



# teachingenglish

M A G A Z I N E

Winter 2011



# CONTENTS



- 3 *Teaching English Magazine*  
Poetry Winners



- 11 The Eve of the Re-scheduled Leaving Certificate  
English Examination 2009  
Julian Girdham



- 14 Brief Guide to Texts



- 24 The Relationship Between English  
and Literacy Education  
English Teachers Association of NSW

Cover image: Harry Clarke (1889-1931), *The Song of the Mad Prince*, 1917, National Gallery of Ireland.



The *Teaching English magazine* is published by the Professional Development Service for Teachers.

**Co-ordinator of the Language Group of Subjects:**  
**Dr Kevin Mc Dermott**

Navan Education Centre, Athlumney, Navan, Co. Meath.

Phone: 046 907 8382    Mobile: 087 293 7302

Fax: 046 907 8385    Email: [english@slls.ie](mailto:english@slls.ie)

**Administrators: Esther Herlihy/Joan Shankey**



The Professional Development Service for Teachers is funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan, 2007-2013

★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★

# Teaching English Magazine

## POETRY WINNERS

### SENIOR WINNERS

#### 1st Place

##### Rikuzentakata

Little Ayako sits in class. It is break time.  
She is making paper cranes.

She handles the coloured folds like an expert craftsman.  
The paper seems to dance in her hands.

Her classmates are impressed.  
No one can make a paper crane like Ayako.

"Subarashii!"  
"Sugoi!"

Their praise floats on Ayako's ears.  
She imagines they are praising her grandmother.  
Her mentor.

The weight of two years worth of missing her  
Sits heavily in her childish heart.  
But making paper cranes lightens the load.

Now there is a monstrous grey whale.  
It comes to visit, uninvited.

And devours everything.

Then spits out what's left.  
Leaving everything shock-coloured.

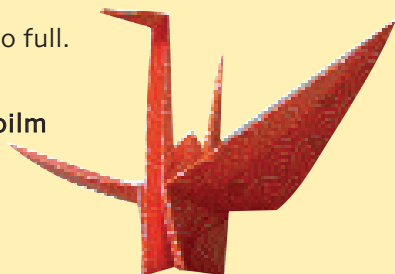
A man in a weary jumpsuit and hard hat  
Paws his way through the dregs of a neighbourhood.  
Searching.

Through a tangle of tatami mats,  
Wood frames that once held a home,  
And the odd Hello Kitty alarm clock,  
He finds a paper crane.  
Sodden and forlorn.

But it is tossed aside.  
No time to contemplate.  
There are more important things to find.

And his heart is too full.

**Rianna Peck**  
**Gaelcholaiste Choilm**  
**Ballincollig**  
**Co. Cork**



#### 2nd Place



##### Suburban Nighttimes

This is where  
Night is never night  
But a shade of sodium lamp.  
Where your earth shattering decisions  
Tear down mountains  
But leave their shadows  
Burnt onto the sky  
Like they were never gone.

This is where cheap cars and  
Motorcycle all swaddled in the  
Cold, cold wind of past  
When you should have been home.  
This is where they come to shred  
These empty, field-friended roads.  
Where they hope against hope  
There is no ghost of other presence  
Here to crash into  
Like they never drove at all.

This is where time is immeasurable  
And landmarks unmarkable  
Lost in the lukewarm, attack-filled  
Night of things  
Undoable.

**Elaine Guckian**  
**Mount Sackville**  
**Chapelizod**  
**Dublin 20**





**Highly Commended - Senior**

**The Chest of Drawers**

Little more than  
firewood

the chest of drawers

lined with  
dust sheets

so I could sleep  
while he painted

**Amy Flood**  
**Loreto Community School**  
**Milford**  
**Co. Donegal**

**Highly Commended - Senior**

**Childhood War Wounds**

Most scrapes were Mum's job,  
cuddles, kisses, cartoon plasters and comfort.  
The bloody messes were Dad's  
The same routine every time,  
we'd cry for Mum and she'd send us to dad.

He'd sit us on the chair,  
go grab the stinging swabs from the car.  
Carefully, not always gently,  
he'd clean the gravel and the dirt  
and get the ice from the freezer.

The rustle of the blue plastic bag  
signalled the freezing pain  
I'd soon feel.  
Numbness ached my bones  
brought streams of tears to my eyes,  
pain pumped in ebb and flow.

The rhythmic repositioning  
of the bag was soon over,  
but even a roasting sun  
couldn't melt the pain or shivers.  
I was bandaged up  
like a little soldier from the war.



Next the pain killer,  
a bag of Walkers crisps  
and a cool glass of Coca Cola,  
ice cubes clinking at the sides.  
It eased the swelling round my two eyes.  
I got my medal for bravery in the form of a hug.

After my recovery,  
I was only too ready to get into the fray  
and run my wound off.  
Sooner or later I would need the medic again.

**Sarah Coll**  
**Loreto Community School**  
**Milford**  
**Co. Donegal**

**Highly Commended - Senior**

**New**

I was there. I witnessed  
This wonderful beginning,  
His shaky start, with unstable legs  
And my heart started singing.

But please, don't misunderstand  
It was by no means pretty.  
It was crimson red and foul-smelling  
And swear-filled and gritty.

I stood at the door,  
Waited and watched,  
For I was too insignificant (and hazard prone)  
To be involved.

The animal wailed in protest,  
While the men cursed and cried.  
The farm dog waited with me,  
His tongue lolling and nostrils wide

And then, in that thick-walled little shed  
On a cold winter night,  
A miracle occurred.  
The most spectacular sight.

Once the sack was cut,  
A fragile creature lay  
Gasping for his first breath  
On a bed of yellow hay

The calf blinked his deep brown eyes,  
His lashes were shockingly long.  
My father and I shared a smile  
And my heart continued its song.

**Catherine Hearn**  
**St. Declan's Community College**  
**Kilmacthomas**  
**Co. Waterford**

**Highly Commended - Senior**

**From the Blue House**

From my window  
I watch  
The world floats by.

He runs from something  
I cannot see.  
Something real.

Occasionally I believe the many  
Menacing black cats  
Illustrate his omens and cross his path.

Day and night I watch him  
Running  
Through treacherous emotions.

The old man's faithful hounds stand by him  
his wife could not.  
The void is infinite  
The dogs help fill it  
They bark. He walks  
I watch.

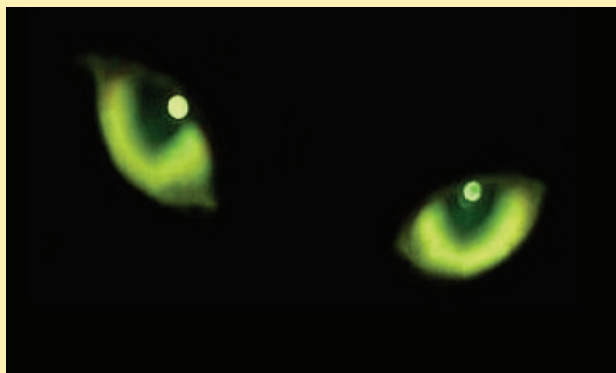
Their presence is reassuring.  
Nameless  
Young men will run  
Old men will walk

They will not leave like others have  
A simple comfort  
A valued one.

From my window  
I watch.  
The world floats by.  
Forever the incessant daydreamer

**Alannah Stritch**  
**Loreto High School Beaufort**  
**Grange Road**  
**Rathfarnham**  
**Dublin 14**

(Inspired by 'The Thought Fox' by Ted Hughes)



**Highly Commended - Senior**

**The Lonely Girl**

Waiting for someone  
on a cold evening  
hot pink lipstick  
turns to black ice

The only crushed girl  
with no party to go to  
no cocktails to drink  
no boom box to dance to  
and no one to be with

He made her feel  
like she was the only girl in the world  
She loves the way he lies

**Joy Clifford**  
**Coláiste Pobail Caisleán Cnucha**  
**Carpenterstown Road, Dublin 15**

**Highly Commended - Senior**

**Troublous House**

I am a falling down house  
Unable to stand: shattered and weak  
As I fall, now lying on the cold  
Chaos, unable to rebuild

Myself, helpless as a new born  
Unable to heal, trapped in the  
Rubble; lights dimming  
Darkness and drought, unable to cry.

Dust and memorabilia cloud,  
Around my mind, plaster cracking,  
Bricks blocking my escape, roof is no more-  
This dark ceiling without a star.

Sparks fly, violent red and orange.  
Walls fall, floors fall, broken  
Mirror reflects the baby  
April snowdrops pity.

The poor Indian pipe, the ugly truth  
Paint is chipping from the haggard  
Old, unloved ruins,  
Abandoned by its tenant.

Time turns embers to flames, a phoenix  
Rising from the ashes, a new  
Silvery moon guides a lavender path  
To a new foundation.

**Ciara Ní Dhúbhgain**  
**Coláiste Phobail Cholmcille**  
**Baile Ur, Oilean Thoraí, Co. Dhun na nGall**

(Inspired by 'Child' by Sylvia Plath)

**Highly Commended - Senior**

**Penultimate Movement**

The views from two windows  
come together  
and make the scene sound.

Scenes of blue, of cold-blue, looking across  
the greens, the golds, the pinky hues  
of Mulroy and Gortnabrad.

The view from the window in the school  
calls to mind an earlier view  
of my father's vegetable patch  
from another window  
where I first saw all that I needed to hear:

laughter, crying,  
a hot crackling stove  
all the sounds of home.

Two views, growing further from me  
than from each other  
are themselves beginning the overture  
of my next song.

**Eleanor Mee**  
**Loreto Community School**  
**Milford**  
**Co. Donegal**



**JUNIOR WINNERS**

**Joint 1st Place - Junior**



**Love Signed 280 SE 4.5**

I pressed down on the accelerator pedal,  
no needs for brakes.  
I sit here in my Mercedes 280 SE 4.5  
in pure white,  
Looking through my sunglasses  
getting a sepia-coloured glimpse  
of my pursuit.  
Handgun knocking in the glovebox.  
The cassette radio screams scandal.  
The clock with no faces murmurs regret.  
I sit silent.

