Debra and Enoch, Wesley, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (A) (1) (EAL)

Novel

D'Aguiar, Fred, *The Longest Memory* (4)

Pair 8

Non-fiction text

Yousafzai, Malala, with Lamb, Christina, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (4) (EAL)

Multimodal text – Film

Warchus, Matthew (director), *Pride* (1)

Annotations

These annotations are provided to assist teachers with text selection. The comments are not intended to represent the only possible interpretation or a favoured reading of a text.

List 1 is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. Films are listed by title. List 2 is presented in pairs, with the nominated EAL text presented first.

List 1

Novels

Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, Penguin, 2006 (first published 1958) (1)

Set in Eastern Nigeria during the time of colonial expansion into Africa, *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Okonkwo, a proud and highly respected tribesman from Umuofia, somewhere near the Lower Niger. From immature young man to respected clansman, Okonkwo must deal with all the challenges that face a man growing up in a changing world. Ashamed of his father, obedient to the gods, and responsible for his many wives and children, Okonkwo's life is turned upside down after his accidental shooting of an elder's son and the arrival of missionaries and colonial administrators intent on shifting the power structure in the small village.

Chinua Achebe explores what it means to be an African man in a tribal society whose very existence is under threat from colonisers. Achebe immerses the audience in another world, using the themes of cultural difference, tradition and change, masculinity, religion and family, to give the reader insight into a raw, brutal and beautiful life.

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*, Penguin, 2003 (1)

First published in 1813 and originally titled 'First Impressions', the novel *Pride and Prejudice* follows the setting up and unravelling of misunderstandings between the spirited Elizabeth Bennet and the wealthy Fitzwilliam Darcy. The introduction of siblings, cousins and suitors complicates the plot and deepens Elizabeth's awareness of herself. **The** text follows the ways in which characters respond to the attentions of others.

Replete with irony and free indirect discourse, *Pride and Prejudice* is an extended meditation on the extent to which one must know oneself before they can truly know another. It also provides insight into the obsessions of Georgian England: marriage, rank and etiquette. While Austen's original readers would undoubtedly have appreciated the twists and turns of the marriage plot, modern audiences will appreciate the way in which Elizabeth and her four sisters navigate expectations imposed by self and society, as well as the notion of an 'accomplished woman'.

Doerr, Anthony, *All the Light We Cannot See*, Harper Collins, 2015 (2)

Anthony Doerr's novel explores the tragedy of war through the story of two young people caught up in World War II. Marie-Laure LeBlanc is a young blind girl living in France with her father, the master locksmith of the Paris Museum of Natural History. Self-reliant and resourceful, when the war begins Marie-Laure flees with her father to Saint-Malo and the house of his shell-shocked great uncle, Etienne. Werner begins the novel in a German orphanage with his sister Jutta, until his exceptional gifts with science and technology bring him to the attention of the Nazis. While Marie-Laure comes to

aid the resistance, Werner is sent to the German military, where he tracks rogue radio operators. Eventually their paths cross during one of the final battles of the war in Europe.

The narrative moves between the perspectives of the two children as they navigate life before and during the war, creating detailed pictures of their very different worlds. Told primarily through a series of flashbacks, the story moves quickly through a sequence of short chapters. The vibrant characterisation and rich detail of the narrative allows the reader to reflect on its central themes of the resilience of the human spirit, the horror of war, the shared humanity that connects people even in the worst circumstances, and the roles of destiny and free will. The novel is a celebration of both science and human nature.

Grenville, Kate, *The Lieutenant*, The Text Publishing Company, 2010 (A) (4)

Grenville's work of historical fiction depicts the journey of young Marine Lieutenant Daniel Rooke and how he navigates his troubled childhood in 18th-century Portsmouth, his life in Australia and, finally, in Antigua. A gifted mathematician and astronomer, Rooke is sent to Australia's first settlement, where he becomes obsessed with learning and recording in writing the language of the Cadigal people. Rooke's attachment to his 'tutors', particularly Tagaran, tests his loyalties, making him choose between old and new-found friends, and patriotic obligations and conscience, leaving him emotionally alienated and, ultimately, physically isolated. Grenville's novel examines the themes of knowledge, ambition, friendship, difference and isolation, and the role of language.

