

British Literature Choices in the DHS Library

Classic Novels

Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid's Tale*. F ATW

In the Republic of Gilead, formerly the United States, far-right Schlafly/Falwell-type ideals have been carried to extremes in the monotheocratic government. The resulting society is a feminist's nightmare: women are strictly controlled, unable to have jobs or money and assigned to various classes: the chaste, childless Wives; the housekeeping Marthas; and the reproductive Handmaids, who turn their offspring over to the "morally fit" Wives. The tale is told by Offred, a Handmaid who recalls the past and tells how the chilling society came to be.

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. F AUS

A classic novel about a self-assured young lady whose capricious behavior is dictated by her romantic fancy. Emma, a clever and self-satisfied young lady, is the daughter and mistress of the house. Her former governess and companion, Miss Anne Taylor, beloved of both father and daughter, has just left them to marry a neighbor.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. F AUS

The romantic clash of two opinionated young people provides the theme. Vivacious Elizabeth Bennet is fascinated and repelled by the arrogant Mr. Darcy, whose condescending airs and acrid tongue have alienated her entire family. Their spirited courtship is conducted against a background of ballroom flirtations and drawing-room intrigues.

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. F AUS

Sense and Sensibility is one of the best loved of Jane Austen's novels, populated by great comic creations like Mrs. Jennings, the unscrupulous cad Willoughby, and guileless and artful women. The novel centers on the sisters Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, who are forced to leave their home with their mother and younger sister, Margaret, and move in reduced circumstances to the West of England. Elinor, the sensible sister, and Marianne, the over imaginative romantic, must rely on a good marriage as a means of support.

Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. F BRO

This is a stormy, intense, introspective novel of the mid 19th century probes the psychology of passion. The heroine is a orphaned governess, penniless and plain, but full of courage and spirit. The hero is a brooding, melancholy figure, a stranger given to rough outbursts of temper. The journey of their romance takes many twists and turns.

Bronte, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. F BRO

Wuthering Heights is set on the bleak Yorkshire moors, where the drama of Catherine and Heathcliff, Heathcliff's cruel revenge against Edgar and Isabella Linton, and the promise of redemption through the next generation, is enacted.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. F CON

In Conrad's haunting tale, Marlow, a seaman and wanderer, recounts his physical and psychological journey in search of the enigmatic Kurtz. Travelling to the heart of the African continent, he discovers how Kurtz has gained his position of power and influence over the local people. Marlow's struggle to fathom his experience involves him in a radical questioning of not only his own nature and values but the nature and values of his society.

Conrad, Joseph. *Lord Jim*. F CON

A haunted sailor, driven from port to port, from island to island; Lord Jim is a man trying to hide from his past. This is a novel of the outcast from civilization finding refuge in the tropics. The natives of Patusan in the Far East worship the bold young Englishman by the name of "Lord Jim", but he despises himself. Tortured by an act of cowardice and desertion that wrecked his career in the Merchant Service years before and tormented by his ideal of what an officer should be, he has fled from scandal further and further East.

Christie, Agatha. *And Then There Were None*. FIC CHR

Considered one of the greatest mysteries of all times, ten strangers, each with a dark secret, are gathered together on an isolated island by a mysterious host. One by one they will die, and before the weekend is out, there will be none.

Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. F DEF

What happens to a woman forced to make her own way through life in 17th century England? This story retells Moll's life from her birth in Newgate Prison to her final prosperous respectability; gained through a life where all human relationships could be measured in value by gold.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. F DEF

An Englishman leaves his comfortable middle-class life to go to sea. This is the diary of a man shipwrecked for almost thirty years on a small isolated island where, using wit and industry, he manages to build a new life.

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. F DIC

A tale of sacrifice and bravery set during the 1789 Revolution, when the sound of the guillotine rang regularly through the streets of Paris. *A Tale of Two Cities* explores the horrors and heroics of humanity in the grip of the terror with a subtle mixture of delicacy and intensity.

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. F DIC

It is the story of several generations of the Jarndyce family who wait in vain to inherit money from a disputed fortune in the settlement of a lawsuit. It is also a mystery, in which Esther Summerson discovers the truth about her birth and her unknown mother's tragic life. The story comes to a climax in a thrilling chase, led by one of the earliest detectives in English fiction, Inspector Bucket.

Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. F DIC

David Copperfield is the story of a young man's adventures on his journey from an unhappy and impoverished childhood to the discovery of his vocation as a successful novelist. In *David Copperfield* Dickens drew on his own experiences to create one of his most exuberant and enduringly popular works, filled with tragedy and comedy in equal measure.

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. F DIC

In what may be Dickens's best novel, humble, orphaned Pip is apprenticed to the dirty work of the forge but dares to dream of becoming a gentleman—until one day, under sudden and enigmatic circumstances, he finds himself in possession of “great expectations”.

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. F DIC

Hard Times weaves the tale of Thomas Gradgrind, a hard-headed politician who raises his children Louisa and Tom without love, of Sissy the circus girl with love to spare who is deserted and adopted into their family, and of the honest mill worker Stephen Blackpool and the bombastic mill owner Josiah Bounderby.

Eliot, George. *Silas Marner*. F ELI

The story's main character is a friendless weaver who cares for only his cache of gold. He is ultimately redeemed through his love for Eppie, an abandoned golden-haired baby girl, who he discovers shortly after he is robbed and raises as his own child. It examines the contrasts between "Fact"—the cold, rationalistic approach to life that Dickens associates with utilitarianism—and "Fancy"—a warmth of the imagination and of the feelings, which values individuals above ideas.

Eliot, T.S. *Murder in the Cathedral*. 822.912 ELI

The Archbishop Thomas Becket speaks fatal words before he is martyred in T. S. Eliot's best-known drama, based on the murder of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1170. Praised for its poetically masterful handling of issues of faith, politics, and the common good, T. S. Eliot's play bolstered his reputation as the most significant poet of his time.

Forster, E.M. *Howard's End*. F FOR

A chance acquaintance brings together the prosperous bourgeois Wilcox family and the clever, cultured, and idealistic Schlegel sisters. As clear-eyes Margaret develops a friendship with Mrs. Wilcox, the impetuous Helen brings into their midst a young bank clerk names Leonard Bast, who lives at the edge of poverty and ruin. When Mrs. Wilcox dies, her family discovers that she wants to leave her country home, Howard's End, to Margaret. Thus Forster sets in motion a chain of events that will entangle three different families and brilliantly portrays their aspirations for personal and social harmony.

Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. F FOR

Among the greatest novels of the twentieth century *Passage to India* unravels the growing racial tension between Indians, uneasy at best with colonial power, and the British, largely ignorant and dismissive of the society they're infiltrating. A sudden moment of confusion results in a devastating series of events that threatens to ruin a man's life, revealing just how deeply and swiftly prejudice has taken root. In exquisite prose, Forster reveals the menace that lurks just beneath the surface of ordinary life, as a common misunderstanding erupts into a devastating affair.

Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. F HAR

In *Tess*, victimized by lust, poverty, and hypocrisy, Thomas Hardy created not a standard Victorian heroine, but a woman whose intense vitality flares unforgettably against the bleak background of a dying rural society. This is a moving novel of hypocrisy and double standards. It tells of Tess Durbeyfield, the daughter of a poor and dissipated villager, who learns that she may be descended from the ancient family of d'Urbeville. Seduced by Alec d'Urbeville, she bears his child. The novel shocked its Victorian audiences with its honesty; it remains a triumph of literary art and a timeless commentary on the human condition.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. F HUX

"Community, Identity, Stability" is the motto of Aldous Huxley's utopian World State. Here everyone consumes daily grams of soma, to fight depression, babies are born in laboratories, and the most popular form of entertainment is a "Feelie", a movie that stimulates the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. Though there is no violence and everyone is provided for, Bernard Marx feels something is missing and senses his relationship with a young woman has the potential to be much more than the confines of their existence allow.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Remains of the Day*. F ISH

Here is Kazuo Ishiguro's profoundly compelling portrait of Stevens, the perfect butler, and of his fading, insular world in post-World War II England. Stevens, at the end of three decades of service at Darlington Hall, spending a day on a country drive, embarks as well on a journey through the past in an effort to reassure himself that he has served humanity by serving the "great gentleman," Lord Darlington. But lurking in his memory are doubts about the true nature of Lord Darlington's "greatness," and much graver doubts about the nature of his own life.

Joyce, James. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. F JOY

Here is one of the masterpieces of modern fiction. This semi-autobiographical Irish novel focuses on Stephen Dedalus, a sensitive and creative young man who rebels against his family, his education, and his country by committing himself to the artistic life.