My neon china-town purple-painted lips tighten.  
I see him through my rear view  
mirror.  
He gives me a nostalgic smile and  
revs his car closer to mine,  
Driving his teeth through my windscreen-wiper heart.  
The world outside my windows going by at  
fifty frames per second.  
All images pixilating into a straight line.  
History flies by,  
Carelessly turning the wheels like  
a child pushing a pram.  
Death is the hubcap on my bonnet,  
As he serenades me with flowers,  
Edged with lies  
And Butterflies.

**Sophie Cullen**  
**Notre Dame Secondary School**  
**Upper Churchtown Road**  
**Churchtown**  
**Dublin 14**









**Highly Commended - Junior**

**Dressing Up**

I am going out in this tonight.  
It's not ridiculous. It's nice and bright.  
A hedge! Backwards! You're gone wrong there,  
Of course I'm wearing my under wear.

Ok Ok! It's just a bit short.  
God! You're so rude. Why do you snort?  
Revealing where? Too much of my what?  
Off down here? At this spot?

What do you mean you're not explaining?  
Sure half the time you're found complaining.  
You wonder why I ignore your advise.  
Sure the things you do tell me are nothing but "nice".

My neckline is fine, and don't criticize.  
Oh there you go now, rolling your eyes.  
The back? It plunges? Dad, that's called style,  
You will get used to it after a while.

What are you saying? You've seen it before,  
The neckline, the heels, the short skirt go leor.  
Tell me I'm beautiful, pretty and bright,  
Just like you did to mam on that night.

**Kate Malone**  
**Presentation Secondary School**  
**Mitchel Street**  
**Thurles**  
**Co. Tipperary**

(Inspired by 'Dress Sense' by David Kitchen)

**Highly Commended - Junior**

**"Oliver"**

Hilarious, mischievous, never stops, enthusiastic.  
Brother of John and Paige.  
Lover of my family, my friends, my ego.  
Who feels exhausted, egocentric, rage.  
Who needs love, laughter, time to myself.  
Who fears the past, the future and the end.  
Who gives happiness, sadness, worry.  
Who would like to see the answers, peace and  
happy endings.  
Who lives in a small house on a small estate  
On a small road  
In a small world.

**Oliver Thornton**  
**Mercy Secondary School**  
**Mounthawk**  
**Tralee**  
**Co. Kerry**

**Highly Commended - Junior**

**Inside a six foot garden wall**

To touch was soft, the smell was sweet,  
The rainbow colours shone beneath  
the gentle wind and glistening sun,  
while children nearby were engrossed in fun.

She looked so delicate all alone,  
In this magical place among rubble and stone.  
No wind could move her she stood so tall,  
surrounded by a six foot garden wall.

Her colour was subtle it must be said,  
Not pink or purple or a shade of red.  
But tones of peach and dusky white  
a beautiful picture in the midday light.

The construction workers were on their way  
The rubble was being removed today.  
The choice was clear, now came the hour,  
I had to rescue this lovely flower.

As I took a scissors to cut her down  
It almost seemed like she had a frown  
upon her face so fair and sweet  
No garden is ever quite complete  
Without a rose so fair and tall  
Inside a six foot garden wall.

**Rachel Hodnett**  
**Mount St. Michael**  
**Rosscarbery**  
**Co. Cork**



★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★

★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★ WRITE A POEM ★

# THE EVE OF THE RE-SCHEDULED LEAVING CERTIFICATE ENGLISH EXAMINATION 2009

*Julian Girdham reflects on teaching literature.*

I'm sitting in a school library on the evening of Friday 5 June. It's a beautiful space, designed to be both functional and pleasing, and since we have the gift of an early summer spell, the golden light is still slanting in from the garden at 8.30pm. I'm surrounded by wooden bookshelves, which house a fine collection of fiction, drama and poetry, the best literature written in English since Anglo-Saxon times – the picture of peacefulness.

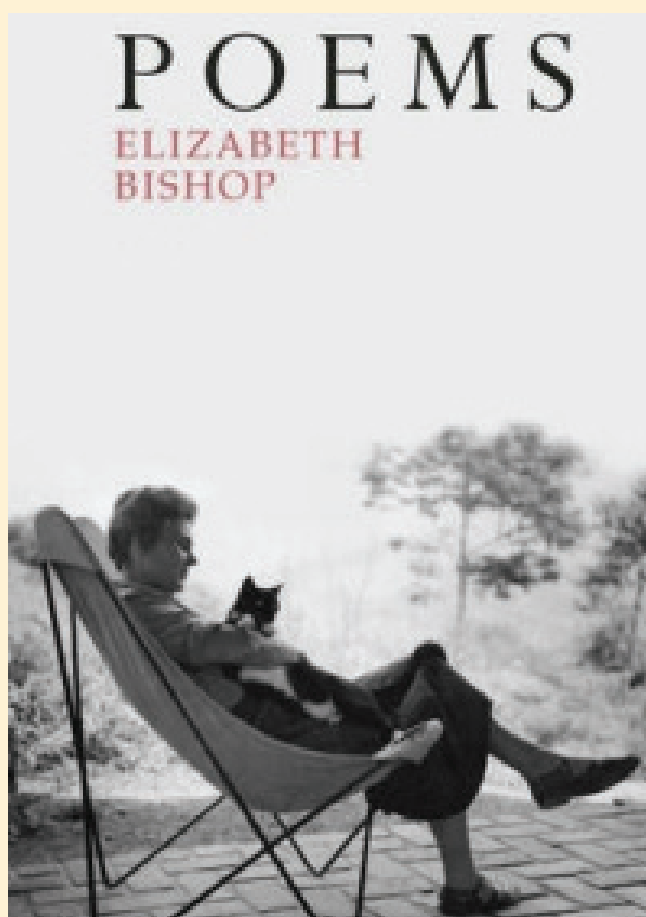
I'm here to supervise 35 teenagers who have chosen to study in this building on the eve of their Leaving Certificate English Literature exam. I'm here mainly to answer questions and help soothe any nerves, but the questions are occasional and mostly just technical, ones that can be answered in two or three sentences. These 18 year-olds seem calmly focussed on their work, and on the rescheduled examination tomorrow morning, which has dominated the Irish media over the last two days.

This isn't surprising. Young people are pretty resilient, and whatever the more hysterical voices

in the media have been saying in the last 48 hours, this change of schedule isn't the most disturbing thing that could have happened to them. After all, such disruption is what most of them will face weekly when they begin their careers; it's the stuff of adult life. Many have already faced much bigger challenges during their Leaving Certificate years – sports finals, family trouble, bereavements. And it seems disproportionate to the point of being distasteful that all this fuss over the psyches of young people, with talk of helplines and counselling services, should come just two weeks after the Ryan Commission reported on the darkest stain in the history of our education system, and probably of the State itself. A visiting American friend comments on how extraordinary it is that for two days the main items on national radio and television news, and in our newspapers, should have been frenzied discussions of themes in *Macbeth*, and poets who many adults haven't heard of – **Adrienne Rich, Derek Walcott, and Elizabeth Bishop.**

That English Literature should be at the centre of this firestorm is paradoxical. The biggest fuss of all has been on which poets are or are not 'coming up'. But poetry is a shy beast you wouldn't expect to see out and about on front pages, bulletin boards and social networking sites. All the works of literature those thousands of teenagers have been exploring and studying for two years are beautiful artefacts created by highly imaginative minds, worked on and honed to their perfection over time. Their rightful arena is what **Keats** in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' called 'silence and slow time'. Take Bishop's heart-breaking 'Sestina', which compresses grief and loneliness in an extraordinary structure. Or **John Montague's** pair of poems about his mother and father, 'The Locket' and 'The Cage', full of honesty and understanding. Or the glory of Keats's 'To Autumn', poised between mellowness and decadence, as 'gathering swallows twitter in the skies'.

*The Irish Times* today, in its two full pages headlined 'Leaving Cert Exam Leak', also mentions twittering, but this time it's an explanation of its very recent re-incarnation with a capital T. This is the flow of language we all





move in now, sweeping over us via television, radio, texting, Facebook, moving locust-like from topic to topic.

Every now and then pupils ask me "What's the point of studying poetry?" (To be fair, they ask that question of almost everything). My answer, partly to wind them up and stimulate an argument, is that poetry is by far the most important subject you can study in school, because:

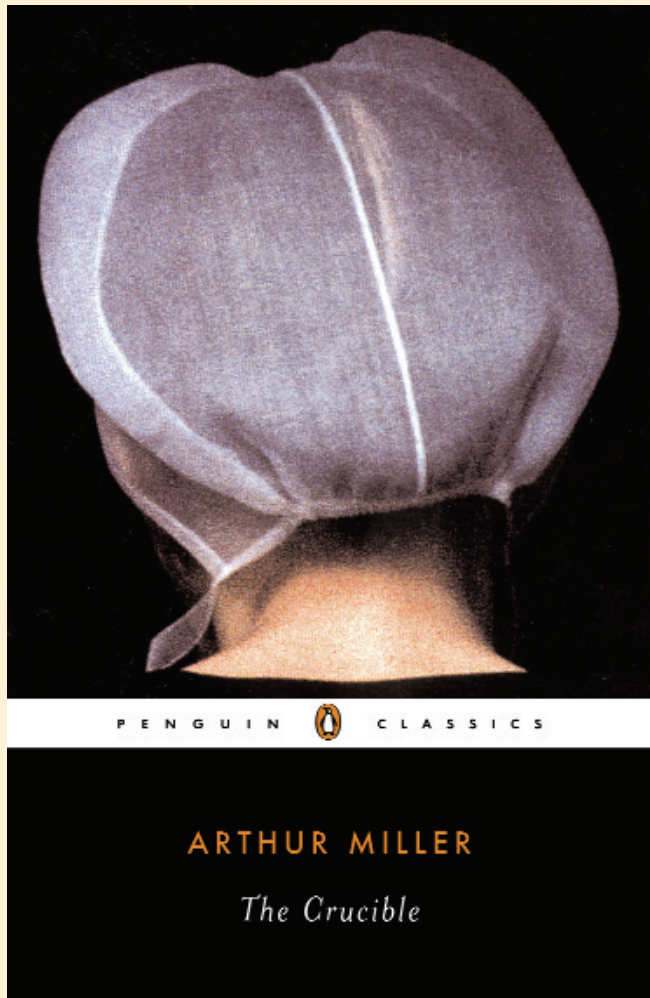
- a) the defining characteristic of human beings is language, and therefore
- b) it is the most important tool each of us has, and therefore:
- c) we need to understand and use this tool to its maximum effect, and:
- d) poetry is the most intense and carefully written form of language, and therefore:
- e) the study of poetry is the most important and practical activity we can possibly undertake.