Jordan, Toni, *Nine Days*, Text Publishing, 2012 (A) (2)

Nine Days is the third and most accomplished novel by Melbourne writer Toni Jordan. It won the Independent Booksellers of Australia Award for Best Fiction in 2013 and was shortlisted for a number of other awards. The front cover of *Nine Days* hosts an archival picture from The Argus newspaper of a troop train leaving a Melbourne railway station during World War II. The picture shows a soldier leaning out of a window for a good-bye kiss from a young woman on the platform, who sits aloft a stranger's shoulders. A momentous occasion for the central figures is depicted.

Nine Days timeshifts between the eve of the war in 1939 to the early 21st century. The approach Jordan takes to presenting multiple perspectives over time is a non-linear one, held together by the linking of key themes and motifs across chapters. Each of the nine central characters has a day devoted to them, in which pivotal events take place, presented through their eyes and in their voice. Most of the action revolves around three generations of the Westaway family household in the predominantly Catholic, working-class suburb of Richmond. 'Our part of Richmond, here on the hill, is an island. I can see over the roofs of the rest of it, mismatched shingle and rusty tin held down by lumps of rock and brick and jerry cans.'

The realities of life for the Westaways include such events as young, unmarried Connie's unwanted pregnancy, leading to a 'backyard' termination that ends tragically. Her younger brother Kip has the direction of his life changed by the death of his father, forcing him to leave school and take up work to support his family. There are chapters told from the viewpoint of Kip's daughters, Stanzi and Charlotte, some 70 years later. These chapters express the kinds of modern sentiments and concerns that are likely to be relatable for today's readers.

London, Joan, *The Golden Age*, Vintage, 2014 (A) (4)

The Golden Age tells the story of Frank Gold, a 13-year-old refugee recovering at The Golden Age Children's Polio Convalescent Home. Frank, or Ferenc, is learning to walk again but is also dealing with his memories of his time in war-torn Hungary. He forms a close relationship with Elsa, a fellow patient, who inspires his poetry. Set in 1950s Perth, the novel explores grand themes such as the refugee experience, love, memory, fear and isolation through the microcosm of The Golden Age. This is a surprisingly uplifting telling of a sad and moving story.

Piper, Christine, *After Darkness*, Allen & Unwin, 2014 (A) (3)

Christine Piper is a distinguished, prize-winning writer and her first novel, *After Darkness*, won the 2014 Vogel Literary Award. She also won the 2014 Calibre Essay Prize and was the 2013 Alice Hayes writing fellow at Ragdale in the United States. *After Darkness* is written in the first person. Ibaraki Tomokazu, a Japanese doctor who is interned in Australia in 1942, tells the story of his life in Japan and Australia. The novel opens in South Australia in 1942. Ibaraki then reveals his story by exploring his life in Tokyo and in Broome before the war.

The text deals with a number of timeless ideas, including friendship, identity, trauma, loss and change. Possibly the most significant is the issue of personal conscience – the conflict every individual faces when confronted with the differences between what they really believe is right and what is held to be right by tradition or society.

St John Mandel, Emily, *Station Eleven*, Picador, 2014 (2)

Winner of the 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award, Mandel's fourth novel presents a non-linear narrative that carries the reader on a journey encompassing life before and after the end of civilisation. Celebrated for its visually stunning prose and sense of hope for the survival of modern culture, this apocalyptic novel gives the reader a different take on the apocalyptic genre.

On the same night an actor dies in the midst of a stage performance of *King Lear*, the deadly Georgia Flu eradicates much of the world's population, with only a few survivors. Each of the characters whose lives are cleverly developed before and after the flu are connected intricately by their own pasts as they build new lives for themselves after the collapse of civilisation. Focusing on the concepts of memory, loss and nostalgia, Mandel's novel stands by the premise, 'The more you remember, the more you've lost.'

Short stories

Kennedy, Cate, *Like a House on Fire*, Scribe, 2013 (A) (3)

Stories for study: 'Flexion', 'Ashes', 'Laminex and Mirrors', 'Tender', 'Like a House on Fire', 'Five-Dollar Family', 'Cross-country', 'Sleepers', 'Whirlpool', 'Cake', 'White Spirit', 'Little Plastic Shipwreck', 'Waiting', 'Static', 'Seventy-Two Derwents'.

Victorian-based author Cate Kennedy was shortlisted for the Stella Prize in 2013 for her most recent collection of short fiction, *Like a House on Fire*. This collection has been recognised for its ability to capture the subtleties of the 'real' people of modern Australia. While often dark and challenging, many of the stories highlight moments of hope in the complex lives of everyday individuals and their families.

