

Heston Community School

Key Stage 4 Book Recommendations



Detective/thrillers

Truman Capote

“In Cold Blood”

Detailing the 1959 murders of an entire family from Holcomb, Kansas.

Agatha Christie

“Murder on the Orient Express”

A man lies dead, the door locked from the inside. Isolated with a murderer in their midst, detective Poirot must find the murderer before he or she strikes again.

Arthur Conan Doyle

“Sherlock Holmes stories”

A London-based "consulting detective" whose abilities border on the fantastic, Holmes uses logical reasoning and forensic science to solve difficult cases.

Graham Greene

“Brighton Rock”

A gang war is raging through the dark underworld of Brighton. Seventeen-year-old Pinkie, has killed a man, believing he can escape retribution, he is unprepared for the courageous, life-embracing Ida Arnold.

Robert Harris

“Fatherland”

Set in an alternative world where Hitler has won the Second World War. A detective, Xavier March, uncovers a conspiracy that could go to the very top of the German Reich.

Ian Rankin

“Knots and Crosses”

Shocked by the abduction and subsequent strangling of two young girls, Inspector Rebus connects the murders to his own military past.

Alice Sebold

“The Lovely Bones”

A teenage girl who, after being murdered, watches from her personal heaven as her family and friends struggle to move on with their lives and catch her killer, while she comes to terms with her own death.

Science fiction and fantasy

Anthony Burgess

“Clockwork Orange”

English society that has a culture of extreme youth violence, Alex, narrates his violent exploits and his experiences with state authorities’ intent on reforming him.

Isaac Asimov

“The Foundation Series”

Foundation marks the first of a series of tales set so far in the future that Earth is all but forgotten by humans who live throughout the galaxy.

Margaret Atwood

“The Handmaid’s Tale”

Offred’s only one function is to breed, if she deviates, she will die. But even a repressive state cannot obliterate desire.

Ray Bradbury

“Fahrenheit 451”

The hauntingly prophetic classic novel set in a not-too-distant future where books are burned by a special task force of firemen.

Aldous Huxley

“Brave New World”

The World Controllers have created the ideal society, using genetic engineering and brainwashing. Bernard Marx seems alone harbouring an ill-defined longing to break free.

George Orwell

“1984”

Winston Smith rebels against the totalitarian world he lives in and the watchful eye of big brother.

Terry Pratchett

“The Discworld Series”

A book series set on the fictional Discworld, a flat disc balanced on the backs of four elephants which, in turn, stand on the back of a giant turtle.

H G Wells

“The War of the Worlds”

The adventures of an unnamed man and his brother in Surrey and London as Earth is invaded by Martians.

John Wyndham

“The Day of the Triffids”

A Post-Apocalyptic novel about a plague of blindness which befalls the entire world, allowing the rise of an aggressive species of plant.

Douglas Adams

“The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy”

The Earth gets demolished to make way for a new hyperspace bypass. But for Arthur, that is only the beginning of the craziest, strangest road trip of all time.

Horror/ghost/Gothic stories

Angela Carter

“The Bloody Chamber”

Collection of Fairy Tales retold with in an adult, gothic tone.

Wilkie Collins

“The Woman in White”

Walter meets a mysterious and distressed woman dressed in white. He helps her on her way, but later learns that she has escaped from an asylum.

Daphne Du Maurier

“Rebecca”

Rebecca is a novel of mystery and passion, a dark psychological tale of secrets and betrayal, dead loves and an estate called Manderley that is as much a presence as the humans who inhabit it.

Susan Hill

“Woman in Black”

A classic ghost story: the chilling tale of a menacing spectre haunting a small English town.

Stephen King

“The Shining”

Danny possesses "the shining," an array of psychic abilities that allow Danny to see the horrific past of the hotel his father is currently the caretaker of.

Mervyn Peake

“The Gormenghast Trilogy”

A doomed lord, an emergent hero, and a dazzling array of bizarre creatures inhabit the magical world of the Gormenghast.