Lawrence, D.H. *Sons and Lovers*. F LAW

The novel revolves around Paul Morel, a sensitive young artist whose love for his mother, Gertrude, overshadows his romances with two women. Unable to watch his mother die slowly of cancer, Paul kills her with morphine.

Maugham, William Somerset, *Of Human Bondage*, FIC MAU

Originally published in 1915, *Of Human Bondage* is a potent expression of the power of sexual obsession and of modern man's yearning for freedom. This classic tells the story of Philip Carey, a sensitive boy born with a clubfoot who is orphaned and raised by a religious aunt and uncle. Philip yearns for adventure, and at eighteen leaves home, eventually pursuing a career as an artist in Paris. When he returns to London to study medicine, he meets the androgynous but alluring Mildred and begins a doomed love affair that will change the course of his life.

Orwell, George. *1984*. F ORW

A masterpiece of rebellion and imprisonment, where war is peace, freedom is slavery, and Big Brother is watching...

Thought Police. Big Brother. Orwellian. These words have entered our vocabulary because of George Orwell's classic dystopian novel, *1984*. The story of one man's nightmare odyssey as he pursues a forbidden love affair through a world ruled by warring states and a power structure that controls not only information but also individual thought and memory, *1984* is a prophetic, haunting tale.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. F ORW

In this controversial classic fairy tale, a farm is taken over by its overworked, mistreated animals. With flaming idealism and stirring slogans, they set out to create a paradise of progress, justice, and equality, setting the stage for one of the most telling satiric fables ever penned.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*.

Ghosts, murder, and madness abound in this tale of revenge. Set in the Kingdom of Denmark, the play dramatizes the revenge Prince Hamlet exacts on his uncle Claudius for murdering King Hamlet, Claudius's brother and Prince Hamlet's father, and then succeeding to the throne and taking as his wife Gertrude, the old king's widow and Prince Hamlet's mother. The play vividly portrays both true and feigned madness—from overwhelming grief to seething rage—and explores themes of treachery, revenge, incest, and moral corruption.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. F STO

The vampire novel that started it all. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* probes deeply into human identity, sanity and the dark corners of Victorian sexuality and desire. When Jonathan Harker visits Transylvania to help Count Dracula purchase a London house, he makes horrifying discoveries about his client.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. F SWI

Gulliver's Travels describes the four fantastic voyages of Lemuel Gulliver, a kindly ship's surgeon. Swift portrays him as an observer, a reporter, and a victim of circumstances. His travels take him to Lilliput, where he is a giant observing tiny people. In Brobdingnag, the tables are reversed and he is the tiny person in a land of giants, where he is exhibited as a curiosity at markets and fairs.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. 16 Famous British Plays 822.08 CE

Oscar Wilde's madcap farce about mistaken identities, secret engagements and lovers' entanglements still delights readers more than a century after its 1895 publication and premier performance. The rapid fire wit and eccentric characters of *The Importance of Being Earnest* have made it a mainstay of the high school curriculum for decades. Cecily Cardew and Gwendolen Fairfax are both in love with the same mythical suitor. Jack Worthing has wooed Gwendolen as Ernest while Algernon has also posed as Ernest to win the heart of Jack's ward, Cecily. When all four arrive at Jack's country home on the same weekend – the “rivals” to fight for Ernest's undivided attention and the “Ernests” to claim their beloveds – pandemonium breaks loose.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. F WIL

The Picture of Dorian Gray is Oscar Wilde's enduringly popular story of a beautiful and corrupt man and the portrait that reveals all his secrets. Entranced by the perfection of his recently painted portrait, the youthful Dorian Gray expresses a wish that the figure on the canvas could age and change in his place. When his wish comes true, the portrait becomes his hideous secret as he follows a downward trajectory of decadence and cruelty that leaves its traces only in the portrait's degraded image. Wilde's unforgettable portrayal of a Faustian bargain and its consequences is narrated with his characteristic incisive wit and diamond-sharp prose. The result is a novel that is as flamboyant and controversial as its incomparable author.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 305.4 WOO

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf imagines that Shakespeare had a sister; a sister equal to Shakespeare in talent, and equal in genius, but whose legacy is radically different. This imaginary woman never writes a word and dies by her own hand, her genius unexpressed. If only she had found the means to create, argues Woolf, she would have reached the same heights as her immortal sibling. In this classic essay, she takes on the establishment, using her gift of language to dissect the world around her and give voice to those who are without. Her message is a simple one: women must have a fixed income and a room of their own in order to have the freedom to create.