As **Steven Pinker** writes in *The Language Instinct*, 'Language is so tightly woven into human experience that it is scarcely possible to imagine life without it.' And the official syllabus of this course, published ten years ago, comments: 'Each person lives in the midst of language. Language is fundamental to learning, communication, personal and cultural identity, and relationships. This syllabus aims at initiating students into enriching experiences with language so that they become more adept and thoughtful users of it and more critically aware of its power and significance in their lives'. Right now, it looks like there's no more important skill than critical awareness of language.

This cohort of Higher Level Leaving Cert candidates have all studied a vivid enactment of that importance. The central character of their core **Shakespeare** text is a man who starts by using language in brilliant colour and density: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red.' Is there any speech more clear-sighted than Macbeth's when he considers doing the most terrible thing he could do? He sees everything clearly and articulates this with absolute precision: 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly.'

And then through the course of the play we watch his moral decline, and the simultaneous and intertwined loss of his poetic brilliance. He stops thinking clearly, his actions spiral out of control,

and just before he is killed he says 'And be these juggling fiends no more believed, / That palter with us in a double sense.' A man who used language so vividly has ended up trusting a few unconvincing chants.



The students have also studied another text which demonstrates how language can catch fire and cause not just hysteria but even terror: **Miller's** *The Crucible* has been one of their comparative texts, a story of how mere accusation can become 'truth'. Reverend Hale appears 'loaded down with half a dozen heavy books' and says that they are 'weighted with authority', but Hale learns that blind acceptance of what these books tells him is wrong, and discovers his own truth, articulating it himself rather than parroting the texts. At the very core of the play is the question of language, as Abigail and the girls let their accusations fly, and as John Proctor, under Danforth's relentless pressure, refuses to speak falsely. He will not confess 'Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!' A man discovers his



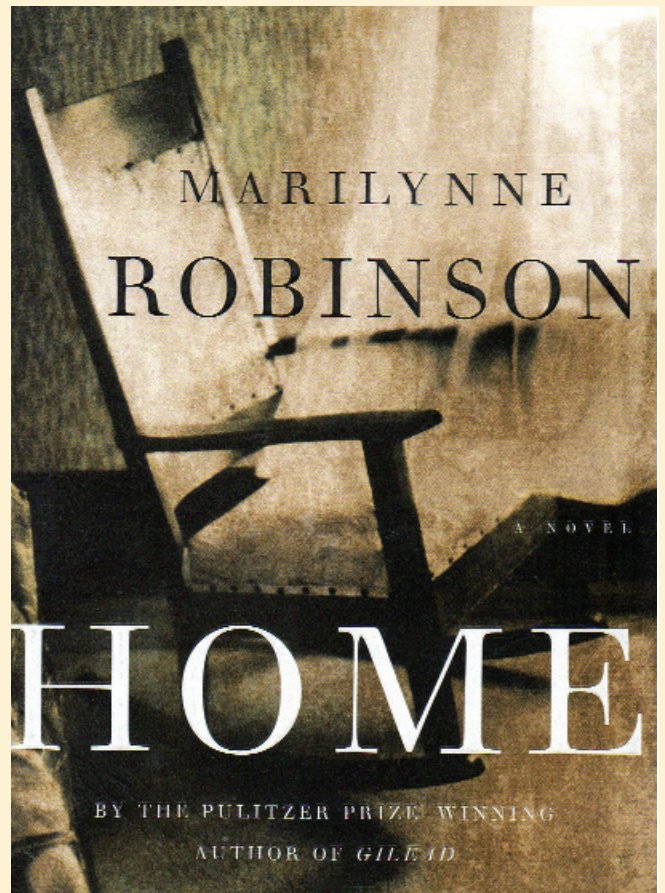
'goodness' under the most terrible pressure. A man discovers what is 'true'.

On a happier note, today I made the first of many raids on the bookshops for holiday reading. For an English teacher there is no more delicious prospect than stretches of time for reading. So beside me is today's haul: **Colm Tóibín's** *Brooklyn*, **Paula Meehan's** *Painting Rain*, **David Lodge's** *Deaf Sentence*, **Marilynne Robinson's** *Home*, **John Harvey's** and **Michael Connelly's** new thrillers. And a novel by a writer I've never read before, *Indian Summer* by **William Dean Howells**, written in 1886, and which I bought because it looks like a **Henry James** substitute, and I can't really read *The Portrait of a Lady* again so soon. This novel begins:

*Midway of the Ponte Vecchio at Florence, where three arches break the lines of the little jewellers' booths glittering on either hand, and open an approach to the parapet, Colville lounged against the corner of a shop and stared out upon the river. It was the late afternoon of a day in January, which had begun bright and warm, but had suffered a change of mood as its hours passed, and now, from a sky dimmed with flying grey clouds, was threatening rain. There must already have been rain in the mountains, for the yellow torrent that seethed and swirled around the piers of the bridge was swelling momentarily on the wall of the Lung' Arno, and rolling a threatening flood toward the Cascine, where it lost itself under the ranks of the poplars that seemed to file across its course, and let their delicate tops melt into the pallor of the low horizon.*



Excellent: the sense of a story ahead, an adventure into a different time. This is the thrill that those of us who love literature keep on seeking, and there's no reason why we can't help our pupils to learn to seek it too: an English teacher who didn't do so would be failing in a dismaying fashion. It's perfectly possible to help



them get the best marks they can in their exams, and also gain something far more valuable, which will stay with them through life.

It's 9.30. Time to ring the bell, pack up the books, turn off the lights and usher them off for a good night's sleep. In exactly twelve hours they'll open that paper and begin 200 minutes of writing. But I don't have to rush to the car. I can amble around the shelves for a while, and then stand in the garden outside, take in the fragrances released by our currently lovely weather, and consider which book I'll read next after the Howells – the Lodge, the Meehan, the Tóibín?

It's time to remember that what really matters is what lasts. I hope when these teenagers have finished their exams, after all the wittering and Twittering, there's still plenty that survives the stress and media maelstrom. I think they'll remember Macbeth's guilt, Elizabeth Proctor's grace, **Philip Larkin's** precision. Literature is a store of the permanent truths of human nature.

Or as a famous poet once expressed it more memorably: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty — that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' Julian Girdham teaches English in St Columba's College, Dublin 16. Check out the English Department's website: <http://www.sccenglish.ie>

# BRIEF REVIEW OF TEXTS PRESCRIBED FOR EXAMINATION IN 2013

AUSTEN, Jane **Emma**

There is only one Emma Woodhouse, "handsome, clever and rich". She is also bored, gossipy, generous, meddling, presumptuous; class conscious, charming, blind, beautiful, intelligent, indulged, cruel, infuriating, mortified, apologetic and, finally, happy. And there is only one man for her, Mr Knightley – wise, gallant, good, and sincere (though very dull!) Austen's comic novel on the dangers of meddling, the folly of youth, the presumptions of the idle wealthy and the ennui of life for a spirited young woman with no real purpose in life.

Ballard, J. G. **Empire of the Sun**

Based on his experience, this is Ballard's brilliant, clear-eyed, account of an English schoolboy lost in Shanghai after the Japanese invasion, during World War II. This is a novel of displacement, of death marches and internment, and the compromises made in order to survive. There is a great cast of characters from Jim, the enterprising young hero, the dignified and kind Dr Ransome, and the immoral Basie. Ballard succeeds in conveying both the squalor and the bravery of war, its brutality and its hallucinatory beauty. The writing has a cinematic flavour and there are numerous memorable scenes.

BINCHY, Maeve **Circle of Friends**

Although this is a long novel, it is not a daunting read. Set in Ireland in the late 50s, the novel tells the story of Eve and Benny two friends from the small town of Knockglen, who go to Dublin to attend university. Their encounters with Jack Foley and Nam Mahon teach them about true friendship. Binchy's warm, conversational style, as she charts the up and downs of the two friends in life and love, engages the reader and makes us empathise with her heroines.

BRANAGH, Kenneth (Dir.) **As You Like It (Film)**

This fast-moving version of Shakespeare's play is an intricate tale of love ("a merry war") and betrayal, jealousy and reconciliation. Under the comic surface lies an exploration of chastity and marriage. Shot on location in Tuscany, the film is beautiful to look at and the comedy is diverting, though whether the casting is wholly successful is a moot point. Experienced Shakespearean actors and American film stars play alongside each other. And there is the age old question of the degree of misogyny in the text.

BRONTË, Emily **Wuthering Heights**

Classic romantic novel of consuming passions, played out against the wild Yorkshire moors. Cathy and Heathcliff are the unhinged, tempestuous lovers, who wreak havoc all round them. A dense, overwritten, overwrought tale of passion, jealousy and revenge. A demanding read but who can resist its peculiar madness: *I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind; not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.*

CHATWIN, Bruce  
**In Patagonia**

Chatwin's account of his journeys in the southern tip of South America, first published in 1977, established a new kind of travel writing, which mixes evocative description, amusing anecdotes, oral tradition, odd bits of history and historical narrative and accounts of local outlaws! A genuine original from a writer who died prematurely in 1989.

CUARÓN, Alfonso (Dir.)

**Children of Men (Film) NEW TEXT**

Adapted from PD James' novel, *Children of Men* is set in the near future in an England ruled by an authoritarian government. The countryside is overrun by competing militia and thousands of refugees flood into the country. Two decades of human infertility have created an atmosphere of hopelessness among young and old alike. And then a young West African refugee is discovered to be pregnant. Clive Owen plays the ordinary man required to be extraordinary in protecting the young woman, who represents the hopes of the entire world, but who is also wanted as a trophy by competing forces. The film's gritty realism is offset by the themes of hope and regeneration. The film's ending leaves room for different interpretations which should generate good debate especially on the question of the general vision and viewpoint which emerges in viewing the film.