Edgar Allan Poe

“Tales and Poems”

Perfecting the psychological thriller, Poe invented the detective story, and rarely missed transporting the reader to his own supernatural realm.

Mary Shelley

“Frankenstein”

The story of Victor Frankenstein's monstrous creation and the havoc it reeks on his life and village.

Bram Stoker

“Dracula”

During a business visit to Count Dracula's castle in Transylvania, a young English solicitor finds himself at the centre of a series of horrifying incidents.

Oscar Wilde

“The Picture of Dorian Gray”

Dorian Gray, a handsome young Londoner turns from an innocent fop into a cruel and reckless pursuer of pleasure and, ultimately, a murderer. As he sinks into depravity, his body retains perfect youth while his portrait reflects the ravages of crime and sensuality.

Man Booker Prize Winners mostly more challenging literary fiction

2013 Eleanor Catton “The Luminaries”

Walter, a prospector who travels to Hokitika in 1866 to try and make his fortune. Instead he stumbles into a tense meeting between twelve local men, who draw him in to the complex mystery behind a series of unsolved crimes.

2012 Hilary Mantel “Bringing Up the Bodies”

Sequel to her award-winning Wolf Hall. It is the second part of a planned trilogy charting the rise and fall of Thomas Cromwell, the powerful minister in the court of King Henry VIII.

2011 Julian Barnes “The Sense of an Ending”

Narrated by a retired man named Tony Webster, who recalls how he and his clique met Adrian Finn at school and vowed to remain friends for life. When the past catches up with Tony, he reflects on the paths he and his friends have taken

2010 Howard Jacobson “The Finkler Question”

Radio producer, Julian and Jewish philosopher, Sam, are long-time friends reminiscing about the past and continued discrimination.

2009 Hilary Mantel “Wolf Hall”

A fictionalised biography documenting the rapid rise to power Thomas Cromwell in the court of Henry VIII through to the death of Sir Thomas More.

2008 Aravind Adiga “The White Tiger”

Providing a darkly humorous perspective of India’s class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy.

2007 Anne Enright “The Gathering”

Veronica looks through her family’s troubled history to try to make sense of her brother’s death.

2006 Kiran Desai “The Inheritance of Loss”

The novel follows the journey of Biju, an illegal immigrant in the US who is trying to make a new life; and Sai, an Anglicised Indian girl living with her grandfather in India. The novel shows the internal conflicts in India between groups.

2005 John Banville “The Sea”

Max Morden returns to his childhood home to escape from a recent loss and to confront a distant trauma.

2004 Alan Hollinghurst “The Line of Beauty”

Britain, early to mid-1980s, the story surrounds Nick Guest, a gay Oxford graduate, who deals with heterosexual hypocrisy and homosexual promiscuity.

2003 D B C Pierre

“Vernon God Little”

Teenager Vernon Gregory Little's life has been changed by the Columbine-style slaughter of a group of students at his high school. Soon his small town is blanketed under a media siege, and Vernon finds himself blamed for the killing.

2002 Yann Martel

“Life of Pi”

Piscine Molitor "Pi" Patel, an Indian boy explores issues of spirituality and practicality from an early age when he survives 227 days stranded on a lifeboat with a Bengal Tiger.

2001 Peter Carey

“True History of the Kelly Gang”

The legendary Ned Kelly speaks for himself, scribbling his narrative on errant scraps of paper in semiliterate but magically descriptive prose as he flees from the police.

2000 Margaret Atwood

“The Blind Assassin”

A tale of two sisters, one of whom dies in the opening pages. The survivor, Iris Chase Griffen, initially seems a little cold-blooded about this death in the family. But as the book unfolds, with several nested narratives and even an entire novel-within-a-novel--we're reminded of just how complicated the familial game of hide-and-seek can be.

Non - Fiction

Maya Angelou

“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”

Sent by their mother to live with their devout, self-sufficient grandmother in a small Southern town, Maya and her brother, Bailey, endure the ache of abandonment and the prejudice of the local “powhitetrash.”