The home and its role in creating strong family bonds are at the core of Kennedy's stories. The cliché of the house on fire within the title is subverted, as for many it provides an environment of physical and emotional danger instead of a sanctuary from the outside world. Themes of regret, understanding,

awareness, the complexity of filial and romantic relationships, the impact of chronic injury and sickness, as well as salvation underpin this collection of stories. Students will find writing that offers a great deal of discussion about issues faced in 21st century society.

Schools may need to deal with some complex and potentially controversial topics and effectively prepare students for mature themes.

Munro, Alice, *Runaway*, Vintage Publishing, 2006 (1)

This anthology of short stories, by the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature, conveys the inner lives of Canadian women living in the 20th and 21st centuries and how they endure the daily trials of modern life. Alice Munro presents and explores the lives of these women through flashbacks and other narrative devices. Many of the stories are connected by characters and plot twists.

Munro's writing is clear and cogent, but she does not illuminate or offer judgement. Her dialogue is crisp and restrained, allowing readers to be drawn into the inner world of the characters and it is they who are left to question and query the nature and value of relationships. Munro provides scope for in-depth discussion of modern life, morality and self. Her writing is capacious, with the breadth of a novel and the artistry of the short story form.

Plays

Rayson, Hannie, 'Extinction' in *Endangered: Three Plays*, Currency Press, 2016 (A) (3)

Award-winning Australian playwright Hannie Rayson's most recent work, *Extinction*, is a moving and sometimes confronting exploration of human fragility. When Harry Jewell runs over an endangered tiger quoll during a stormy night in the Otways, the event precipitates a moral crisis for the mining executive. Through his new-found relationship with conservation biologist Dr Piper Ross, Jewell is forced to re-evaluate the consequences of prioritising economic over environmental concerns, while Ross herself is confronted by a conflict: should she act for the greater good, or for the good of herself?

Hannie Rayson explores human relationships, environmental issues and considerations of mortality through her depiction of a range of complex and flawed characters. Rayson's symbolism invites students to discuss humanity's obligations to nature, as well as the interplay between idealism and pragmatism.

Shakespeare, William, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Cambridge School Shakespeare), Rex Gibson, Vicki Wienand, Richard Andrews, Anthony Partington, Richard Spencer (eds), Cambridge University Press 2014 (1)

One of Shakespeare's comedies, this play features characters from all parts of the social spectrum. Although set in Messina in Italy, the cast of soldiers, nobles, civic officials and women are easily recognisable to the English audiences of Shakespeare's time and, of course, the comedy is typical of Shakespeare's world.

The text provides value in the verbal sparring between Beatrice and Benedick and the somewhat pathetic pomposity of the constable Dogberry. The treatment of Hero would be seen as outrageous by Tudor audiences as she is framed by the wicked Don John and totally innocent of the charges which make her fiancé, Claudio, cruelly repudiate her. Today's readers may be horrified to see the double standards of the men in the play who expect one type of behaviour from women and another from themselves. In exploring the fate of Beatrice and Benedick, as well as Hero and Claudia, the text also throws up issues relating to the nature of true love.

Euripides, *The Women of Troy*, Don Taylor (ed), Methuen Drama, 2007 (2)

Presented in 415BC, Euripides' episodic drama, *The Women of Troy* focusses on the horrifying consequences of violence, drawing upon the many atrocities that occurred during the Peloponnesian wars. As such, Euripides' play is a lyrical commentary on loss – of a people, of a city, of a civilisation.

As dawn breaks on the ruins of Troy after the Athenian invasion, the city's queen and women are confronted by the brutal reality of the battle and the cruelty of their fates. What ensues is a series of lamentations that question the traditional pantheon of gods and the morality of men who seek revenge under the guise of justice. The play thus reflects the universal ugliness of war, exposing a single, tragic truth; that while war devastates women and children particularly, everyone suffers – victims and victors alike.

PLEASE NOTE: in the Methuen edition, the speech on page 22 attributed to the Chorus is, in most other editions, attributed to Cassandra.

Poetry/songs

Skrzynecki, Peter, *Old/New World: New & Selected Poems*, University of Queensland Press, 2007 (A) (4)

Peter Skrzynecki is the German-born son of Polish parents who immigrated to Australia in 1949. He writes of their efforts to adapt to the new country while maintaining the traditions of their homeland. Written largely in free verse, his poems deal with family relationships, in his case both as a son and as a parent, and the importance of memory and friendship. Skrzynecki's poems are lyrical and appreciative as he describes both the Australian landscape and the experience of life in suburbia. Skrzynecki's relationships with fellow Australian writers and artists are also reflected in his poetry.

