

Annotations

Literature prescribed texts — from 2026 to the end of 2029

These annotations are provided to assist schools make decisions about text selection for their contexts and cohorts. There are many valid ways to interpret the texts on this list, and these annotations are not intended to promote a particular interpretation or preferred way to read a text.

While the QCAA considers all texts on the list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that some texts include content that may be of a sensitive nature for certain students and school contexts. Teachers should consider these issues prior to selecting texts and introducing them to students for study.

No single text on the list is compulsory for schools to use.

Cultural notice on spellings

The QCAA acknowledges that there are alternative spellings of First Nations language groups and community names in this resource. Respectfully, the QCAA has tried to use the spelling the people represented prefer when describing themselves and will continue to engage in this consultation process. Where the names are generally used, the QCAA has used the most common spelling, and in some cases noted a common alternative.

Text categories

The year a text is introduced or retired is indicated below each text's title where relevant. Titles are listed alphabetically within the following text categories:

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External assessment texts

***Alias Grace* — Margaret Atwood**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2027

There are few writers who can critique religious patriarchal societies with quite the same incisiveness, inventiveness and literary flair as Margaret Atwood. In *Alias Grace*, she is at her most compelling.

Set in Ontario, Canada, this absorbing novel is based on a historical figure. Grace Marks was an Irish immigrant and domestic servant who was convicted of co-conspiring to murder her employer and his housekeeper in 1843. At the time of the alleged murder, she was just sixteen years old, and her trial received widespread public and media attention. Filling in the many historical gaps with her vivid imagination, Atwood tells this fascinating story using a dual narrative approach. The first narrative strand is the alleged murderess's perspective. The second is from an entirely fictional character, Dr Simon Jordan's point of view. Hired by a church committee, 15 years into Grace's imprisonment, he must determine if she may, in fact, be innocent.

Atwood uses these two narrative perspectives, and the regularly jarring dissonance between them, to explore the devastating impact of class and gender marginalisation; the subjective nature of truth and justice; feminine and masculine identity; and storytelling's allure and power. Like Atwood's earlier novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Alias Grace* resonates powerfully in a world where social status and gender continue to determine the life outcomes of so many.

***Antony And Cleopatra* — William Shakespeare**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2026

Antony and Cleopatra was written and performed around 1606. In literary terms, the intersection of tragic elements with a historical period and characters classifies it as both a history and a tragedy. It is one of Shakespeare's busiest works with forty scenes, many of them brief, multiple characters and settings, and a fragmented chronology.

The play focuses on the relationship between Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, and Mark Antony, a revered Roman soldier and one of three Roman rulers. Antony's love for Cleopatra compromises his dedication to Rome giving Octavius an opportunity to dispense with him and the weaker Lepidus and assume control. Faced with a challenge from the ambitious Pompey, the three men agree to put aside their differences to protect Rome. Antony's unwillingness, however, to give up Cleopatra disrupts their accord and prompts further conflict. In the subsequent battle, Antony's uncharacteristic reliance on Cleopatra's military knowledge leads to a substantial loss. Faced with dishonour, he resolves to end his life, eventually dying in his lover's arms. Rather than being kept alive and humiliated back in Rome, Cleopatra kills herself with poison from an asp.

Antony and Cleopatra is distinguished by its strong female antagonist, the ardent and theatrical Cleopatra. The play features some of Shakespeare's finest passages of dramatic poetry, especially in the exchanges between the two titular characters. It offers students the opportunity to engage with concepts such as colonisation and expansionism, the definition and nature of civilisation, the philosophical relationship between reason and passion, and the cultural, political and social divisions that may be seen as characterising the world's East and West.

***Beloved* — Toni Morrison**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2027

Winner of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, African–American author Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, is a story of escape from slavery, recapture then escape again.

Set in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873 after the American Civil War, Sethe, the novel's protagonist, lives with her daughter Denver and a mysterious newcomer Beloved at 124 Bluestone Road. When Sethe's former friend, Paul D, arrives and the two begin a relationship, readers are introduced via fragmentary flashbacks to the plantation — 'Sweet Home' in Kentucky — where she and Paul D were enslaved. The past and the present connect as the truth emerges about Sethe and the terrible decision that continues to haunt her.