Contemporary Novels

Adams, Douglas, *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Universe*, F ADA

Forty-two. Now read this classic to see what we're talking about. Sort of. It's pretty complicated — you better read the book. Bring a towel. (*Powell's City of Books*)

Seconds before the Earth is demolished to make way for a galactic freeway, Arthur Dent is plucked off the planet by his friend Ford Prefect, a researcher for the revised edition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* who, for the last fifteen years, has been posing as an out-of-work actor.

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. F BUR

Told through a central character, Alex, the disturbing novel creates an alarming futuristic vision of violence, high technology, and authoritarianism. A modern classic of youthful violence and social redemption set in a dismal dystopia whereby a juvenile delinquent undergoes state-sponsored psychological rehabilitation for his aberrant behavior.

Christopher, Lucy, *Stolen*, F CHR

She steps away. For just a second. He pays for her drink. And drugs it. They talk. Their hands touch. And before Gemma knows what's happening, Ty takes her. Steals her away. To sand and heat. To emptiness and isolation. To nowhere. And expects her to love him.

Written as a letter from a victim to her captor, *STOLEN* is Gemma's desperate story of survival; of how she has to come to terms with her living nightmare--or die trying to fight it.

Crossley-Holland, Kevin, *Arthur: The Seeing Stone*. PB CRO

In late 12th century England, a 13-year-old boy named Arthur recounts how Merlin gives him a magical seeing stone which shows him images of the legendary King Arthur, the events of whose life seem to have many parallels to his own.

Fielding, Helen. *Bridget Jones's Diary* F Fie

Here is the daily chronicle of her permanent, doomed quest for self-improvement - a year in which she resolves to: “reduce the circumference of each thigh by 1 1/2 inches, visit the gym three times a week not merely to buy a sandwich, form a functional relationship with a responsible adult, and not fall for any of the following: misogynists, megalomaniacs, people with girlfriends or wives, emotional fuckwits, alcoholics, workaholics, chauvinists, or perverts”. Bridget struggles to keep her life on an even keel - or at least afloat.

Griffiths, Elly, *The Crossing Places: A Ruth Galloway Mystery*, F GRI

The start of an exciting new crime series featuring quirky, tart-tongued archaeologist Ruth Galloway as she investigates a child's bones found on a nearby beach, thought to be the remains of a little girl who went missing ten years before.

McEwan, Ian. *Atonement: A Novel*. F McE

A young girl sees her older sister and a man in a situation she doesn't understand, and subsequently makes an accusation that changes the course of all three lives. This is a study of a life-long search for forgiveness and atonement.

Ness, Patrick, *Chaos Walking Series (Book 1 - The Knife of Never Letting Go)* F NES

In modern-day England, witches live alongside humans: White witches, who are good; Black witches, who are evil; and fifteen-year-old Nathan, who is both. Nathans father is the worlds most powerful and cruel Black witch, and his mother is dead. He is hunted from all sides. Trapped in a cage, beaten and handcuffed, Nathan must escape before his sixteenth birthday, at which point he will receive three gifts from his father and come into his own as a witch—or else he will die.

Ness, Patrick, *A Monster Calls*, F NES

At seven minutes past midnight, thirteen-year-old Conor wakes to find a monster outside his bedroom window. But it isn't the monster Conor's been expecting-- he's been expecting the one from his nightmare, the nightmare he's had nearly every night since his mother started her treatments. The monster in his backyard is different. It's ancient. And wild. And it wants something from Conor. Something terrible and dangerous. It wants the truth. From the final idea of award-winning author Siobhan Dowd-- whose premature death from cancer prevented her from writing it herself-- Patrick Ness has spun a haunting and darkly funny novel of mischief, loss, and monsters both real and imagined.

Townsend, Sue, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 ¾*, F TOW

Adrian Mole faces the same agonies which life sets before most adolescents: troubles with girls, school, parents, and an uncaring world. The difference, though, between young Master Mole and his peers is that this British lad keeps a diary — an earnest chronicle of longing and disaster that has convulsed more than five million readers since its two-volume initial publication.