Wordsworth, William, *William Wordsworth: Poems selected by Seamus Heaney, Faber and Faber*, 2016 (1)

The poetry of William Wordsworth forms a part of the Romantic movement in England, and is partly a challenge to rapid industrialisation that was based on a reductive and exploitative attitude towards nature. His poetry is, above all, an exploration of the power of the natural world in its pristine beauty. To convey the effect of such beauty, Wordsworth's writing adopts language that aims for greater immediacy and naturalism than was common in the work of earlier poets. Wordsworth's evocative depictions of the English countryside form the backbone of many poems in this collection. Drawing on his own experiences, he uses the wonder elicited by natural scenery as the starting point for his sophisticated exploration of human feelings, emotions, and the complexity of lived experience. The introspective focus of the writing offers rich possibilities for discussion of themes and ideas. The poems vary in length and style, enabling nuanced and varied exploration.

Multimodal texts

Films

Hitchcock, Alfred (director), *Rear Window*, 1954 (3)

When professional adventure photographer L. B. 'Jeff' Jeffries breaks his leg on assignment, he is confined to a wheelchair to recuperate in his New York apartment. Frustrated and bored in the summer heat, he begins watching his neighbours across the courtyard. Boredom turns to suspicion when he believes that one of his neighbours has been murdered. Calling on the support of his socialite girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, and his visiting nurse, Stella, Jeff embarks on an investigation into the actions of that fateful night and turns up more than he expected.

Nominated for four Academy Awards and long regarded as one of the best films of the 20th century, *Rear Window* is a masterpiece of storytelling from the master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock. Filmed almost exclusively from Jeff's perspective, this mystery thriller explores the various 'ways of looking' as the audience shares the journey with the three protagonists. Beautifully crafted, it is a film that stands up to repeat viewings and close analysis. (Rating: M)

Polley, Sarah (director), *Stories We Tell*, 2012 (3)

Stories We Tell is actor Sarah Polley's second film as director. The film won many documentary awards, including Best Documentary Screenplay from the Writers Guild of America.

Stories We Tell is an autobiographical documentary: Polley compiles interviews with many of her family members, narration from her father, and home video footage to create a chorus of voices as a means of investigating her family's past. The film is an interrogation of history, and examines how stories can guide our memories, and whether one voice has a right to declare itself the truth. The layering of different documentary techniques allows students to investigate the role stories play in our lives, as well the conflicts around the truth of family secrets. (Rating: M)

Other

Satrapı, Marjane, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Jonathan Cape, 2003 (3)

Iranian-born Marjane Satrapı documents her childhood in Tehran, Iran, from age six to 14 in the graphic novel *Persepolis*. The book was met with critical acclaim, receiving several awards and being adapted into an animated film in 2007.

Growing up during the period of the Islamic revolution, Satrapı suffered under oppression and was exposed to violence and brutality. She does not shy away from exploring the often shocking and fatal repercussions of the repressive regime. However, *Persepolis* also offers a counter to this brutality by highlighting the courageous actions of Satrapı's family, including her staunch Marxist parents and her activist uncle, Anoosh, whom she idolises. *Persepolis* explores the contradictions between public and private life, and how absurd they appear through the eyes of an innocent child. The graphic novel form provides much for students to discuss regarding the written and the visual, both of which can be considered when analysing the themes of grief, mortality, freedom and repression, and heroism and gender.

Non-fiction texts

Boo, Katherine, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*, Scribe, 2013 (4)

Set in a Mumbai slum, this narrative non-fiction book documents how those in poverty – particularly women and children – negotiate the age of globalisation. After several years of field work, Boo explores the profound inequality in the lives of the slum-dwellers, interrogating the degree to which society's most exposed people can control their reality. Posing uncomfortable questions about the inconsistent nature of justice and opportunity, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* reveals the conditions that sabotage humanity's 'innate capacity for moral action' amid 'government corruption and indifference'.

Boo's confronting work contains unsettling scenes of violent death, mistreatment of women, racism and broken dreams, but these issues are presented as inevitable in the society and are not exploited. The voices of the people are quoted.