Beloved is a searing and lyrical examination of the inhumanity of the slave trade and the lasting effects of trauma. Morrison aligns the fate of her individual characters with the broader concept of civilisation: all must be healed and be welcomed into their wider communities if the nation is also to be healed. The novel is richly aesthetic with powerful imagery and fluid shifts of voice, but also uncompromising in its depiction of the violence, degradation and sexual savagery that was routinely inflicted upon slaves in America.

***Catch-22* — Joseph Heller**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2026

American writer Joseph Heller (1923–1999) specialised in novels that satirised what he saw as the absurdity of 20th century Western civilisation. *Catch-22*, first published in 1961, is the best known of these novels.

The central character, Yossarian, a bombardier on a Mediterranean island in World War II, is an antihero who wants to stay alive. The novel relentlessly mocks the military bureaucracy that rather than facilitate Yossarian's desire, makes his death and those of his compatriots, more probable. A series of increasingly farcical episodes ensue as Yossarian tries to prove that he is insane, the only way that he can officially leave the war.

Catch-22 was part of a wave of countercultural American fiction that actively sought to use satire and surrealism as ways of protesting against the seriousness of events of the time such as the Korean War, the Cold War and the impending conflict in Vietnam. The novel's lively language, bizarre plot twists and doomed characters highlight what Heller saw as the inanity of America's active participation in such events, and inadequacies of bureaucracies such as governments and the military that enforced that participation.

***Cloudstreet* — Tim Winton**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2027

Tim Winton is one of Australia's most celebrated writers, having won the Miles Franklin Award four times, including for his 1992 novel, *Cloudstreet*. A committed environmental advocate, he is noted for writing about land and seascapes, and for adroitly using the Australian vernacular.

Cloudstreet is a sprawling saga that tells the story of two families, the godly Lambs and the intemperate Pickles, who are fated to live together in a house at 1 Cloudstreet, Perth. The novel features Winton's trademark blend of realism and surrealism as characters pursue unlikely dreams in ways that are tragic and comic, but always heartfelt. *Cloudstreet* is a complex work that features a circular narrative, a large cast of fascinating characters and an energetic writing style.

that effortlessly locates the poetry within the colloquial. A range of compelling concepts, including individual and community identity, family, loss, spirituality, and love fuels this novel's generous spirit.

Winton's long and pulsating work is richly developed and offers the discerning reader plenty of scope for analysis. The 'Australianness' of *Cloudstreet* and how the novel shapes or is shaped by cultural assumptions around national identity is a particularly interesting perspective. The epic genre and its extended timeframe — the two decades that span the end of World War II through to the political crises of the early 1960s — offer interesting literary and historical contexts to discuss this perspective.

***Hamlet* — William Shakespeare**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2028

Hamlet was written at the beginning of the 17th century, a time of significant political, intellectual and cultural tumult. The play deals with a young prince's efforts to avenge his father's death at the hands of his conniving uncle. It is widely celebrated for its probing existential insights and its characters' psychological complexity.

Prince Hamlet of Denmark is grieving his beloved father's death and his mother Gertrude's rapid remarriage to Claudius, his father's brother. An encounter with the King's ghost convinces the prince that his father was murdered, and he pledges vengeance. Initially, his efforts are thwarted by his own paralysing uncertainty and a distrust of those around him, except for his good friend, Horatio. Hamlet, does however, reach a point where he is prepared to sacrifice all — friends, lover, family and himself — to right the moral and spiritual wrongs that have thrown Denmark into a state of 'rottenness'.

Arguably Shakespeare's most widely interpreted and influential play, *Hamlet* offers a rich palette of perspectives for study. The play can be viewed as a philosophical examination of free will and determinism, a commentary on gender roles, a treatise on political power, and a piercing analysis of family and relationships. *Hamlet* is ethically, structurally and aesthetically potent, with the soliloquies in particular providing a wealth of material for investigation and debate.

***Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* — Tom Stoppard**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2029

When *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* was first performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the summer of 1966, Czech-born British writer, Tom Stoppard, was struggling to make his mark on the literary world. His clever metatheatrical, absurdist tragicomedy, dealing with the death-bound duo from *Hamlet*, ensured that his work would never again languish in obscurity.

Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are minor characters in Shakespeare's famous work, Stoppard recognised the wonderful potential they offered for linguistic, dramatic and philosophical playfulness. Echoing elements of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, his play tracks the hapless pair as they seek to make sense of the whirling, bewildering events at Elsinore and their role in those events.

Over the course of three highly entertaining acts, Stoppard foregrounds interesting ideas about human agency and the role of chance, the limitations of language, the ironies of existence and the purpose of life. These ideas are conveyed through some wonderfully memorable lines, perhaps none more so than Guildenstern's bleak observation that 'we move idly towards eternity

without possibility of reprieve or hope of explanation'. The play's intellectual challenge, its dramatic self-consciousness, and its strong links to *Hamlet* make it a fascinating study text.

***Stasiland* — Anna Funder**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2027

Anna Funder's hybrid nonfiction work blends historical facts, personal narrative and others' lived experiences. *Stasiland* tells the stories of East Berliners who lived inside the Stasi (secret police) surveillance state, with the Berlin Wall looming large. It provides an internal view of a totalitarian regime's moral culpability and machinations. Widely translated and published across the world, *Stasiland* has won and been shortlisted for many awards.

The book begins with Funder's autobiographical account of her boss refusing to allow her to collect the East German stories, and her decision to ignore this. As Funder gathers personal histories describing what it was like to live in a tightly controlled society where both citizens and regime enforcers watch everyone's movements, she subjects herself to the residual effects of this history.

This powerful book is horrifying in its depictions of the surveillance state and uplifting as a celebration of human resilience, compassion and courage. As well as being a potent reminder of totalitarian ruthlessness, *Stasiland* asks readers to consider their own history, both at a personal and national level. It also asks how we would cope with the levels of governmental control that defined pre-unified East Germany.

***Swallow The Air* — Tara June Winch**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2029

Tara June Winch's first novel was published in 2006, a year after winning the David Unaipon Award. The protagonist's desire to find a place to belong and to be loved gives this quest story universal appeal beyond the apparent intimacy of the subject matter.

May, a young Aboriginal woman, lives on the Australian coast. Her life is frequently and profoundly affected by poverty, violence and discrimination. When her mother dies and her brother Billy turns to drug addiction, May leaves to find her father. Throughout this physical and moral journey to Darwin she is more focused on finding somewhere to belong than on her identity. A conventional finale that successfully resolves the main character's problems is not offered to readers. May's story, however, does end in hope, albeit compromised, as she returns to the place where she began her journey and re-establishes meaningful connections with her aunt and brother, who has rebuilt his life.

The quality of Winch's writing can be seen in the understated way in which she depicts the story's underlying violence. The language and content of *Swallow The Air* is unflinchingly explicit but faithful to the experience of a troubled young person seeking to overcome serious obstacles in her life and achieve self-determination. This powerful and often lyrical novel moves beyond coming-of-age tropes and asks questions about society's treatment of those who are disenfranchised, and their right to community, safety and dignity.

***Terra Nullius* — Claire G Coleman**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2028

Noongar writer Claire G Coleman's acclaimed 2017 novel is set in futuristic Australia after an alien species has invaded and colonised, with the people divided into Natives and Settlers.

The novel takes readers on a journey of survival, interweaving several characters' stories, including Jacky, who escapes a settler mission in search of his family.

It opens with Jacky fleeing into unfamiliar terrain, knowing that Settlers and skilled Native trackers, travelling more easily and swiftly, will be in pursuit. His journey is long and fraught, filled with hardships and battles for survival. Other characters whose stories intersect with Jacky's include Sergeant Rohan, the leader of the group in pursuit, Johnny Star, an ex-trooper and outlaw, and Esperance, a young woman trying to protect her own group from enslavement. Partway through the narrative, their stories shift as the novel heads in an unexpected direction.

Terra Nullius is nonlinear, providing an unsettling and multifaceted view of colonisation as a process and outcome. The novel subverts dystopian tropes as a way of forcing the reader to reconsider their perspective on colonial practices. The use of language as a tool to repress and control people is highlighted, as are contrasting views of land and ownership. This unconventional allegorical novel offers many opportunities for study and debate.

