



Cultural Reading list

#readingmatters

These recommendations have been enjoyed by many of our students.



Does my Head look Big in this? by Randa Abdel-Fattah

The slide opened and I heard a gentle, kind voice: What is your confession, my child? I was stuffed. The priest would declare me a heretic; my parents would call me a traitor.... The Priest asked me again: What is your confession, my child? I am Muslim. I whispered.

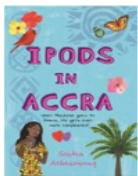
Welcome to my world. I am Amal Abdel-Hakim, a 17 year old Australian-Palestinian-Muslim still trying to come to grips with my various identity hyphens. It is hard enough being cool as a teenager when being one issue behind the latest Cosmo is enough to disqualify you from the in group. Luckily my friends support me, although they have got a few troubles of their own. Simone, blonde, gorgeous and overweight, she has got serious image issues, and Leila's really intelligent but her parents are more interested in her getting a marriage certificate than her high school certificate! . . . And I thought I had problems.



Clap When you Land by Elizabeth Acevedo

Camino Rios lives for the summers when her father visits her in the Dominican Republic. But this time, on the day when his plane is supposed to land, Camino arrives at the airport to see crowds of crying people. In New York City, Yahaira Rios is called to the principal's office, where her mother is waiting to tell her that her father, her hero, has died in a plane crash.

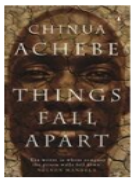
Separated by distance and Papi's secrets, the two girls are forced to face a new reality in which their father is dead and their lives are forever altered. And then, when it seems like they have lost everything of their father, they learn of each other.



Ipods in Accra by Sophia Acheampong

Makeeda's plans for the summer holidays are falling apart! Her parents suddenly announce that the family are going on a trip to visit their relatives in Ghana and then she splits up with her boyfriend Nelson. Can things get any worse?

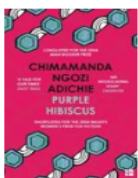
But in Ghana things are different, and Makeeda, the sophisticated London girl, makes some surprising discoveries about herself, her family and her friends. And, while she is struggling to reconcile her two cultures, could it be that she has found true love where she least expected it?



Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Okonkwo is the greatest wrestler and warrior alive, and his fame spreads throughout West Africa like a bush-fire in the harmattan. But when he accidentally kills a clansman, things begin to fall apart.

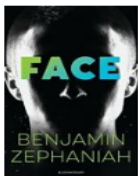
When Okonkwo returns from exile to find missionaries and colonial governors have arrived in the village. With his world thrown radically off-balance he can only hurtle towards tragedy.



Purple Hibiscus by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The limits of fifteen year old Kambili's world are defined by the high walls of her family estate and the dictates of her fanatically religious father. Her life is regulated by schedules: prayer, sleep, study, prayer.

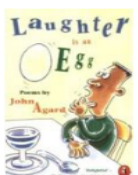
When Nigeria is shaken by a military coup, Kambili's father, involved mysteriously in the political crisis, sends her to live with her aunt. In this house, noisy and full of laughter, she discovers life and love and a terrible, bruising secret deep within her family.



Face by Benjamin Zephaniah

Martin seems to have it all. He is cool, funny and he is the undisputed leader of the Gang of Three, who roam their East London estate during the holidays looking for fun. But one night after the Gang leave a late night rap club, Martin accepts a ride from Pete, a Raider's Posse gang member. Too late, he realises that the car is stolen, and that the police are after them.

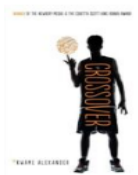
What happens next will change Martin's life and looks, and show him the true meaning of strength, courage, discrimination and friendship.



Laughter is an Egg by John Agard

Laughter is an egg
with a crick-crack face
that can hide in the heart
of the human race.

Tummy tickling, rib-cracking and even wee-yourself laughs can all be found in the pages of this eggstraordinary collection of poems, riddles, jokes and ballads from the wonderful John Agard.



