



CHS English Department GCSE Reading List: Summer 2017

The lists start with short reads; requires more stamina as you go down the list)

Modern Novels

'Brock', A. McGowan.

'Ghosting', K. Gray.

'Hatchet and sequels, G. Paulsen.

'A Monster Calls', S. Dowd/P.Ness.

'Boy/Going Solo', R. Dahl.

'The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon', S. King.

'The Killing Floor', L. Child.

'Maus 1 & 2', A. Spiegelmann (graphic novel).

'The Boy In The Striped Pajamas', J. Boyne.

'The Graveyard Book', N. Gaiman.

'Equal Rites', T. Pratchett.

'Keeper', M. Peet.

'Blood Ties', S. McKenzie.

'Across The Nightingale Floor' (trilogy), L. Hearn.

'Northern Lights' (trilogy), P. Pulman.

'The Curious Incident of The Dog In The Night-time', M. Haddon.

'Tales of The Unexpected', R. Dahl.

'Life of Pi', Y. Martel.

'Of Mice and Men' J Steinbeck.

Classic Novels (19th & 20th century)

Try to find an edition with the biggest font you can find; and do listen to the unabridged audio download from Audible, etc. alongside the book

'Treasure Island', R.L. Stevenson.

'Animal Farm', G. Orwell.

'All Quiet On the Western Front', E. M. Remarque.

'A Christmas Carol', C. Dickens.

'The Turn of the Screw', H. James. (at the Mercury Theatre in 2018).

'The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to The Galaxy', D. Adams.

'The Best of Sherlock Holmes' (stories), A. C. Doyle.

'The Hound of the Baskervilles', A. C. Doyle.

'The Time Machine', H.G. Wells.

'The War of the Worlds', H. G. Wells.

'To Kill a Mocking Bird', H. Lee.

'Lord of The Flies', W. Golding.

'The Handmaid's Tale', M. Atwood.

'Oliver Twist', C. Dickens.

'The Odyssey', Homer.

'Fahrenheit 451', R. Bradbury.

'Tom Sawyer'- 'Huckleberry Finn', M. Twain.

'Jane Eyre', E. Bronte.

'1984', G. Orwell.

Non-fiction

'The Guardian Book of Football', M. Herd (classic football journalism from the last 50 years with eye-catching photographs).

'A Short History of Nearly Everything', B. Bryson.

'On Writing', S. King. The most accessible book ever written about how a writer learns to write more powerfully. In this very readable book, the master of horror explains the craft of writing. Reading this book will certainly help you appreciate the craft of writing for the GCSE Fiction Examination Paper.

The eight best young adult books – and why grownups should read them, too

YA fiction has become a fixture at the top of the bestseller lists. Children's literature expert Daniel Hahn recommends eight novels that adults also should read

What do my chosen books have in common? Well, in each case, somebody at some point has decided they are "young adult" books. As often as not, this person isn't the writer. The

category does have some meaning and some usefulness, of course; books that teenagers enjoy do often have certain congruences of perspective or theme. But the boundary is porous. Books are wayward things, and the good ones, the ones that are really alive with that energy that seems to detonate in your brain as you read, aren't so easily contained.

As I've been compiling a new companion to children's literature, I've been thinking a lot about the limits of this category – and I've read so much about what we call “crossover books”, books with appeal both to teenagers and adult readers. Yes, we all know that vampire stories and teen cancer romances have sold in vast numbers on both sides of that imaginary dividing line. But the crossover book has encompassed writing of great sophistication and ambition, too. For every *Twilight* there is a Pullman; the [young adult](#) category contains plenty of pulp and plenty of fine writing – as any spurious category will. It contains work that is derivative, shallow and lazy, to be sure, and writing that is urgent and bold and experimental and complex, just like the adult market. The best of it can be fantasy (dystopian, sometimes) or realism (gritty, perhaps, but not necessarily so); it can be genre-based writing or uncategorisable, funny or profoundly serious, cool or lyrical, domestic and quiet or virtuosic and surreal.