CURTIZ, Michael (Dir.) **Casablanca** (Film)

Set in Morocco, during World War II, Rick's nightclub is a haven for refugees hoping to obtain transit documents that will eventually allow them to reach the USA. Rick's apparent neutrality and his willingness to entertain both Vichy and Gestapo forces is called into question when Ilsa, the great love of his life, and her husband, Victor Laszlo, a famous Czech nationalist and Resistance leader, show up in his bar. For many, *Casablanca* is the greatest example of the classic Hollywood film. It was shot entirely in a Hollywood studio, using studio actors, writers and directors. Bogart's world-weary Rick Blaine is one of the most iconoclastic figures in cinema history and the famous ending will generate plenty of debate and discussion in class. A genuine 'classic' movie.

FITZGERALD, F. Scott

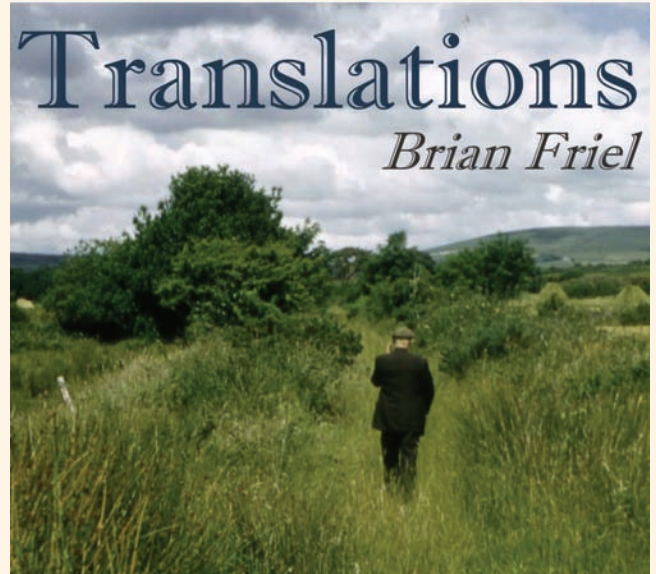
### **The Great Gatsby**

Fitzgerald's novel on the search for love and meaning; the lure of money and power; the difference between the wealthy and the social elite; and the moral and social fog that surrounds the restless Jay Gatsby. The novel is a satire on the lives of the idle nouveau riche. And yet, Fitzgerald seems to be as seduced by Gatsby as he is appalled by the emptiness of his life. And Gatsby's life represents the triumph of style over substance. It's a novel that a new generation of readers, accustomed to 'celebrity culture' will understand immediately. And they will also appreciate the way in which Fitzgerald uses the automobile to highlight the emptiness of The American Dream, where wealth is pursued as an end in itself and the pursuit proves futile. Of course this did not prevent Fitzgerald from aping the lifestyle of Gatsby in his private life ... First published in 1925, the novel still retains its freshness and energy.



FRIEL, Brian **Translations** **NEW TEXT**

Friel's play, set against the background of the British survey of Ireland in 1833, in which the countryside was mapped and place names recorded in anglicised form, explores the relationship between two cultures and two languages. The complicated relationship between Ireland and England is explored



through the lives and loves, the hopes and disappointments of a small set of characters in the town of Baile Beag. The love story between Maire and Lieutenant Yolland anchors the play and brings into focus many of its themes, including the conflict between the generations. And the play touches on the conflict between economic development and the erosion of culture which will almost inevitably follow it, in a way that speaks to our current national concerns. The uncertain ending of the play adds to the dramatic impact. Gentle, humorous, thoughtful, inventive, challenging, *Translations* presents Friel at the height of his powers.

FULLER, Alexandra

### **Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight**

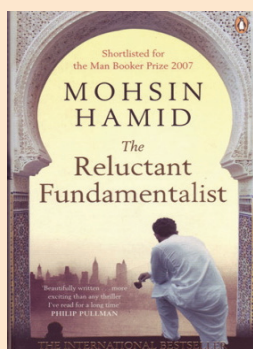
This is an award-winning memoir by the English-born writer, Alexandra Fuller, whose family moved to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) when she was little. This is a dazzling piece of writing and captures the many faces of the Africa she knew as a child: beautiful, hair-raising; frightening, wild, startling. The memoir is set during the Rhodesian Civil War. Fuller writes from the perspective of a white child in a colonial family. They are part of the system built upon race, even as they are victims of that system. The memoir opens with a picture of the seven-year-old Fuller putting bullets into a gun, and this establishes the bizarre circumstances of her life, where a trip to town for groceries involves a mine-proofed Land Rover and an armed escort. The memoir charts a bleak family history (three siblings die in infancy, and their deaths destroy her mother) but it is lightened by humour and the perspective of the child narrator. This is a fierce book, full of love for a country that is far away and lost forever.

HAMID, Moshin

### The Reluctant Fundamentalist

Written in the wake of the attacks on September 11 2001, on the World Trade Centre in New York, Hamid's novel is an intelligent and thought-provoking read. Changez, the narrator, speaks to a stranger in a café in the Pakistani city of Lahore. Bearded and dressed in traditional clothes, he speaks perfect English.

He has been educated at Princeton. As he tells his story, one of growing disenchantment with all things American and Western, the real reason for the encounter in the café becomes apparent. Clever, poised, with the feel of a thriller, this is an interesting novel on identity and transformation, and the misunderstandings and prejudices that exist between East and West. In a clever twist, the 'fundamentalist' of the title applies as much to the American company Underwood Samson, for whom Changez worked, whose motto is: "focus on the fundamentals." Some readers consider the novel to be too clever, too knowing and, ultimately, manipulative. It is mannered. The narrator's name, for example, 'Changez' is almost silly and the girl with whom he falls in love is Erica (Am-Erica). For all that, a provocative and engaging read.



HARDY, Thomas

### Tess of the D'Urbervilles

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is one as Hardy's finest novel. It is a dark tale of love, betrayal and murder. Hardy is not the easiest writer to read. Sometimes the language is clunky and the plotting is laboured. However, he is also capable of brilliant lyrical description and his stories are compelling, none more so that *Tess*. The novel tells the story of Tess Durbeyfield, a beautiful young woman from a poor family. When her parents learn that they are related to the wealthy D'urbervilles, Tess is sent to solicit help from their 'relations' at the family seat at Tantridge. Here the young woman is pursued and violated by Alex D'Urberville and becomes pregnant. Her child dies. Wracked by guilt and feelings of worthlessness, Tess goes to work on a dairy farm where she meets and falls in love with Angel Claire. The two marry. On her wedding night, Tess confesses her secret and is rejected by her husband. After a chance meeting with Alex, Tess succumbs to her 'fate' and becomes his mistress. When Angel comes back into her life, Tess seeks a

desperate remedy... Melodramatic, far-fetched, but also ignited by Hardy's passionate anger at the injustices facing his young heroine, this is a memorable read. Interestingly, some of the reviews of the novel were so negative and personal that Hardy vowed never again to write fiction.

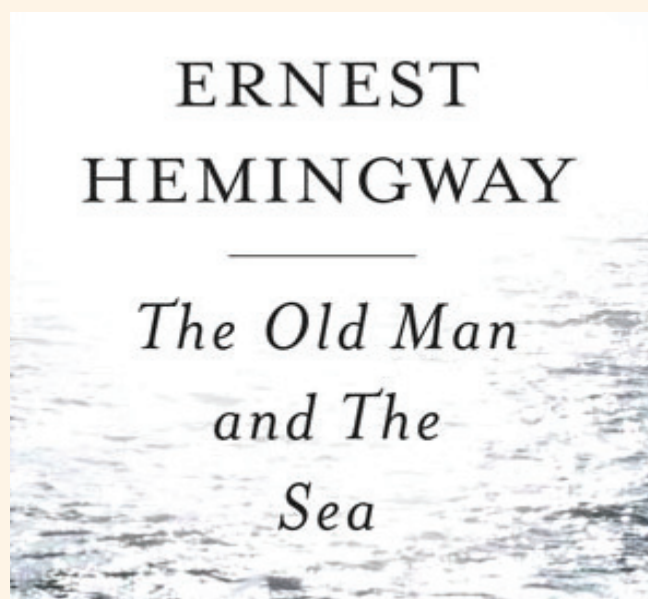
HARRIS, Robert **Pompeii**

On the morning of August 24 A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the city of Pompeii, killing thousands of people. Thomas Harris brings this story to life in a novel that has a contemporary feel. The last hundred pages, describing the destruction of the city, are terrific and, though we know the end of the story, Harris creates real suspense and drama. The Sherlock Holmes at the centre of the novel is Marius Attilius, a young engineer from Rome. As he sets out to discover the cause of a water shortage in the area of Naples, he finds himself in the new town of Pompeii on the slopes of Vesuvius. What follows is a detective story of new money, local corruption, dodgy developers, love and heroism, with more than a passing similarity between the Roman Empire and contemporary America (or Ireland, for that matter) to amuse or irritate. A readable, stylish thriller and historical novel.

HEMINGWAY, Ernest

### The Old Man and the Sea **NEW TEXT**

Told with great economy and clarity, Hemingway's celebrated novel tells the extraordinary struggle of Santiago, the old Cuban fisherman, to bring home the greatest fish he has ever caught. Told with the simplicity of a parable, Hemingway portrays the old fisherman as a hero in an epic tale. In the old man, Hemingway celebrates the nobility of heroic struggle and simplicity.