The Crossover by Kwame Alexander

'With a bolt of lightning on my kicks The court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. Cuz tonight I'm delivering'

12 year old Josh and his twin brother Jordan have basketball in their blood. They are kings of the court, star players for their school team. Their father used to be a champion player and they each want nothing more than to follow in his footsteps. Both on and off the court, there is conflict and hardship which will test Josh's bond with his brother. In this heartfelt novel in verse, the boys find that life does not come with a play book and it is not all about winning.



I know why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

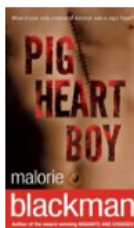
Abandoned by their parents, Maya and her older brother Bailey are sent to live with their grandmother and uncle in the small Southern town of Stamps in Arkansas. Struggling with rejection, they endure the prejudice of their white neighbours and suffer several racist incidents. One day, their father unexpectedly returns and takes the children to live with their mother in St Louis, Missouri. Aged only eight, Maya is abused by her mother's boyfriend, an experience that haunts her for a lifetime. Filled with guilt and shame, she refuses to speak to anyone except Bailey - until she meets Mrs Bertha Flowers, who encourages her love of books, helping her to find her voice and regain her own strong spirit.



Artichoke Hearts by Sita Brahmachari

Twelve year old Mira comes from a chaotic, artistic and outspoken family where it is not always easy to be heard. As her beloved Nana Josie's health declines, Mira begins to discover the secrets of those around her, and also starts to keep some of her own.

She is drawn to mysterious Jide, a boy who is clearly hiding a troubled past and has grown hardened layers, like those of an artichoke around his heart. As Mira is experiencing grief for the first time, she is also discovering the wondrous and often mystical world around her.



Pig Heart Boy by Malorie Blackman

You are thirteen. All you want is a normal life. But most normal kids do not need heart transplants.

So there is this doctor. He says there is a chance for you. But he also says it is experimental, controversial and risky.

And it has never been done before.



Heart Shaped Bruise by Tanya Byrne

They say I am evil. The police. The newspapers. The girls from school who sigh on the six o'clock news and say they always knew there was something not quite right about me. And everyone believes it. Including you. But you do not know. You do not know who I used to be. Who I could have been.

Sometimes I wonder if I will ever shake off my mistakes or if I will just carry them around with me forever like a bunch of red balloons. Awaiting trial at Archway Young Offenders Institution, Emily Koll is going to tell her side of the story for the first time.



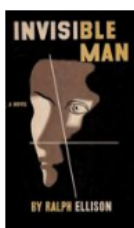
Fasting and Feasting by Adam Federman

In Fasting and Feasting, biographer Adam Federman tells the remarkable, and until now untold, life story of Patience Gray: from her privileged and intellectual upbringing in England, to her trials as a single mother during World War II, to her career working as a designer, editor, translator, and author, and describing her travels and culinary adventures in later years. A fascinating and spirited woman, Patience Gray was very much a part of her times but very clearly ahead of them.



Bhangra Babes by Narinder Dhani

It is Amber, Jazz, and Geena Dhillon's dream come true: Their interfering Auntie is finally getting married and moving out. The girls cannot wait to get the house and their dad back to themselves, and they certainly will not miss their nosy Auntie at all, right? Meanwhile, Amber tangles with a new girl with a bad attitude and falls head over heels for a would be rapper whose attitude might be even worse. The girls' friend Kim just might be the only one in their group with any sense, and could it be? Has darky George Botley blossomed into a Man of Style? Will Amber get her love life straightened out before it ruins Auntie's wedding? And will the girls learn to survive without Auntie around to keep them in line?



Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

After a brief prologue, the story begins with a terrifying experience from the hero's high-school days; it then moves quickly to the campus of a Southern Negro college and then to New York's Harlem, where most of the action takes place.

The many people that the hero meets in the course of his wanderings are remarkably various, complex and significant. With them he becomes involved in an amazing series of adventures, in which he is sometimes befriended but more often deceived and betrayed, as much by himself and his own illusions as by the duplicity and the blindness of others.