Young adult writing today contains everything. The worst of it is as limited as any bad writing, the best could thrill any readers willing to put themselves in the hands of expert storytellers and great writers. Readers, that is, of any age. Hundreds of superb novels have been published for young adult readers. **Here are just eight of them.**

[Revolver](#): Marcus Sedgwick (Orion)

Sedgwick has written across the age ranges, from children to adults, but it is his dark and atmospheric YA-branded work that best shows off what he can do. In *Revolver*, all his skill is compacted into something small and potent, controlled and devastating. As it begins, 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle, in 1910, 15-year-old Sig discovers his father's corpse; but how did he die? The arrival of a threatening stranger forces Sig to investigate his parents' past and confronts him with big questions about his own future. Set over just a couple of days, Sedgwick's spare, crisply written narrative flips between the past and recent present, but the tension never disappears, and as he creates this most hostile of environments, it's impossible not to be drawn in.

[The White Darkness](#): Geraldine McCaughrean (Oxford)

From the Arctic to the Antarctic, with the incomparable McCaughrean. I don't know many writers of any kind who have her apparently effortless consistency. Her books are always a thrilling read, with intricate plotting, characters you instantly feel you know personally and utterly beautiful writing; *The White Darkness* is no exception. It's the story of awkward teenager Sym (who is in love with the very-long-dead Captain Oates) and her “uncle” and their lunatic mission to the Antarctic. Things surely can't end well ... The book is dark, clever, and menacing, and, if you've never read McCaughrean before, you're about to make a glorious discovery.

[Kit's Wilderness](#): David Almond (Hachette Kids Hodder)

Skellig may be better known, but I think the book that followed is Almond's masterpiece: *Kit's Wilderness* is one of those rare works that changes how we see the world. Kit Watson moves to the Northumberland town where his grandfather lives, and there he befriends new classmate Allie Keenan, and meets a strange, wild boy called John Askew, who plays a game called Death. With the delicate, dark beauty that characterises so much of Almond's

work, *Kit's Wilderness* explores things beneath the surface, suffused with death and menace, and the spirits of the past, but this is a wilderness that is full of beauty and things that are precious, too.

[Henry Tumour: Anthony McGowan](#) (Random House)

This is one teen cancer book among many, but truly it's not like any other you may have come across. For one thing, it's funny – grimly, hilariously so. For another, in this book the eponymous brain tumour talks. The schoolboy afflicted with this unusual predicament is nerdy Hector, who has to decide whether or not to take the outspoken, anarchic tumour's advice as he finds his feet in the world, and has a lot of decisions to make before the surgeons get to work on them both. Original, smart and gripping, *Henry Tumour* breaks all kinds of rules, and does it with irresistible brio.

[The Graveyard Book: Neil Gaiman](#) (Bloomsbury)

Perhaps this isn't a young adult book. Really, who is to say? It won the Booktrust teenage prize, and as far as I recall, the judges – I was one of them – had no category anxiety; we just knew it was something that needed to be read. It is one of those books that gives you a whole world – small and wonderful – which is entrancing for eight chapters, and which you feel very sorry to leave. It is set, as the title suggests, in a graveyard, where young Bod (short for "Nobody") makes his home after his parents are murdered. Bod finds himself a new family and new friends – most of them long dead – a set-up that allows Gaiman's macabre imagination to run wild. Along with the great characters and friendships, there is a gripping story – episodic with echoes of *The Jungle Book* – some delightful humour, and, as a bonus, a set of typically superb black-and-white illustrations, by Chris Riddell or Dave McKean, depending on your preferred edition.

Chaos Walking trilogy: [Patrick Ness](#) (Walker)

For ambition and scale, this highly accomplished trilogy is hard to beat. The opening volume, [The Knife of Never Letting Go](#), introduces us to Todd Hewitt, who lives in a place where there are no women, and where the thoughts of every man can be heard all the time (this is called Noise). Todd meets a girl, Viola, and they go on the run. Tensions build as a great battle breaks out between two factions, with Todd and Viola forced into involvement on opposing sides. The war explodes in scale and complexity, and stakes rise before a thrilling and satisfying conclusion to the series. The story is excitingly paced and has a cast of engaging characters, but taken together, the trilogy is also a complex study of responsibility, difference, maturity and power.