The Narrow Road to The Deep North **— Richard Flanagan**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2028

Richard Flanagan is a Tasmanian writer whose work reflects his passion for the island state, its history and environment. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, his sixth novel, was published in 2013 and secured Flanagan the prestigious Man Booker Prize. The novel is loosely based on his father's experiences as a prisoner-of-war working on the notorious Thai-Burma Railway.

The protagonist is Dorrigo Evans, a literary-minded surgeon. His story spans his early years in Tasmania to his time as a prisoner-of-war and his later life as a civilian and war hero. It is further framed around his memories of a pre-war love affair, his brutal experiences at the railway and the relative numbness of his post-war existence. Flanagan, who researched survivor memories, writes unflinchingly of war's harrowing savagery. He portrays events from both Australian and Japanese characters' points of view, and adopts a highly literary style with deep connections to poetry. While the novel deals extensively with wartime horrors, the relationship at its core arguably classifies *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* as a complex love story.

The novel offers readers the chance to consider the moral ambiguities of virtue and evil, and asks how justice should operate for crimes committed during war. Flanagan's writing choices, especially his visceral descriptions and multiple poetic techniques, could also be discussion points, as could the nexus between history and fiction, and the novelists' responsibilities when writing about potentially sensitive realities such as other people's war experiences.

***The Picture of Dorian Gray* — Oscar Wilde**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2026

Published in 1891, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Irish writer Oscar Wilde's only novel. It is regarded as a fine example of Gothic literature and has been widely adapted into other narrative forms.

A beautiful young man, Dorian, after having his portrait painted by artist and admirer Basil Hallward, laments that the painting will remain beautiful while his own beauty fades. Influenced by Lord Henry Wotton's hedonistic views, Dorian pledges his soul in exchange for his face remaining perfect as the painting distorts with his ageing and debauchery. His strange pledge works.

As Dorian sinks into excess, betrayal and pleasure, he appears to possess timeless beauty while the image in the painting twists horribly.

This philosophical novel, constructed within the literary tradition of stories about ill-advised Faustian bargains, focuses on the moral imperative that we must pay for the evils we perpetrate, regardless of how long we may appear to remain unpunished. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* deals effectively with concepts such as the lure of sensuality over rationality, the role of art in society and the power of influence. Despite its Victorian setting and traditional style, the novel's perspective on humanity's fervent desire to prolong youth and beauty gives it significant contemporary relevance.

***The Winter Road* — Kate Holden**

Introduced to EA list — start of 2028

Kate Holden's third book explores the 2014 murder of government environmental officer Glen Turner by 80-year-old farmer Ian Turnbull, near the New South Wales town of Croppa Creek. *The Winter Road*, winner of several major awards for nonfiction writing, examines Turnbull's crime and the many ethical questions that fateful day provoked.

Holden's account is all-encompassing. She explores the schism that exists between European and Indigenous beliefs around land ownership and asks how we should best manage that land, especially the preservation of native fauna and flora. Another focus is ethical regeneration and ways in which the complex grouping of government and non-government agencies and a plethora of environmental laws may support or detract from those processes. Holden also brings a historical lens to her analysis, looking at the long-term effects of variations in farming techniques from the 19th to the 21st centuries and the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people in the name of profit-driven agriculture. This is a book that uses the catalyst of an horrific local event to trace our national relationship with the land that we tread on, rely upon and disrupt.

As well as the crime, *The Winter Road* is held together by the concept of loss. The victim, Turner, and ultimately the perpetrator, Turnbull, lose their lives. Wives and children lose their loved ones, families lose their land and legacies, and communities lose their futures. In chronicling the events of July 2014, Holden raises questions about national responsibilities towards conservation and links our attitudes to land ownership to the Australian character archetype.

***Wuthering Heights* — Emily Brontë**

Moves from EA to general list — end of 2026

Emily Brontë's only novel was published in 1847, one year before she died from consumption. Domestic in placement and Gothic-Romantic in style, the novel has become an enduring English literature classic.

The story is set in the bleak West Yorkshire Moors. Two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, are embroiled in an intergenerational conflict that echoes across the decades with far-reaching consequences. Central to this conflict is the thwarted love between obsessive Heathcliff and defiant Catherine, a love Brontë depicts as hyperreal to the point of transcendence. The corrosive intensity of their relationship drives the action towards its brutal but tragic climax.