Andrea Ashworth

“Once in a House on Fire”

The true story of three sisters and their mother, a close-knit and loving family forced to battle with poverty, abuse and the effects of depression.

Bill Bryson

“Notes from a Small Island”

An uproarious social commentary that conveys the true glory of Britain, from the satiric pen of an unapologetic Anglophile.

Jung Chang

“Wild Swans”

The story of three generations in twentieth-century China that blends the intimacy of memoir and the panoramic sweep of eyewitness history of a Communist China.

Nick Hornby

“Fever Pitch”

Part autobiography, part comedy, Nick Hornby captures the fever pitch of fandom, its agony and ecstasy, its community, its defining role in thousands of young men's coming of age stories.

Frank McCourt

“Angela’s Ashes”

The luminous memoir of Frank McCourt, born in Depression-era Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants and raised in the slums of Limerick, Ireland.

Jon Krakauer

“Into Thin Air”

The storm, which claimed five lives and left countless more-, including Krakauer's, in guilt-ridden disarray, would also provide the impetus for Krakauer's epic account of the May 1996 disaster.

Joe Simpson

“Touching the Void”

Joe Simpson and his climbing partner, Simon Yates, had just reached the top of a 21,000-foot peak in the Andes when disaster struck.

Tobias Wolff

“Old School”

Outsider, Tobias, who has learned to mimic the negligent manner of his more privileged classmates. Like many of them, he wants more than anything on earth to become a writer. But to do that he must first learn to tell the truth about himself.

‘Coming-of-age’ novels

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Purple Hibiscus”

15 year old Kambili discovers the blurred lines between the old gods and the new, childhood and adulthood, love and hatred and the grey spaces in which truths are revealed and real life is lived.

Kate Chopin

“The Awakening”

A New Orleans wife who attempts to find love outside a stifling marriage.

Charles Dickens

“Great Expectations”

Showing how a young man's life is transformed by a mysterious series of events - an encounter with an escaped prisoner; a visit to a black-hearted old woman and a beautiful girl and a fortune from a secret donor.

Kazuo Ishiguro

“Never Let me Go”

Kathy hauntingly dramatises her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world.

Ian McEwan

“Atonement”

The narrator, Briony, has witnessed mysteries and committed a crime for which she will spend the rest of her life trying to atone.

Sue Monk Kidd

“The Secret Life of Bees”

Finding sanctuary in the home of three beekeeping sisters, Lily starts a journey as much about her understanding of the world, as about the mystery surrounding her mother.

J D Salinger

“Catcher in the Rye”

Holden Caulfield is a 17 year-old dropout who has just been kicked out of his fourth school. Navigating his way through the challenges of growing up, Holden dissects the 'phony' aspects of society, and the 'phonies' themselves.

William Trevor

“The Story of Lucy Gault”

Eight-year-old Lucy Gault clings to her home in Ireland, the home her family is being forced to abandon. Lucy, however, is headstrong and decides that somehow she must force her parents into staying. But the path she chooses ends in disaster.

Sylvia Plath

“The Bell Jar”

Esther is at college and is fighting two battles, one against her own desire for perfection in all things and the other against remorseless mental illness. As her depression deepens she finds herself encased in it, bell-jarred away from the rest of the world.

Jeanette Winterson

“Oranges are Not the Only Fruit”

This is the story of Jeanette, adopted and brought up by her mother as one of God's elect. Zealous and passionate, she seems destined for life as a missionary, but then she falls for one of her female converts.

Kevin Brooks

“Martyn Pig”

14-year-old Martyn Pig is faced with some difficult choices in the aftermath of his brutal father's accidental death.

S.E. Hinton

“The Outsiders”

Even though they attend the same school, The Greasers and The Socs are from different worlds, separated as they are on social lines. When a murder occurs how can those youngsters involved ever ‘stay gold’ again?

Mark Haddon

“The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”

Christopher is 15 and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a very great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He has never gone further than the end of road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered he sets out on a journey which will turn his whole world upside down.