[A Swift Pure Cry: Siobhan Dowd](#) (Random House)

This debut introduces the small-town community of Coolbar in mid-80s Ireland, where we meet Shell and her young siblings. Dowd was a writer of immense sympathy and insight, and in *A Swift Pure Cry* she takes Shell, and her reader, on a journey. Many people assume young adult fiction will always be heavy on issues, and there are some big ones in this book, which tackles faith and death, but the questions are born out of, and always in the service of, the story and characterisation. *A Swift Pure Cry* is never wilfully bleak, never heavy-handed, never moralistic. A fine piece of writing.

[Life: An Exploded Diagram: Mal Peet](#) (Walker)

With its displays of profound affection and pin-sharp humour, Mal Peet's *Life* is one of the best books I know

When Peet died three weeks ago at the age of 67, the children's book world was shaken and bereft. Few adult readers, however, will yet have discovered just how much they've lost. As with so many of Peet's supposedly young adult books, *Life: An Exploded Diagram* is more than that: it's a great novel of growing up and the delicious immediacy of teenage experience, but with a broad historical sweep and nostalgia, too. Partly autobiographical, it captures the experiences of Norfolk lad Clem Ackroyd against the backdrop of the Cuban missile crisis and imminent Armageddon. It is a sophisticated coming-of-age story, full of intelligence and compassion. It displays profound affection, pin-sharp humour and acrobatic leaps in chronology and scale – there's even a religious cult. *Life* is – in short – one of the best books I know. Time to find out what you've been missing.

• *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* by Daniel Hahn is published by OUP.

A Few Recent Novels Summarised

His Dark Materials: Philip Pullman

Bleak, brutal, warm, lush and exhilarating by turns, fiercely intelligent, compassionate and compelling always, it will undo all the harm or all the good you feel was done by letting your offspring loose on Narnia. That's what reading is for.

The Chaos Walking trilogy: Patrick Ness

An unbelievably thrilling read that nevertheless poses profound questions – about the effects of war, the constraints of love and hate, the competing claims of vengeance and forgiveness – as the epic tale of Todd's efforts to escape various warmongering forces unfolds. Profoundly humane and utterly magnificent.

A Little History of the World: E H Gombrich

Talking of beautiful, sad and true – Gombrich's short, measured jog through the main civilisations and events that have shaped the world is a warm, witty presentation of vital facts in narrative form, which grew out of a correspondence the author had with his friend's young daughter. And a useful reminder that there is lots of fantastic non-fiction as well as fiction out there too.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: Mark Twain

And a classic for – ostensibly – the boys. Until they are ready for the greater demands of Huckleberry Finn, whet juvenile appetites with Tom, his entrepreneurial spirit and his taste for treasure-hunting adventure. A paean to true boyhood.

Witch Child: Celia Rees

In 1659, 14-year-old Mary Newbury travels from England to the New World, where she becomes embroiled in what are effectively the Salem witch trials. It's a completely absorbing account of what happens when suspicion and rumour fuel secret agendas, prejudices and politics. A book to make you sigh with satisfaction.

Exposure: Mal Peet

This contemporary retelling of Othello – the doomed couple now a black Brazilian star footballer and a pampered young pop goddess – will continue to grip young readers for years to come.

The Sterkarm Handshake/The Sterkarm Kiss: Susan Price

These books cross effortlessly between science fiction and fantasy, depicting life as it might have been in the primitive past with rare and enthralling realism. A British corporation, FUP, has developed the Tube, a means of time-travelling between the 21st and 16th centuries, and made contact with an ancient Scottish tribe. FUP expects no difficulty in negotiating for resources with savages, but the Sterkarms are unexpectedly ruthless – and Andrea, FUP's 16th-century liaison, has complicated matters by falling in love with the Sterkarm leader's son. Not for the fainthearted, and with some decidedly adult language in Kiss, these books never talk down or soften the harshnesses of the past. Unforgettable.

The White Darkness: Geraldine McCaughrean

Sym is a typical teenage girl in many ways, wrestling with a colossal crush – unusually on long-dead Polar explorer, Captain Oates. When her eccentric uncle offers her the opportunity to go to Antarctica, she's delighted – but Uncle Victor's unnerving behaviour and the dark cold of the South Pole are more than Sym bargains for. Bleakly, heroically romantic.