**ISHIGURO, Kazuo** **Never Let Me Go**

Ishiguro's dystopian novel explores the dangers of scientific advances in contemporary society. Hailsham is a seemingly idyllic boarding school in the heart of the English countryside, dedicated to the welfare of the children who reside there. However, through the narrative of Kathy H, a 'carer' at the school, the dark secret of the institution is revealed. The school is a sham a place as twisted as Miss Havisham's eerie residence in *Great Expectations*. The children at Hailsham are 'donors', cloned to provide healthy organs so that other 'normal' people might live. So slyly does the truth of the society creep up on you in the reading of the novel that the impact is unforgettable. Margaret Atwood described the novel as like a cross between Enid Blyton and *Blade Runner* and this catches something of the strangeness of the work. Written in his customary spare, flat style, this is a novel of real power and purpose, in the tradition of Orwell. It brilliantly mimics society's ability to cover morally dubious practices under euphemism and scientific language and make the monstrous seem normal. (263 Pages)



**JOHNSTON, Jennifer**

**How Many Miles to Babylon?**

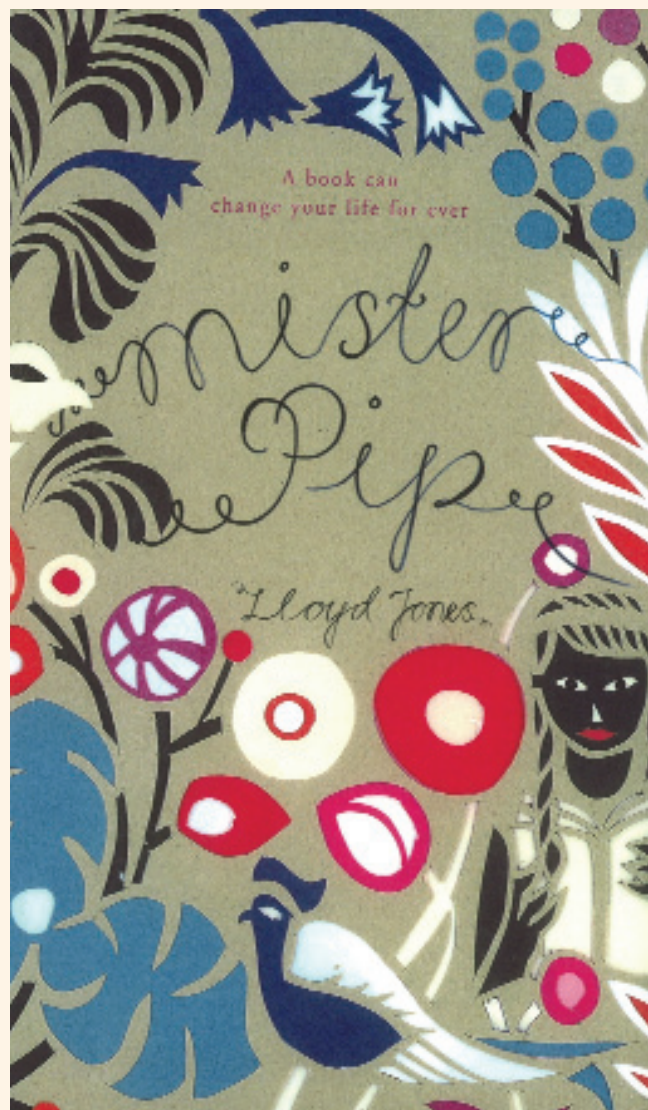
Two boys, separated by class and religion, grow up as friends on a large country estate. Their relationship is frowned upon and they are forced apart. When WW1 begins, both young men leave to fight. We follow their careers separately until they meet again near the dramatic and moving end of the novel. Brilliantly written, with a number of superb set pieces, Johnson's novel is a meditation on class, war, loneliness and loss. A great favourite among students.

**JONES, Lyod**

**Mister Pip** **NEW TEXT**

Set in Papua New Guinea during the Civil War of the 1990s, Lyod Jones's brilliant novel brings together the atrocities of war, Charles Dickens, and the art of storytelling. The novel is narrated by 13-year old Matilda. As the story opens, the school has closed, the teachers have fled, and a blockade has cut her village off from the outside world. The only remaining white man is Mr Watts. He feels at home in the jungle and he loves Dickens. He starts to teach school hoping to

make the classroom 'a place of light'. When he promises to introduce them to Mr Dickens, the children imagine someone bearing food and medicine. What they get instead is Mr Watt's reading of *Great Expectations*. When the book is burnt, the novel takes an unexpected turn. The novel manages to be charming and brutal, dreamy and clear-eyed in one. (223 Pages)

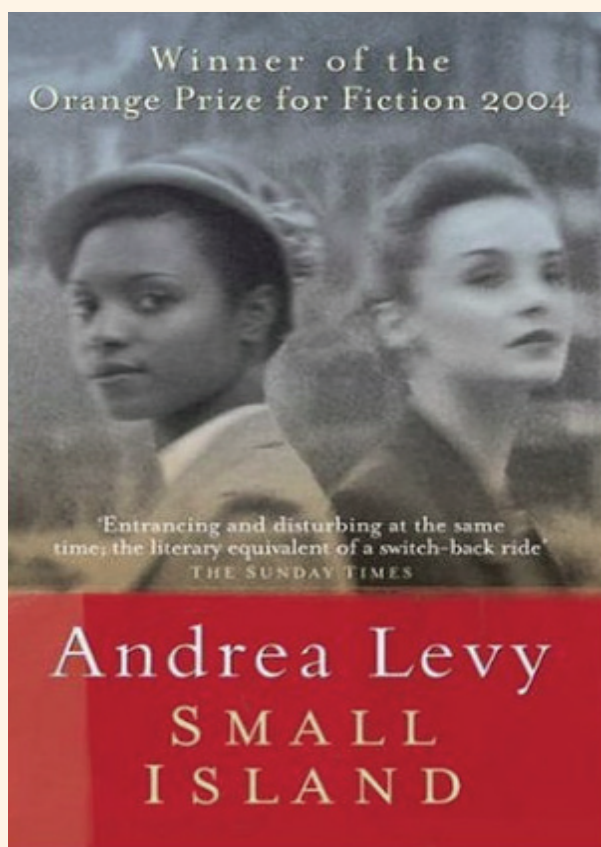


**KEANE, John B** **Sive**

First produced in Listowel in 1959, the play tells the story of Sive, a young orphan, who lives with her grandmother, her uncle and his bitter wife, Mena. Mena conspires with the local matchmaker to sell Sive in marriage to Seán Dóta, a "worn, exhausted little lorgadawn of a man", Despite the protests of Sive and her grandmother, the arrangement proceeds until the evening before the wedding when Sive takes her fate into her own hands with tragic consequences. A strong tale of innocence, lechery and betrayal. Contemporary young readers will question Sive's willingness to proceed as far as she does with the arrangements made for her.

LEVY, Andrea **Small Island** NEW TEXT

Andrea Levy's *Small Island* is set in post-world war two Britain and explores the immigrant experience of a young Jamaican woman, Hortense and her English landlady, Queenie Blight. The novel reads like an old-fashioned family drama. It deals with big themes (racism and class) but does so in a non-preachy way. It highlights the role played by Jamaican soldiers in the British army in the Second World War but the less than warm welcome many of them received when they started appearing on the streets of London. Levy is a terrific writer, who has created four memorable characters in the novel – the two women and their husbands. She has a good ear for dialogue and writes with sly good humour. This is a really well-written, thoughtful, enjoyable (though long) novel. (448 pages)



LEONARD, Hugh **Home Before Night**

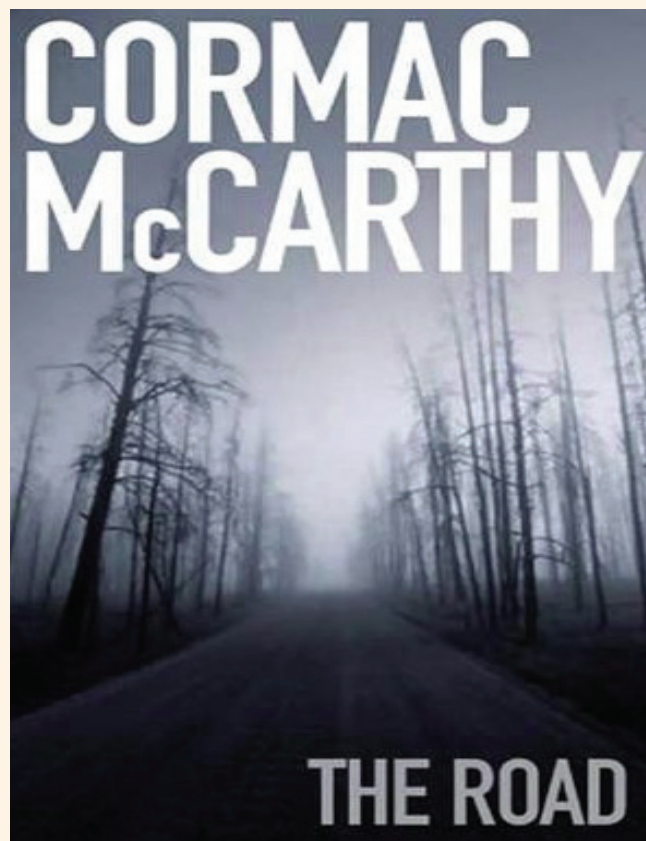
Leonard's charming, witty, nostalgic memoir of growing up in Dalkey with his much loved Da and his fierce, though good-hearted, mother. The memoir captures the 30s and 40s brilliantly. It has some great set pieces delivered with real skill and insight and vivid portraits of a host of memorable characters. Yes, it is sentimental, in the way that Dickens is sentimental, but none the worse for that. The prose is clear, simple and elegant. Young writers will learn a great deal about personal writing from reading a master at work.

LESSING, Doris **The Grass Is Singing**

Dark, brooding and gripping, Lessing's novel is a study in the psychology and exercise of power and the politics of gender and race. Set in Africa it tells the story of the life and murder of Mary Turner, wife of a struggling farmer. Lessing portrays Mary as a flawed and weak person, who is trapped in a marriage and a life from which she cannot escape. Strong forceful writing on the corrupting influence of both colonialism and patriarchy which, by concentrating so intently on the story of Mary Turner, never strays into abstraction.

McCarthy, Cormac **The Road** NEW TEXT

McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel tells the journey undertaken by a father and his young son over a period of several months, across a desolated American landscape, following an unnamed catastrophe that has destroyed much of civilization and almost all life on earth. The journey is harrowing and the man and boy encounter horrors on the way. The novel ends on a note that may be read as optimistic. A novel of despair, endurance and love which raises important questions about the nature of humanity and the conflict between the need to survive and the need to connect with other human beings. The novel takes much of its force from the context of 9/11 and the environmental disaster that may follow from global warming. A harrowing and emotionally shattering read that is also tender and compelling.