Wuthering Heights' narrative force, structural complexity and heightened, near-hyperbolic language makes it challenging but rewarding to study. The aesthetics that enhance Brontë's work, and her ability to forensically examine her characters' psychology, are especially noteworthy.

Novels and prose texts

***Always Will Be* (collection of short stories) — Mykaela Saunders**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Mykaela Saunders, a Koori/Goori and Lebanese writer, teacher and researcher, has created a collection of seventeen speculative fiction stories that imagines a world in which indigenous people have not ceded sovereignty over the land. *Always Will Be*, winner of the 2022 David Unaipon Award, is openly critical of the ideologies and practices inherent in colonisation, and pays tribute to lore and the wisdom of ancestors as the key to developing community.

The stories are underscored by the idea that a deep cultural engagement with the land and waterways of the Tweed Valley, where they are set, is affirming and necessary. 'River Story' and 'Fire Bug' are about the transmission of cultural knowledge as a way of managing natural resources, while 'Tweed Sanctuary Tour' depicts a future in which the area has become a sanctuary where people learn how to live in harmony with the land. Other key concepts explored in this collection include the combatting of colonial forces ('Blood and Soil'), the trauma visited upon the Stolen Generations ('The Girl's Home') and the dispossession inherent in capitalism ('Our Future in the Stars'). The anthology finishes with 'Kinship Festival', which advocates unity.

The stories in *Always Will Be* achieve a sacredness in their sense of connection to Country and Indigenous culture. Operating as a collective, they pose a provocative challenge to our national consciousness. This is a stimulating and highly imaginative collection.

***Anna Karenina* — Leo Tolstoy**

Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) is regarded as one of the world's foremost exponents of literary realism, a movement that developed in response to 18th century Romanticism. *Anna Karenina*, first published in 1878, is shaped against a background of the tensions that were inherent in Russia's stratified society, the divisions that existed between rural and city life, and the dynamism of relationships within and outside families. The reader is encouraged to accept the story for what it is, and make their own decisions about the rightness or wrongness of the characters' actions.

The novel contains multiple plots. The main narrative concerns the titular character, Anna, and her illicit relationship with a rich noble. In exploring the parameters of this doomed liaison, Tolstoy reveals the stifling pressures the social norms of the time placed on women, many of which were linked to the Russian Orthodox Church's moral code. Anna's tragic fate can be seen as the classic displacement story, where a character is ostracised and ultimately condemned by their world's unyielding social norms.

A study of this novel will reward those who are interested in the impacts of social and political hierarchies on the individual, and the moral conflicts that occur when passion clashes with social expectations.

***Beloved* — Toni Morrison**

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Winner of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, African–American author Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, is a story of escape from slavery, recapture then escape again.

Set in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873 after the American Civil War, Sethe, the novel's protagonist, lives with her daughter Denver and a mysterious newcomer Beloved at 124 Bluestone Road. When Sethe's former friend, Paul D, arrives and the two begin a relationship, readers are introduced via fragmentary flashbacks to the plantation — 'Sweet Home' in Kentucky — where she and Paul D were enslaved. The past and the present connect as the truth emerges about Sethe and the terrible decision that continues to haunt her.

Beloved is a searing and lyrical examination of the inhumanity of the slave trade and the lasting effects of trauma. Morrison aligns the fate of her individual characters with the broader concept of civilisation: all must be healed and be welcomed into their wider communities if the nation is also to be healed. The novel is richly aesthetic with powerful imagery and fluid shifts of voice, but also uncompromising in its depiction of the violence, degradation and sexual savagery that was routinely inflicted upon slaves in America.

***Brave New World* — Aldous Huxley**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

When Huxley's *Brave New World* was published in 1932, this prescient dystopian novel received a mixed reception. For many critics, the book was too bleakly alarmist, fantastical and lewd. Others, however, recognised that Huxley's work offered timely warnings about the dangers of consumerist hedonism, anti-intellectualism, science uncoupled from ethics, and total state control.