Creature of the Night : Kate Thompson

Furious at being moved to the country by his mother, 14-year-old Bobby thinks of nothing but getting back to the city; back to his life of drink, drugs and driving stolen cars. But he's reluctantly drawn into country ways and, helping on a local farm, he finds he's calmed by discovering things he is good at. Gradually, Bobby begins to reflect on his old life. A multi-layered plot combining new and age-old mysteries makes this a moving and non-judgmental story about the conflicting pulls of adolescence. *Ages 13+*

How I Live Now : Meg Rosoff

Arriving as an unhappy 15-year-old from New York, smart and sassy Daisy soon fits into her new surroundings in England with her unconventional cousins and their carefree way of life. She falls in love with her cousin Edmond and life seems perfect until the idyll is destroyed when world war three breaks out, and there is chaos as the two teenagers are swept apart. How I Live Now is an adventure that subtly charts a journey of discovery, one which delicately and unequivocally captures the confusion of adolescence. *Ages 13+*

Revolver : Marcus Sedgwick

Alone in a remote hut in the Arctic Circle and with only the frozen corpse of his father for company, 15-year-old Sig hears a knock at the door. Behind it is a giant of a man. He's armed, he's come for some gold he believes the recently deceased owes him, and he isn't leaving without it. As the back story of gold prospecting and scams unravels, Sig is busy calculating how he will balance his pacifist principles with the knowledge that his father's gun is near to hand. Sparely written, this is a haunting and atmospheric short story that bristles with tension. *Ages 13+*

Finding Violet Park : Jenny Valentine

Part mystery, part romance and written with a compellingly spare clarity, *Finding Violet Park* is an account of one teenager's giant stride from childhood introspection towards adult awareness. Lucas finds the remains of Violet Park in an urn in a cab office: it had been left in the back of a taxi. Lucas feels compelled to put her to rest, and his quest takes him on a moving and thought-provoking mission that reveals much more about his own life. *Ages 13*
Before I Die : Jenny Downham

Tessa has a list of 10 things she wants to do before she dies. At just 16 and with only months to live, she must fit in so many critical teen experiences in a short time. How Tessa makes her choices, how she carries them out and, above all, how she and those around her cope with living and dying is beautifully and movingly told. *Ages 13+*

The Radleys : Matt Haig

The Radleys seem like any other family, but they hide a deep secret: both parents are abstaining vampires. It's also a secret kept from their teenage children, but when Clara kills a boy who pushes his luck, they have to know the truth. How the Radleys deal with "blood addiction" and what happens when they call on their vampire uncle to help is a deeply dark thriller with wittily barbed social comments that transcends vampire clichés. *Ages 13+*

A Swift Pure Cry : Siobhan Dowd

After the death of her mother, 15-year-old Shell is left to look after herself, her siblings and her alcoholic father. She looks for comfort from the new priest, who provides some moments of spiritual calm, and from local boy Declan. But her innocence leads her astray, with disastrous consequences. Shell's tragedy is told without self-pity or judgment. *Ages 14+*

The Knife That Killed Me :Anthony McGowan

Peer pressure, belonging, the need to find out who you are – all of these themes are cleverly covered in this gripping first-person narrative. Paul feels his way between the conflicting groups that dominate at school and gets sucked into trouble he needs to avoid. The realities of contemporary teenage life are laid bare without adult judgment; it is Paul and his peers who have to make the choices that will affect their own futures. *Ages 14+*

Long Reach : Peter Cocks

Pulling no punches, this action-packed thriller grabs you by the scruff of the neck and doesn't let go. Seventeen-year-old Eddie's world turns upside down after the death of his brother. Refusing to accept that his sibling killed himself, Eddie signs up for the same undercover police work his brother was engaged in, in the hope that he can discover the truth. Soon, he is asked to infiltrate the same notorious gangland family ... Peter Cocks never takes his foot off the gas as he piles on the twists and turns that Eddie must take in his quest for the truth. *Ages 14+*

Useful Idiots : Jan Mark

Set in a dystopian future, the UK is now partly under water as a result of climate change and has been renamed the Rhine Delta islands. It is a hi-tech era in which history is controlled by

the authorities and archaeology has become taboo. When a storm uncovers a human skull in the watery wastelands, it brings the old and the new worlds into direct conflict. Juxtaposing the barren landscape where the remnants of the "English" aboriginals live with the hi-tech cities of the new civilisation, Useful Idiots is a thoughtful black comedy about greed, prejudice and the idiocy of governments. *Ages 14+*