The text observes what happens when versions of reality clash, and examines the role of perception, power and self-preservation in pulling people back from the vulnerable brink upon which they teeter. There are moments of hope and defiance of the forces against which the people struggle.

Capote, Truman, *In Cold Blood*, Penguin, 1965 (3)

A blend of factual reportage and narrative techniques, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* has been described as one of the great books of American 20th-century literature. Capote travelled from New York to Holcomb, a small mid-western town, to explore the impact of this brutal and apparently random act of violence on the community. What followed was five years of research; information gleaned through reports and interviews with various members of the Holcomb community, local law enforcement and the killers themselves, Perry Edward Smith and Richard Eugene Hickock.

Finding himself particularly drawn to Smith's own tragic life story, Capote examines the American Dream, as represented by the Clutters, and sharply reminds us of its broader unattainability. Both critically and commercially acclaimed, Capote ultimately questions the 'right to kill' and within this framework he explores not simply the Clutter murders, but the hypocrisy of the State whose death penalty 'kills' criminals in its pursuit of justice for the 'people'. In this sense, the stories within reveal the sadness of death, rather than just the causes and consequences of murder, a crime which, 'all told, ended six human lives'.

List 2

Pair 1

Davidson, Robyn, *Tracks*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013 (A) (4) (EAL)

Robyn Davidson's 2700-kilometre trek from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean in 1977 with camels became famous due to a *National Geographic* article focused on the journey of a heroine driven to achieve a personal goal, despite the patronising disbelief of those around her. Davidson's 1980 memoir highlights an adventurer with a great affinity for the environment, empathy for Australia's Indigenous people and a determination to achieve, despite setbacks. Told with brutal honesty, this story of the internal and external battle against the sandhills, spinifex and interminable space presents the reader with an intriguing study of a woman who tests herself in the isolation of the wilderness.

de Heer, Rolf (director), *Charlie's Country*, 2013 (2)

Rolf de Heer's film, co-written by and starring David Gulpilil, follows the protagonist Charlie's attempts to define himself in the world. His revolts against the intrusion of mainstream Australian life in the Arnhem land of his home leads him to a failed attempt to live off the land, to hospital, to degradation in Darwin and to prison. Told with humour and an oblique style, the film addresses ideas of identity and failure in worlds that sit uneasily with each other. The struggles particular to Indigenous peoples are twinned with ordinary anxieties associated with how we understand ourselves and our places in the world. (Rating: M)

Pair 2

Frears, Stephen (director), *The Queen*, 2006 (1) (EAL)

The Queen follows the British Royal family's public inertia following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. The film presents a family wedded to duty and sacrifice, but unequipped to respond adequately to the demands of the moment. At its heart is Queen Elizabeth, who, having determined to rule with authority, is unaware of or perhaps unable to understand the country's emotions and act in a way that satisfies her people. The text is interested in balancing private emotion and public duty, and the inevitable sacrifices of leaders. The film also explores the life of newly minted Prime Minister Tony Blair, also coming to terms with the responsibilities of his public and private domains. (Rating: M)

Malouf, David, *Ransom*, Vintage, 2010 (A) (4)

Malouf re-imagines the world of *The Iliad* through a little-known episode of the Trojan War. Maddened by Hector's slaying of his dear friend Patroclus, Achilles takes revenge and subsequently violates Hector's corpse. Priam – King of Troy and Hector's father – journeys to Achilles' camp seeking to ransom his son's body. He travels in a donkey cart escorted only by a carter but aided by the god Hermes. The mission is a success and delivers to Priam enrichment in life and legendary status after death. *Ransom* reveals the powerful impact of love, leadership and paternal duty, and explores ideas of universal relevance, including the liberation of the spirit and what can be achieved through a vision of something new.

Pair 3

Funder, Anna, *Stasiland*, The Text Publishing Company, 2014 (A) (4) (EAL)

An investigation into the rule of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the role of the secret police, the Stasi, *Stasiland* considers the human cost of state control. Revealing episodes of recent history previously hidden behind the Berlin Wall, Australian writer Anna Funder presents stories of survival with compassion and humour. Funder recounts the personal stories of Stasi victims, from citizens to some Stasi officers themselves. The text illustrates not only the toll of such an oppressive regime at the time, but also considers the ongoing legacy of the Stasi long after the fall of the GDR.