Fiction about race/other cultures

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie **“Half of a Yellow Sun” (Nigeria)**

Ugwu, a poor village boy, works as a houseboy for a professor. Olanna, a young woman, has abandoned her life of privilege to live with her new lover, the professor. And Richard, a shy writer, is in thrall to Olanna's twin sister. As the Biafran War engulfs them, they are thrown together and pulled apart in ways they had never imagined.

Isabelle Allende

“The House of the Spirits” (Latin America)

Spanning four generations together, men and women, spirits, the forces of nature, and of history, converge.

Khaled Hosseini "The Kite Runner" (Afghanistan)

Hassan was Amir's closest friend even though he was the son of Amir's father's servant and a member of Afghanistan's despised Hazara minority. On the day of Kabul's annual kite-fighting tournament, something unspeakable happened between the two boys.

Barbara Kingsolver "The Poisonwood Bible" (African Congo)

A story of an American family in the Congo during a time of tremendous political and social upheaval.

Harper Lee "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1930s America)

Through the young eyes of Scout and Jem, the adult attitudes to race and class in the Deep South of the thirties are tested. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence and hypocrisy is pricked by the stamina of one man's struggle for justice.

Andrea Levy "Small Island" (West Indies/Britain)

A wartime tale of a Jamaican airman who returns to post war England with his young wife to find a less than welcoming populace awaiting them.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez "One Hundred Years of Solitude" (South America)

Macondo, a settlement surrounded by mountains, has its wars and disasters, even its wonders and miracles. Its secrets lie hidden, encoded in a book and only Aureliano Buendía can fathom its mysteries and reveal its shrouded destiny.

Toni Morrison "Beloved" (set after American Civil War)

The world of Sethe turns from one of love to one of violence and death after the death of her daughter Beloved. Set in the mid 1800's in Kentucky.

Zadie Smith "White Teeth" (racial tensions in London)

Following to unlikely heroes and best friends, this story travels through Jamaica, Turkey, Bangladesh and India but ends up in a scrubby North London borough.

John Steinbeck "Of Mice and Men" (1930s America)

George and his big, childlike friend Lennie are searching for the American dream, but dreams come at a price. Lennie gets into trouble so bad that even his protector George may not be able to save him.

Richard Wright "Native Son" (1930s Chicago)

Bigger, a young black man who is trapped in a life of poverty is unwittingly involved in a wealthy woman's death. He is hunted relentlessly, baited by prejudiced officials, charged with murder and driven to acknowledge a strange pride in his crime.

Love/family/relationships/society novels

Kate Atkinson **“Behind the Scenes at the Museum”**

Ruby Lennox narrates her life at the moment of conception, and from there takes us on a tour of the 20th century as seen through the eyes of an English girl determined to learn about her family and its secrets.

Jane Austen **“Pride and Prejudice”**

The story follows the main character Elizabeth Bennet as she deals with issues of manners, upbringing, morality, education, and marriage in the society of the landed gentry of early 19th-century England.

Raymond Carver **“What we talk about when we talk about love”**

Powerful collection of stories about how men and women ease the pain of loneliness and passing time.

Emma Donoghue **“Room”**

Jack is five. He lives with his Ma. They live in a single, locked room. They don't have the key, Jack and Ma are prisoners.

George Eliot **“The Mill on the Floss”**

This novel, based on George Eliot's own experiences of provincial life, is a masterpiece of ambiguity in which moral choice is subjected to the hypocrisy of the Victorian age.

Gustave Flaubert **“Madame Bovary”**

Emma Bovary is beautiful and bored, seeks escape in fantasies of high romance. When her affairs bring her disappointment, the consequences are devastating.

Thomas Hardy **“Tess of the D'Urbervilles”**

Tess is an innocent young girl until the day she goes to visit her rich 'relatives', the D'Urbervilles which leads her onto a path that is beset with suffering and betrayal.