Shine by Candy Gourlay

Rosa suffers from a rare condition that renders her mute. She lives on the strange island of Mirasol where the rain never seems to stop and its superstitious population shun people who suffer from Rosa's condition. So she lives hidden away in an isolated house with only the internet for a social life. But Rosa has no desire to leave Mirasol. This is where her mother died and every night she lights a candle on the windowsill. The islanders believe this is the way to summon ghosts, and Rosa wants her mother back.

One day she is befriended by a boy online and she quickly realizes that this is one friendship that can take place in the real world. Can she really trust him? What does he want from her? And then Mother turns up at the front door.



The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Moshin Hamid

'Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard. I am a lover of America'.

So speaks the mysterious stranger at a Lahore cafe as dusk settles. Invited to join him for tea, you learn his name and what led this speaker of immaculate English to seek you out. For he is more worldly than you might expect; better travelled and better educated. He knows the West better than you do. And as he tells you his story, of how he embraced the Western dream -- and a Western woman -- and how both betrayed him, so the night darkens. Then the true reason for your meeting becomes abundantly clear.

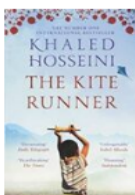


Boy in the Tower by Polly Ho Yen

When they first arrived, they came quietly and stealthily as if they tip-toed into the world when we were all looking the other way.

Ade loves living at the top of a tower block. From his window, he feels like he can see the whole world stretching out beneath him. His mum does not really like looking outside, but it is going outside that she hates. She prefers to sleep all day inside their tower, where it is safe.

Except it is not safe any more. Strange plants have started to take over and tower blocks are falling down around them. Now Ade and his mum are trapped and there is no way out.



The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

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.



Their Eyes were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

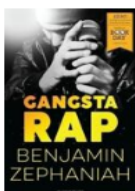
She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her . . .'

When sixteen-year-old Janie is caught kissing shiftless Johnny Taylor, her grandmother swiftly marries her off to an old man with sixty acres. Janie endures two stifling marriages before she finally meets the man of her dreams, who offers not diamonds, but a packet of flowering seeds.



Sawbones by Catherine Johnson

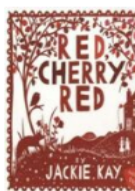
Sixteen year old Ezra McAdam has much to be thankful for: trained up as an apprentice by a well regarded London surgeon, Ezra's knowledge of human anatomy and skill at the dissection table will secure him a trade for life. However, his world is turned on its head when a failed break in at his master's house sets off a strange and disturbing series of events that involves grave robbing, body switching and murder. Sparky, persuasive young Loveday Finch, daughter of the late Mr Charles Finch, magician, employs Ezra to investigate her father's death and there are marked similarities between his corpse and the others. The mystery takes Ezra and Loveday from the Operating Theatre at St Bart's to the desolate wasteland of Coldbath Fields; from the streets of Clerkenwell to the dark, damp vaults of Newgate Prison and finally to the shadowy and forbidding Ottoman Embassy, which seems to be the key to it all.



Gangsta Rap by Benjamin Zephaniah

Ray has trouble at home, and he has trouble at school, until he is permanently excluded and ends up sleeping on the floor of a record shop. What happens to a boy like Ray? If he is lucky, maybe he gets a chance to shine.

The story of three boys who are not easy. They do not fit in. They seem to attract trouble. But they know what they want, and they have got the talent to back it up.



Red Cherry Red by Jackie Kay

A powerful poetry collection full of the drama, musicality and lyricism that Jackie Kay is famed for.

Exploring the themes of identity and age, this collection includes poems about the old days and the new days, and the places associated with an older generation, who often live dreamlike, isolated existences - not only geographically, but also in the memory. Nature and the elements play a big role too: trees, the moon, the sea, fire. Jackie Kay's style is one moment witty, the next melancholic, or gently surreal - and in this brilliant reissued collection, her poems are infused with warmth and colour: in particular, the colour RED.