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go*, Faber and Faber, 2005 (2)

Nobel Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro received extensive praise for his sixth novel, including being dubbed *Time* magazine's Book of the Year for 2005. Set in England in the late 1990s, it explores issues of identity and conformity, the importance of memory and friendships, and freedom and confinement.

The novel opens with 31-year-old narrator Kathy revealing that she is a 'carer', a person who looks after clones who have been raised in order to become organ donors. As she awaits her own call up to donate, she reminisces about her time at Hailsham boarding school and her complex and important friendship with fellow clones Ruth and Tommy. Aware of their destinies, all three must learn to come to an understanding of themselves and their society.

Pair 4

Szubanski, Magda, *Reckoning*, The Text Publishing Company, 2016 (A) (2) (EAL)

While loved for her portrayal of the quintessential Aussie netballer 'Sharon', Magda's own childhood experience was more like that of an outsider. Her immigrant experience, cross-cultural Polish–Scottish heritage, experience as a childhood tennis player and emergence as a 'fat lesbian' in a 1980s feminist setting stand her apart from most suburban 'Sharons'. Even her childhood spent playing in the (car-less) streets and roaming the wilds of Croydon will be exotic to today's young reader.

However, that which she feels sets her apart, her signifier as an outsider, is her father's role as an assassin in the Polish resistance movement in World War II. *Reckoning* is a rich and complex autobiography awash with themes of family secrets and untold history, as well as documenting the rise of a form of comedy over the past 30 years that reflects Australian culture. Szubanski captures the defining elements of a situation or personality and can reveal, with warmth and compassion, the tragedy as well as the comedy in both the mundane and the exceptional.

Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, Fourth Estate, 2011 (4)

For as long as he can remember, Gogol Ganguli has hated his name. Growing up in an Indian family in suburban America did not make it any easier for him to accept it. So, on his 18th birthday, he changes his awkward moniker by deed poll in the hope of casting it off along with the inherited values it represents. Gogol soon discovers, however, that his identity is bound up in much more than what he is called. No matter how hard he tries, he struggles to reconcile the tension that exists between his Indian heritage and his American values. It is this clash of cultures that is at the heart of this narrative, as well as the ways in which the members of the Ganguli family are shaped by their homeland and changed by the American soil on which they live.

Pair 5

Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible*, Penguin Classics, 2000 (4) (EAL)

Set against the claustrophobic and dangerous times of the Salem witch trials in 1692, *The Crucible* recreates the terrifying reality of a village in New England where a group of young girls, accused of witchcraft, attempt to escape retribution by pointing the finger at others. Of particular fascination is the flawed but ultimately heroic response of the protagonist, John Proctor. His battle with Puritan authorities, jealous neighbours and those bent on personal revenge, suggests that love, integrity and dignity can prevail.

Ham, Rosalie, *The Dressmaker*, Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000 (A) (1)

In the 1950s in fictional Dungatar, a small town in the Victorian wheatbelt, Myrtle 'Tilly' Dunnage returns home to care for her sick mother after a hiatus of some 20 years. The rumour mill quickly kicks into action, but this seemingly does not bother Tilly as she has no desire to reintegrate herself into the everyday business of the town, instead stoically getting on with the matter of tending to her mother. However, she quickly becomes revered for the dressmaking skills she honed while studying in Europe, and the desire to be dressed in Tilly's haute-couture designs must be balanced against the townsfolk's enthusiastic and spiteful marginalisation of the Dunnage women. What ensues is the unravelling of past grievances, a tragic love story and dramatic revenge against small-minded bigotry.

A host of characters are used to highlight the shortcomings of humanity, and question those who act maliciously and cast suspicion upon others in order to direct attention from their own conduct or idiosyncrasies. By adopting a gothic style, Ham is able to offer extreme depictions of the vulgarity of people, and the repercussions of such poor behaviour. *The Dressmaker* questions the nature of heroism and resilience.

Pair 6

Ziegler, Anna, *Photograph 51*, Oberon Books, 2018 (2) (EAL)

Photograph 51 traces the scientific breakthrough, made in the 1950s, regarding the nature and shape of DNA, and juxtaposes it with the social stasis women experienced in scientific circles at the same time. Revolving around the polarising figure of Dr Rosalind Franklin, this play explores the events leading up to conceptualising and understanding the molecular structures of DNA. It was Franklin's 'Photograph 51' – made by Franklin's student, using Franklin's techniques – that finally revealed the double helix shape of DNA. But despite Franklin's dedication to her research and her innovative approaches, she was excluded from the collaborative work done by her male colleagues because of her gender and her abrasive personality. The men who used Franklin's work to inform their own research were awarded the Nobel Prize for that work in 1962 while Franklin died, underappreciated, of ovarian cancer in 1958. Ziegler's play interrogates the role of gender in opportunity, community, success and failure, and poses contemporary questions of how we might make our own 'breakthroughs' to understand the nature and shape of sexism.