D H Lawrence **“Sons and Lovers”**

Paul Morel, and his relationships with a demanding mother and two very different lovers.

Marina Lewycka **“A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian”**

Sisters Vera and Nadezhda must aside a lifetime of feuding to save their émigré engineer father from voluptuous gold-digger Valentina.

Valerie Martin **“Property”**

Manon Gaudet is unhappily married to the owner of a Louisiana sugar plantation who longs to be free of the suffocating domestic situation.

Evelyn Waugh **“A Handful of Dust “**

Lady Brenda Last is bored with life at Hetton Abbey and of her husband, Tony. She drifts into an affair with the shallow socialite.

Mary Webb

“Precious Bane”

Prudence Sarn is a wild, passionate girl, cursed with a hare lip -- her 'precious bane'.
A story of true beauty and social hypocrisy.

Edith Wharton

“The Age of Innocence”

Centring on upper-class couple's impending marriage, and the introduction of a woman plagued by scandal whose presence threatens their happiness.

For a challenge in terms of length/difficulty, these classics ...

James Joyce

“Ulysses”

A story of the diverse events which befall Leopold and Stephen in Dublin on 16 June 1904, during which Bloom's voluptuous wife, Molly, commits adultery.

Herman Melville

“Moby Dick”

The story of Captain Ahab's quest to avenge the whale that 'reaped' his leg. The quest is an obsession and the novel is a diabolical study of how a man becomes a fanatic.

W Somerset Maugham

“Of Human Bondage”

The story of Philip, an orphan eager for life, love and adventure. Philip settles in London where he meets Mildred, the loud but irresistible waitress with whom he plunges into a formative, tortured and masochistic affair which very nearly ruins him.

Laurence Sterne

“Tristram Shandy”

Part novel, part digression, the narrative interweaves the birth and life of the unfortunate 'hero' Tristram Shandy, the eccentric philosophy of his father Walter, the amours and military obsessions of Uncle Toby, and a host of other characters.

Leo Tolstoy

“Anna Karenina”

Anna Karenina seems to have everything - beauty, wealth, popularity and an adored son. But she feels that her life is empty until the moment she encounters the impetuous officer Count Vronsky.

Virginia Woolf

“To the Lighthouse”

Mirroring Virginia Woolf's own joyful holidays of her youth, but as time passes, and in its wake the First World War, the transience of life becomes ever more apparent through the vignette of the thoughts and observations of the novel's disparate cast.

War Stories

Sebastian Faulks

“Birdsong”

The novel focuses on Stephen's life in France before and during the war and the life of his granddaughter, Elizabeth, and her attempts to find out more about her grandfather's experiences in World War I.

Charles Frazier

“Cold Mountain”

The story of W. P. Inman, a wounded deserter from the Confederate army near the end of the American Civil War, who walks for months to return to Ada Monroe, the love of his life.

Ernest Hemingway

“A Farewell to Arms”

A love affair between the expatriate American Henry and Catherine Barkley against the backdrop of the First World War, cynical soldiers, fighting and the displacement of populations.

Joseph Heller

“Catch 22”

A tale of the dangerously sane Captain Yossarian, who spends his time in Italy plotting to survive.

James Jones

“From Here to Eternity”

Prew won't conform, he could have been the best boxer in his division, but he chooses the life of a soldier in Hawaii. When he refuses to box for his company for mysterious reasons, he is given 'The Treatment', a campaign of physical and mental abuse.

Erich Maria Remarque

“All Quiet on the Western Front”

German schoolboys are goaded troop off to the 'glorious war'. With the Patriotism of youth they sign up. What follows is the story of a young 'unknown soldier' experiencing the horror and disillusionment of life in the trenches.

Siegfried Sassoon

“Memoirs of an Infantry Officer”

The narrative moves from the trenches to the Fourth Army School, to Morlancourt and a raid, then to and through the Somme. The narrator turns from acceptance of the war and of the standards which it set up, to doubting the necessity of the endless slaughter.