**MCDONAGH, Martin** **The Lonesome West**

McDonagh is an exciting voice in Irish theatre. In *The Lonesome West* Quentin Tarantino meets J.M. Synge or J.B. Keane meets *Father Ted* in this black comedy set in Leenane, the “murder capital” of the west. Featuring fratricide, sibling rivalry, a doubting-priest and a tough-talking teenager girl, the play reveals McDonagh’s gift for language and exuberant comedy. Funny, dark, surreal, McDonagh will appeal to many Leaving Certificate students and provoke interesting debate on the way ‘Irishness’ is represented. Is the play a satire? Is it a parody? McDonagh’s work will be known to many students through his debut feature film, *In Bruges*.

**MEIRELLES, Fernando (Dir.)**  
**The Constant Gardener (Film)**

Part thriller, part love story, Meirelles’ film explores the cynicism of the international pharmaceutical industry and the unholy alliance of Western Governments and Global pharmaceutical companies. Ralph Fiennes plays Quayle, a quiet, unobtrusive British diplomat and the constant gardener of the title. He is stationed in Nairobi in the British Embassy. Following a whirlwind



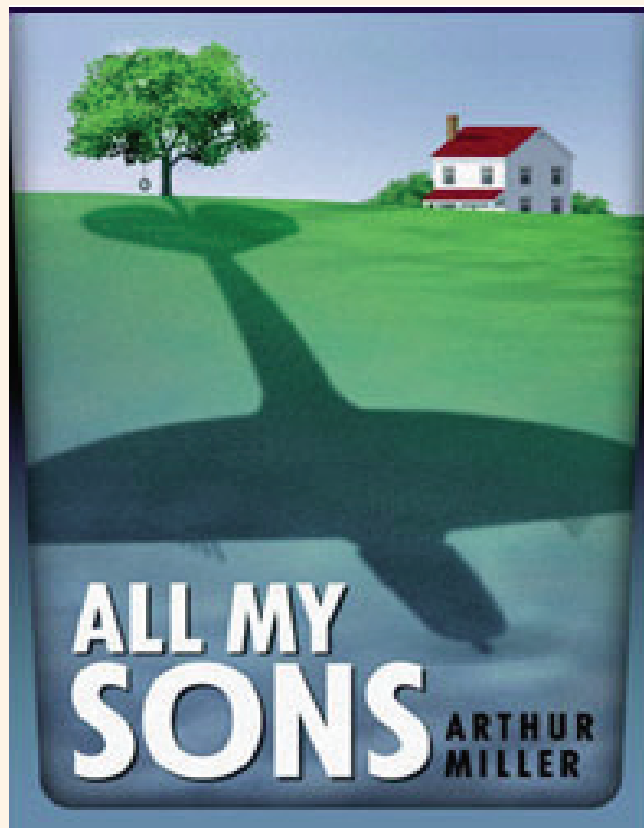
romance Quayle marries the radical, impetuous Tessa and takes his new wife to Kenya with him. There, activist that she is, Tessa works with the poor and investigates the activities of pharmaceutical companies in drug testing. When she is killed in suspicious circumstances, Quayle sets out to find out the truth behind her death and the unsavoury rumours

that surround it. In undertaking his personal odyssey, Quayle learns that his wife was murdered and is forced to confront the moral corruption of his government and its collusion with an unscrupulous industry. Quayle’s real quest is, however, personal - what he finds out about himself in his search for the truth. And this focus on character prevents the film from becoming hectoring or issue-driven. Great acting, beautiful cinematography and well-judged direction bring this story vividly to life on the screen.

**MILLER, Arthur** **All My Sons** **NEW TEXT**

Miller’s play about Joe Keller, a family man, who sacrifices everything, including his honour and integrity, in order to make his family prosper. The play is set in August 1947, in the mid-west of the U.S.A. During the Second World War, Joe’s factory

manufactured parts for military aircraft. Rather than lose a contract Joe knowingly shipped out defective parts to the military. Twenty planes were lost. At his trial, Joe denied he knowingly shipped out the defective parts. Now, two years after the end of the war, the full horror of his action is revealed, and his past deed comes back to haunt him. As in a Greek tragedy, the true story emerges with devastating consequences for the family Joe sought to support.



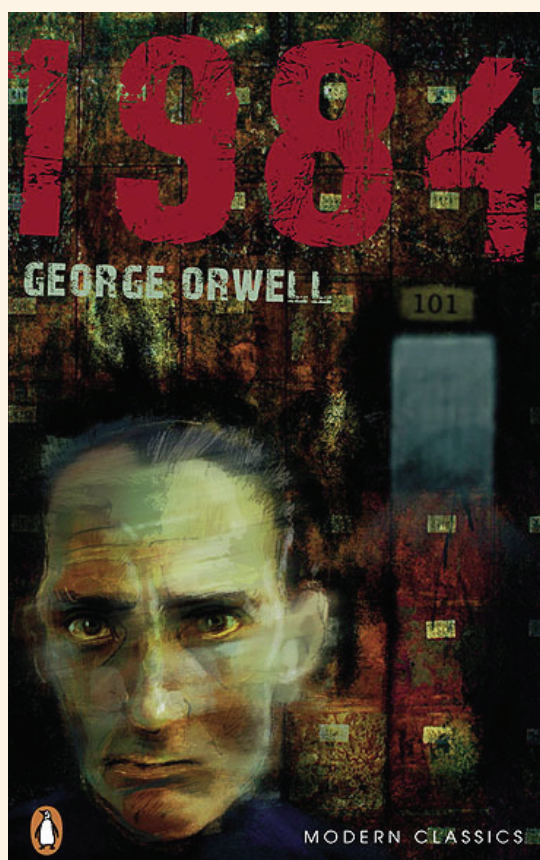
**NGOZI ADICHIE, Chimamanda**  
**Purple Hibiscus**

This debut novel by the young Nigerian writer has been widely praised. The story is narrated by the 15-year old Kambili. She describes a life of apparent privilege. However, her wealthy father is a fanatic and his strict adherence to Catholicism makes life a misery for his wife and family. A kindly aunt alerts Kambili to the possibility of a different kind of life, free of fear and free of domestic tyranny. The novel is grounded in the domestic world but explores themes and issues which move beyond the boundaries of the personal and the familial. Through the eyes of the young narrator, we witness the conflict between Catholicism and the tribal tradition of animism and ancestral worship. We also witness the pernicious effect of religion in a society that is crumbling and struggling with the aftershocks of colonization. Kambili’s voice is sad, poignant and hopeful.

**ORWELL, George 1984 NEW TEXT**

Orwell's dystopian novel on a future society in which state surveillance pervades all aspects of the lives of citizens, and the private world of relationships and emotions is driven underground. In the world of the novel the Party rules over the proles and keeps them in subjection. Total allegiance is demanded not only in body but in mind, too. The leader of the totalitarian state is Big Brother whose leadership condemns reason and individuality. Winston Smith, the central character of the novel, who rewrites past newspaper articles to make them fit with the party's version of the truth, hates the Party and harbours rebellious thoughts. He embarks on a clandestine love affair with Julia with almost inevitable consequences.

Orwell's novel is part political polemic, part science-fiction. Interestingly, the new global economy and the pervasive mass media have created a more benign version of the future that Orwell imagined, while the 'reality-television' programme *Big Brother* pays its own kind of homage to Orwell.



**PICOULT, Jodi My Sister's Keeper**

A popular best-seller which, like Ishiguro's *Never Let me Go*, explores the ethics of modern medicine. The central character is Anna, a bright 13-year-old, who has acted as a donor for her older sister, who suffers from leukaemia. When

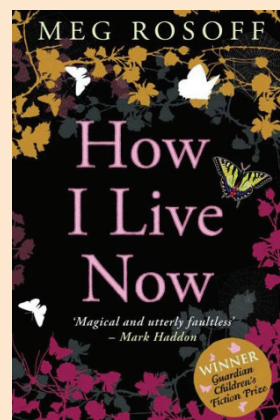
her sister needs a kidney, Anna takes legal action for the right to decide the medical procedures to which she will or will not be subjected. Told from a variety of perspectives, the novel nimbly moves through the emotional, legal and familial repercussions of Anna's decision. Not all of the novel works, but it does race along at a break-neck speed and ends with a real surprise, though the final twist of the plot may tie things up far too neatly for some readers. Picoult's books are a publishing sensation, devoured by many youthful readers. Read *My Sister's Keeper* to find out why. (422 pages)

**QUINN, Marian (Dir.) 32A (Film)**

"I remember that summer in Dublin." The old Bagatelle song might serve as the anthem for *32A*, which tells the story of Maeve Brennan during the summer of 1979. Maeve is growing up, just entering her teenage years, about to get her first bra. She yearns to be older than she is; she yearns to be in love; she yearns to have more freedom than she has. Freedom is symbolised by the park and the local disco, The Grove. Home is where you try to hide as much about your life as you can and parents are obstacles you have to circumvent. Escape is Dollymount Strand. The film is set in the Dublin suburb of Raheny, and the world of the girls is far away from the wider context of Ireland, in the late 1970s. The relationship between Maeve and her three friends is the focus of the film. The girls are all different and the difference makes for much of the humour in the film. *32A*, the feature debut of director Marian Quinn, is one of those rare things, a coming-of-age film told from the perspective of a young girl. The themes of friendship, loyalty and growing up are handled with skill. The film features terrific performances from the young cast and creates a world that every teenage girl will recognise.

**ROSOFF, Meg How I Live Now**

Rosoff's work is marketed as Young Adult fiction, but she is one of those writers whose work is so sophisticated that it can be read by young and not so young adults alike. The central character is Daisy, a fifteen-year-old New Yorker who comes to stay with her bohemian English cousins in an English country manor. The family is happily dysfunctional, unconventional and close to





nature. Daisy falls in love with Edmond and they develop an almost telepathic understanding. When war breaks out, (the novel is set in an alternative present) the cousins are left to fend for themselves. The question then becomes, "how will these child-adults live in the absence of adults?" The answer is more hopeful than that provided by *Lord of the Flies*. Daisy is a terrific narrator, breezy, intelligent, infuriating. Some readers may question the suitability of some of the elements of the novel for young adult readers – Daisy's love for her cousin is not chaste; she is prone to anorexia ... And then there's the lack of punctuation and the mixing of tenses – but most will fall in love with the narrator and with Rosoff's memorable and lyrical novel. Winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction prize and a host of other prizes. (pages 208)

SAVATORES, Gabriele (Dir.)