Atwood, Margaret, *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*, The Text Publishing Company, 2007 (4)

In Homer's *The Iliad*, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus and cousin to the beautiful Helen of Troy, is celebrated for her wifely devotion and faithfulness. With Odysseus off fighting the Trojan War, Penelope governs his kingdom of Ithaca, raises their son and fends off over 100 suitors. When Odysseus returns, he kills the suitors and hangs Penelope's maids. In this witty and vibrant retelling of Homer's work, Penelope's narrative is interspersed with the choral commentary of the 12 maids. Reminiscent of classical Greek drama structure, *The Penelopiad* uses a variety of writing styles to give voice to the female characters.

Pair 7

Mailman, Deborah and Enoch, Wesley, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, Playlab, 2002 (A) (1) (EAL)

To ensure readers of this script understand the context of this play, this work is preceded by a number of pertinent discussions, establishing the importance of this work and its place in the evolution of Indigenous art. Neville Bonner, Australia's first Indigenous member of parliament, Wesley Enoch, artistic director and Hilary Beaton, dramaturg, discuss Aboriginal creativity and the authenticity of this play in combining forms of art as reflected in the tradition of storytelling. The inclusion of a chronology of the cultural history of Australia, before and after contact, highlights a growing awareness of Indigenous recognition, culminating in the enactment of native title.

The 7 Stages of Grieving script opens with an Indigenous family grieving the death of a grandmother. It explores the anguish experienced in losing family members, land, culture and traditions through issues such as the stolen generations, deaths in custody and racial discrimination. While the focus is on the sorrow of what has been lost, the characters' resilience and the final scene of the Walk for Reconciliation leaves plenty of room for the audience to see some hope in the future of a nation. The mournful nature of personal grief is juxtaposed with the 'joy of being' around your community to celebrate the life of a loved one. Hope comes from an acknowledgement that understanding can come when the majority has greater knowledge of what a displaced people have lost.

D'Aguiar, Fred, *The Longest Memory*, Vintage, 1995 (4)

This concise novel explores the story of Whitechapel, the oldest and most respected slave on a plantation in Virginia in the 18th century. Reflecting on his life, Whitechapel remembers his past as a valued slave and advisor to his master, central to the functioning of the plantation. The key event that changed and marred his life is revealed through his reflections as he considers his role in the events leading to the death of his son. The narrative moves between first, second and third person, and between reflection, verse, diary entry and newspaper report. The novel examines the nature of slavery, sacrifice, power and the insidious nature of racism.

Pair 8

Yousafzai, Malala, with Lamb, Christina, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014 (4) (EAL)

In 2012, 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai was shot on her way home from school in retaliation for her refusal to be intimidated by those who believe that girls should not receive an education, leading to greater international recognition for her cause. While the name Malala may now be well known, the story of how she came to be a leading voice in her own country and the strength that helped her to fight on is less known. *I Am Malala* is not just a biographical account of her life, it tells the story of a generation of girls who still have to struggle for equal opportunities, of the love of parents who valued and encouraged their talented daughter when others saw value only in sons, and of a country that is caught between religious extremism and the rights of the individual.

Warchus, Matthew (director), *Pride*, 2014 (1)

In this British film, *Pride* comes to mean different things for the various characters whose communities come together in London and Wales during the miners' strikes of 1984–85. The story begins with the formation of the London chapter of 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' (LGSM) by Mark Ashton, who decries the treatment of the miners by the government, the police, and the newspapers, and claims, 'If anybody knows what this treatment feels like, it's us.' Immediately, the film explores the nature of support offered and received by the most unlikely of groups at a time of dramatic social upheaval and conservative rule. Challenges are presented when two very different communities come together, but friendship and mutual respect overcome these differences and offer a hopeful message about inclusion and fellowship. The devastating impact of the onset of AIDS is delicately explored, as is the troubling effect on the individual when one is forced to hide their true self due to societal pressure and prejudice. The film ultimately asserts the value of solidarity in fighting for rights, equality and love. (Rating: M)