William Styron

“Sophie's Choice”

Stingo meets Nathan, a Jewish intellectual; and Sophie, a beautiful and fragile Polish Catholic. Stingo is drawn into their relationship when he arrives at the core of Sophie's past, her memories of pre-war Poland, the concentration camp and her terrible secret, her choice.

Plays and Poetry

J.B. Priestley

“An Inspector Calls”

A mysterious inspector interrogates a wealthy English family about their responsibility for the death of a young working class factory girl.

Arthur Miller

“The Crucible”

Fictionalized story of the Salem Witch Trials that took place in the Province of Massachusetts Bay during 1692 and 1693.

Dylan Thomas

“Under Milk Wood”

Listen to the dreams and innermost thoughts of the inhabitants of a fictional small Welsh fishing village named Llareggub.

George Bernard Shaw

“Pygmalion”

Henry Higgins makes a bet that he can train a bedraggled flower girl, Eliza Doolittle to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party by teaching her to assume a veneer of gentility, the most important element of which, he believes, is impeccable speech.

Tennessee Williams

“The Glass Menagerie”

Abandoned by her husband, Amanda comforts herself with recollections of her earlier, life when she was pursued by 'gentleman callers'. Her son Tom, a poet, longs for adventure and escape from his mother's suffocating embrace, while Laura, her shy crippled daughter, has her glass menagerie and her memories.

Ted Hughes

“Birthday Letters”

This collection of eighty-eight poems is widely considered to be Hughes' most explicit response to the suicide of his estranged wife Sylvia Plath.

Sylvia Plath

“Ariel”

Second book of Sylvia Plath's poetry to be published, and was originally published in 1965, two years after her death by suicide.

W.H. Auden

“Another Time”

These poems are among the best-known of his entire career. The book is divided into three parts, "People and Places", "Lighter Poems", and "Occasional Poems.

Robert Frost

“New Hampshire”

Pulitzer Prize winning volume of poems. The book includes several of Frost's most well-known poems, including "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "Nothing Gold Can Stay," and "Fire and Ice."

Librarian Favourites

William Golding

“The Lord of the Flies”

Dystopian novel about a group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves with disastrous results.

Mark Zusak

“The Book Thief”

Narrated by Death, the book is set in Nazi Germany, a place and time when in the narrator notes he was extremely busy.

F.Scott Fitzgerald

“The Great Gatsby”

Through the narration of Nick Carraway, the reader is taken into the glittering world of the mansions in the 1920s, to encounter Nick's cousin Daisy, her brash but wealthy husband Tom Buchanan, Jay Gatsby and the mystery that surrounds him.

John Green

“The Fault in Our Stars”

The story is narrated by a 16 year-old cancer patient named Hazel, who is forced to attend a support group, where she subsequently falls in love with the 17 year old Augustus Waters, an ex-basketball player and amputee.

J.R.R. Tolkien

“The Lord of the Rings”

The Dark Lord has gathered to him all the Rings of Power, the means by which he intends to rule Middle-earth. All he lacks in his plans is the One Ring, the ring that rules them all, which has fallen into the hands of the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins.

Mark Twain

“The Adventures of Tom Sawyer”

The story of a young boy growing up in Mississippi, where beneath the innocence of childhood lie the inequities of adult reality - based emotions and superstitions, murder and revenge, starvation and slavery.

Philip Pullman

“The Northern Lights”

Lyra and her animal daemon live half-wild and carefree among scholars of Jordan College, Oxford. Destiny will take her to the frozen lands of the Arctic, where witch-clans reign and ice-bears fight. Her extraordinary journey will have immeasurable consequences far beyond her own world.

Alice Walker

“The Colour Purple”

Set in the deep American south between the wars, this is the classic tale of Celie, a young poor black girl who learns to take charge of her own destiny.

Charlotte Bronte

“Jane Eyre”

Forced to battle against a cruel guardian, a harsh employer and a rigid social order. She becomes governess to the daughter of the mysterious, and sardonic Mr Rochester