### **I'm Not Scared (Io Non Ho Paura) (Film)**

Set in the southern most tip of Italy over a long, hot summer, *I'm Not Scared* is a coming-of-age film that bristles with suspense and menace. The film's narrative focuses on ten-year-old Michele. He hangs out with a gang of friends; adores his frequently-absent father; and fights with his beautiful and troubled mother. By accident, he stumbles across a boy held captive in a pit. Curious and fascinated, he treats the discovery as a guilty secret and begins to visit the boy on a regular basis. To his dismay he finds out that his father is one of the gang who have kidnapped the boy and who are demanding a ransom from his wealthy father. His mother dreams of the lovely things the money will allow her family to do. Michele thinks of the young boy in the pit. What makes the film so successful is the way in which the moral conundrum is played out, allied to the brilliant visual style of the film-making, where so many memorable images speak to the themes of the film. In a word: terrific.

SHAKESPEARE, William **Macbeth**

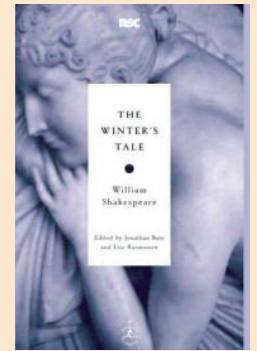
Dark imagery, violence, regicide, madness, suicide, witchcraft and despair. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* moves with an irresistible force towards its bloody climax. The shortest and fast-moving of the major tragedies, the clear focus of the play appeals to students.

SHAKESPEARE, William

### **A Winter's Tale**

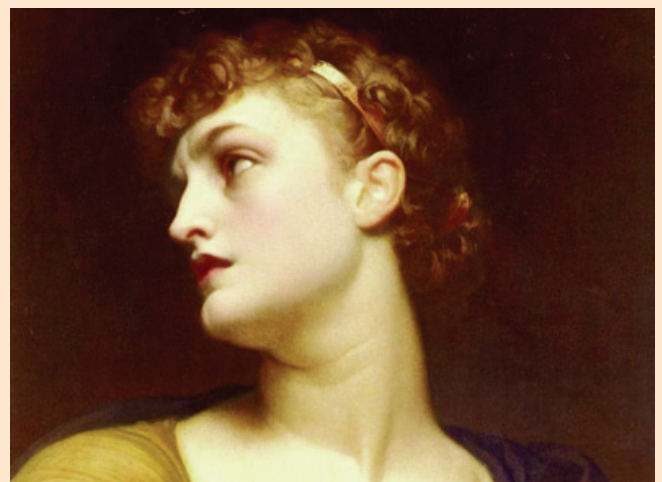
One of Shakespeare's later plays that shows a serenity of mood and a confidence in the writing. The famous restoration scene in the final act, in which the repentant Leontes and the innocent

Hermione are reconciled, is unique in Shakespeare in making the older generation the foundation of the new order. As in *Othello* the play concerns the misplaced jealousy of a husband who accuses his virtuous spouse of adultery. In this instance, the consequences are not calamitous, and the king's repentance is rewarded. The subplot of Perdita, the daughter of Leontes and Hermione, who is abandoned on the coast of Bohemia (modern Puglia, in Southern Italy), because her jealous father believes she is illegitimate, is a delight. The play contains one of the most famous stage directions in Shakespeare: "Exit, pursued by a bear".



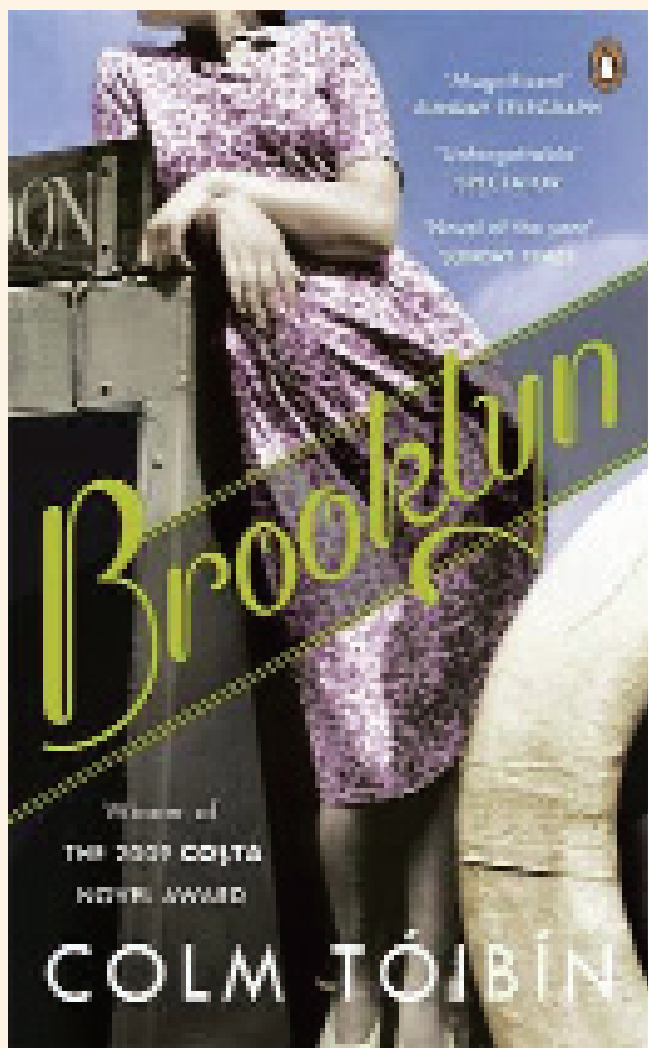
SOPHOCLES **Antigone**

As the play opens, Thebes is recovering from a civil war in which the opposing sides were led by two brothers. Creon, the new ruler, decrees that one brother will be honoured while the other, Polyneices, will lie unburied and dishonoured on the battlefield. Defying the decree of her the new ruler, Antigone sets out to bury her brother and honour his body. Furious at her disobedience, Creon sentences her to be buried alive. When Haemon, Creon's son, pleads for her life, the king ignores him. It is only when the blind prophet Tiresias warns Creon of the terrible consequences that will flow from his action, that he revokes his sentence. However, by the time the guards reach her tomb, *Antigone* has already taken her life and Creon loses his wife and child through suicide. Antigone is a sobering meditation on pride and the dangers of absolute power. In this short play, Sophocles touches on many themes that have become familiar to theatre audiences – state control and individual freedom; the nature of citizenship; the conflict between state law and natural law.



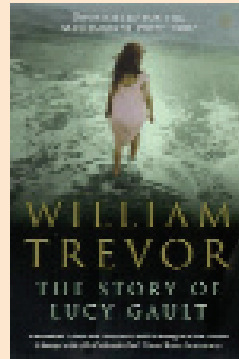
**TÓIBÍN, Colm Brooklyn NEW TEXT**

Toibin's tale of emigration and return plays on the themes of possibility and freedom and gives an ironic turn to a familiar tale. Eilis Lacey does not want to leave Enniscorthy and go to New York but, dutiful daughter that she is, she does what her mother and her older sister think best for her and lands in Brooklyn. There she meets Tony, and puts down roots, though she never finds the courage to tell her family back home about the Italian American boy she has married in secret. Summoned back to Ireland Eilis discovers that America has made her glamorous and desirable and her prospects at home seem more appealing than returning to Tony and Brooklyn. In a neat and ironic shift, America, the land of opportunity, now appears as an obstacle in the way of obtaining the heart's desire. A really good take on the themes of identity and belonging. The final choice made by the heroine will generate classroom discussion and debate. Written in Toibin's plain, unadorned style, this will prove a popular choice with students.



**TREVOR, William The Story of Lucy Gault**

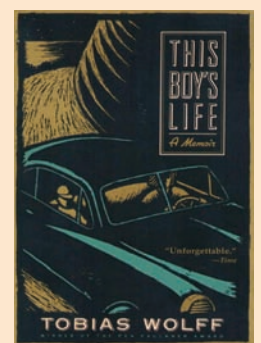
In 1921 in the wake of the War of Independence, and unrest throughout the country, Captain Everard Gault and his family prepare to leave their modest county Cork estate of Lahadane. Having accidentally shot a local youth, Gault fears reprisals and decides to go to England. Trying to protect 9-year old Lucy, her parents don't tell her the full story behind their departure. Unable to understand what she sees as her parents cruelty, Lucy runs away.

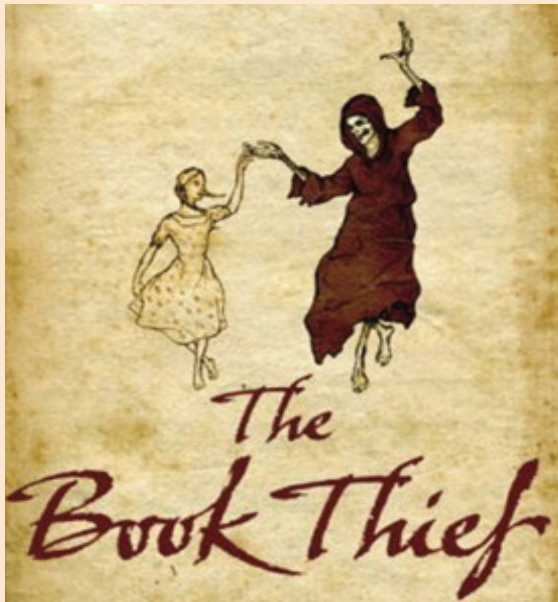


When she doesn't return, her heart-broken parents fear she has drowned and leave, moving from one place to another in Europe and severing all contact with Ireland. Only Lucy hasn't drowned and the novel then becomes a story of regret and guilt. Lucy's life in Lahadane, where she is taken care of by the former servants, is that of a sleeping beauty, marking time in the enchanted house she didn't want to leave. In a short review it is hard to do justice to the beauty and simplicity of Trevor's writing and it is the quality of the writing that makes us accept some of the unrealistic or fairy-tale elements of the story. Covering some of the same territory as Bowen's *The Last of September*, *The Story of Lucy Gault* is a very readable novel.

**WOLFF, Tobias This Boy's Life**

Wolff's autobiographical novel on growing up in the 1950s, set, for the most part, in rural Washington, about a troubled youth, 'Jack' (a name he borrowed from Jack London), and his love for his divorced mother, Rosemary. The young man's life changes for the worst when his mother marries a single father, and the stepfather intimidates and humiliates him. Although the subject matter is sometimes grim, this is really a novel about a young man's inventiveness and determination to succeed. With strong themes of identity, the desire to escape and the need to belong, the meaning of family and fatherhood, the novel is a compelling read, written in crystal-clear prose.





### ZUSAK, Markus *The Book Thief*

The first thing to be said about *The Book Thief* is that it is a remarkably easy novel to read and enjoy. The second thing to say is that it has received mixed reviews. The novel tells the story of a decent German who give shelter to a Jewish man, Max, during World War II. We learn about the German, and his family and his neighbours. Just as we come to know and empathize with the characters, the Allies bomb Munich where they live. One of the conceits of the novel is that the narrator is Death himself. The narrative voice is interesting though whether it is wholly successful is a moot point. The fact that Death addresses the reader in the voice of a contemporary teenager might be too much for some. Be that as it may, there are lots of delightful and grimly humorous elements to the story, not least the beautiful short story that Max writes to Liesel, the nine-year-old adopted daughter of his protectors and the book thief of the title, on white-washed pages torn from a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf!* Zusak, the Australian-born author of the novel, says that the inspiration to write *The Book Thief* came from stories related to him by his German parents concerning the war and the bombing of Munich. One concerned a teenage boy offering bread to a starving Jewish prisoner who was being marched through the streets. Both the boy and the prisoner were whipped for this act of generosity. The scene finds its way into the novel. *The Book Thief* has been hugely successful. Much of its success is due to the simplicity of the writing and the quality of the story-telling, with many readers describing it as "impossible to put down". The key debate for teachers and students is whether the idiom robs the subject of the seriousness it deserves?

### SOME NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Teachers and students should make sure that the texts they are studying come from the prescribed list for the year of the examination. Candidates who are repeating the Leaving Certificate course should note that texts prescribed for one year may not necessarily be prescribed for subsequent years.

For students taking the Higher Level Papers, the study of a Shakespearean play is compulsory as either a single text or as part of a comparative study. The study of a film adaptation of a Shakespearean play **does not** fulfil this requirement as the director of the film is considered the author of the film text.

It is also worth noting that **three** texts are prescribed for study in a comparative manner at both Higher and Ordinary level.

As the syllabus indicates, students are required to study from this list:

As the syllabus indicates, students are required to study from this list:

**One text on its own** from the following texts:

BINCHY, Maeve	Circle of Friends (O)
BRONTE, Emily	Wuthering Heights (H/O)
FITZGERALD, F. Scott	The Great Gatsby (H/O)
JOHNSTON, Jennifer	How Many Miles to Babylon? (O)
KEANE, John B	Sive (O)
LEONARD, Hugh	Home Before Night (O)
LESSING, Doris	The Grass Is Singing (H/O)
SHAKESPEARE, Wm	Macbeth (H/O)
SOPHOCLES,	Antigone (H/O)

One of the texts marked with H/O may be studied on its own at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level. One of the texts marked with O may be studied on its own at Ordinary Level.

The Comparative Modes for 2013 are:

Higher Level	(i) The Cultural Context (ii) Literary Genre (iii) Theme or Issue
Ordinary Level	(i) Aspects of Story: tension or climax or resolution (ii) Social Setting (iii) Theme



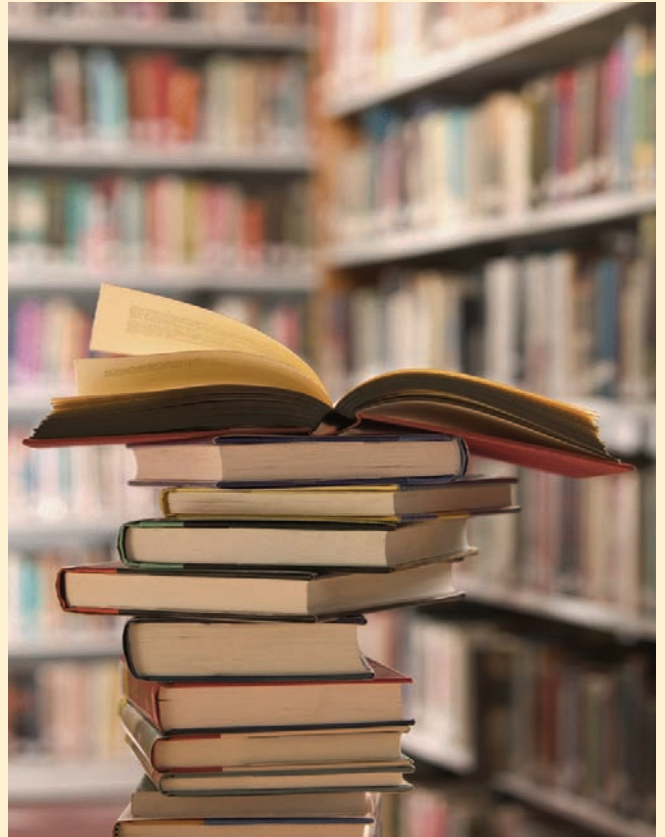
# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGLISH AND LITERACY EDUCATION

*This statement from the website of the English Teachers Association of New South Wales addresses the issue of the relationship between English and Literacy.*

The relationship between English and literacy is a vexed one, made increasingly so by the discovery of literacy by politicians in the years post World War II as a convenient scapegoat for a myriad of social ills – most commonly in Australia, those of unemployment.

In the early 21st Century, any literature review seeking definitions of subject English will come across definitions of the subject couched almost always in terms of literacy/ies, especially in terms of multiliteracies. In effect, these define the subject “English” in terms of the literacy skills being developed. At the same time, current schooling policy and culture in NSW separates literacy from any special relationship with one subject by arguing that each subject has a set of “literacies” which are particular to itself. Literacy education is now commonly understood and manifest in NSW as, effectively, literacy-across-the-curriculum. Ironically, despite this separation of “literacy” from a special relationship with “English”, when it comes to public, external assessment, “literacy” is re-married to “English” (as in Year 10) and English teachers are usually held responsible for literacy results. The relationship is inconsistent, ambivalent and tense. Moreover, it is one that poses a significant challenge to the professional identity of English teachers.

The attitude that English subject specialists have to fostering the concept “literacy” will, of course, depend largely on the definition of that concept. Where the definition of literacy, or the assessment of literacy, that operates at an official level is perceived as especially reductive, then English subject specialists will tend to reject it. Similarly, assessment which over-emphasises discrete, isolated and minuscule skills at the expense of meaningful communication will also be rejected by English subject specialists. For example, if the rhetoric of a broad, eclectic approach to literacy manifests itself in the assessment of writing defined purely in terms of functional grammar, then English subject



specialists will see it as running against the ambitions of their subject for according scope to the creative and aesthetic functions of the imagination or to higher rhetorical functions.

The manifest tension between “English” and “literacy” is exacerbated by the very plurality already mentioned. Terms such as “literacies” and “multiliteracies” suggest a breadth of skills across a number of areas of life and of the school curriculum which, it is argued, are necessary for the modern student/citizen. Within this context, high stakes public testing of literacy in its current forms, driven as it is by a broader political agenda of accountability, is reductivist and repressive. Assessment and testing that examines only the functionality and utility of literacy do not belong under the rubric “English” and the preparation of students for such testing is certainly not the sole responsibility of English teachers.

Nevertheless, English has a historic and special role with respect to literacy. English teachers have had, and continue to have, as a central notion in their teaching, the teaching of reading, writing and visual and oral communication. The skills which the English teacher is concerned to



develop, then, are, essentially, skills of “literacy”. However, this does not make English a 'service' subject for other subjects.

What distinguishes English from other subjects is not only the skills it develops, but its central subject matter. The central concern of English is with the study and application of how language works in a range of contexts and media. Teachers of English should have knowledge of how language works and how we learn to use it, including the ways contemporary critical and cultural theories of text and textual study clarify these processes.

English is further defined by the nature of the texts with which it engages. Historically, this meant the texts of the cultural heritage, just as it now means the inclusion of the texts of popular culture. English is essentially the study of language as a social and cultural semiotic in its multiplicity of textual forms. English is also defined – more so than any other school subject – by the values it tries to create. Historically, English has been about the shaping of the 'self'. This has meant the promotion of humane values, the enrichment of the imaginative life and the development of aesthetic sensibility through engagement with literary texts. It has also meant a concern with the personal growth of the individual. Today, this includes a kind of self-reflexivity that enables students to understand how their 'self' is located within social and cultural contexts, and constructed through language and text. Accordingly, students are able deliberately to conform to or challenge relations of power and the social processes inherent in textual practices.



Contemporary English teaching includes the study of text in terms of “how?” and “can?": “How does it ask to be read?” and “Can I read it another way?” English teachers embrace such a “critical” literacy, but work to ensure that it is not developed at the expense of the imaginative and the aesthetic. “How am I able to now organise my thinking, and draw on my knowledge of language and textual forms, features, and functions to most effectively communicate a message, given the demands of my context, purpose and audience?” and “Can I draw on or imagine other ways of communicating my message?”. English teachers embrace such a rhetorical approach to the subject and recognise that such study of language foregrounds a new sense of “the personal” – explorations of self and identity as they are socially, culturally, historically and politically constituted in and through language and text.

Above all, English makes possible the (re) imagining of other ways of being. At this point, students are in a position to become “designers” of social futures (Kress). This shifts the emphasis in English pedagogy from response to students being essentially centred in their own creations. Understanding language as a social and cultural semiotic makes it natural that in the English classroom these creations will range across a number of areas, including the visual and multimedia. The concept of design also restores to the centre of English the fundamental role of the development of an aesthetic sense, and the development of the imagination – ideas which mass standardised literacy testing can never aspire to assess. Approaches to literacy that are based solely or predominantly on notions of utility and functionality are outdated and accordingly to be challenged by English teachers.

Copyright © 2011 English Teachers Association of NSW