Set in London in the year 2540 AD, the novel introduces the reader to a society controlled by the World State. Individuals are biologically and socially engineered for their designated role in life as an Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta or Epsilon. This caste system, along with regular state-sanctioned drug use and the promotion of communal hedonism, helps create a society of happy and compliant conformists. Huxley uses the two main characters in the novel, Bernard Marx and John the Savage, to critique this seemingly contented civilization. Bernard, an Alpha Plus citizen, is a specialist at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre. John is an isolated and intense individual who has been raised in a primitive society beyond the direct influence of the state. Both characters are represented as outsiders, a status that allows them to see aspects of their world others cannot.

Although Huxley's novel is nearly a century old, it continues to pose important questions at a time when dystopian futures, arguably, seem increasingly possible.

***Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens* — Shankari Chandran**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Shankari Chandran, a British–Australian author with a Sri Lankan cultural background, has worked as a human rights lawyer. *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens*, her third novel and winner of the 2023 Miles Franklin Award, conflates her experiences in a punchy story infused by concepts such as colonisation, war crimes, immigration and displacement, racism, sexism and deep trauma.

The novel is set in a nursing home in Western Sydney, Cinnamon Gardens, which acts as a microcosm of the nation. Using multiple threads, flashbacks and subplots, Chandran weaves a tale around Maya and her husband, Zakhir, settling in Australia. Having joined the Sri Lankan diaspora fleeing a terrible civil war in the 1980s, the duo restores the nursing home and transforms it into a safe and welcoming place for its residents. Shifting to modern times, the home becomes a target for prejudice as the peaceful environment Maya's family has carefully cultivated is gravely threatened.

Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens is both broad-ranging and acute in its examination of racism within Australia today. The novel is highly critical of governments and the media for what is portrayed as their implicit fostering of prejudices. Its intricate structure and complementary narratives also highlight the importance of storytelling as a way of preserving cultural history. Those studying *Chai Time At Cinnamon Gardens* will develop an understanding of the sociopolitical trauma that has beset Sri Lanka since the early 1980s, and why people left their homes to forge new lives in countries like Australia.

Catch-22 — Joseph Heller

American writer Joseph Heller (1923–1999) specialised in novels that satirised what he saw as the absurdity of 20th century Western civilisation. *Catch-22*, first published in 1961, is the best known of these novels.

The central character, Yossarian, a bombardier on a Mediterranean island in World War II, is an antihero who wants to stay alive. The novel relentlessly mocks the military bureaucracy that rather than facilitate Yossarian's desire, makes his death and those of his compatriots, more probable. A series of increasingly farcical episodes ensue as Yossarian tries to prove that he is insane, the only way that he can officially leave the war.

Catch-22 was part of a wave of countercultural American fiction that actively sought to use satire and surrealism as ways of protesting against the seriousness of events of the time such as the Korean War, the Cold War and the impending conflict in Vietnam. The novel's lively language, bizarre plot twists and doomed characters highlight what Heller saw as the inanity of America's active participation in such events, and inadequacies of bureaucracies such as governments and the military that enforced that participation.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing — Madeleine Thien

Do Not Say We Have Nothing combines an extended family saga with commentary on China's history since Mao Zedong's accession to power in 1949.

Thien, a Chinese–Canadian author, begins her saga with a young Chinese girl, Ai-Ming, arriving in Vancouver having left China at the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Ai-Ming lives for a short period of time with relatives, Marie and her mother. The story expands as Marie, with information from Ai-Ming, recounts the stories of family members from the time of the Cultural Revolution in China to the present. Their tales are often tragic, with many becoming victims of a totalitarian government that wanted to actively assert its control over its citizenry.

Thien chose to tell this story, which is partly based on her family's background, as historical fiction (rather than as an autobiography or factual history) because she believes that the genre allows a writer to use their imagination to explore the shadowy gaps in history. The result is a densely plotted story that addresses concepts such as personal and national identity, how we deal with divided communities, the political persecution of individuals and groups, and the basic human right to freedom of expression. Ultimately, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* pays tribute to family bonds, and reminds us of storytelling's power as an unstoppable act of resistance.

***Foreign Soil* (collection of short stories)**

— Maxine Beneba Clarke

Foreign Soil is a collection of short stories that focuses on the experiences of marginalised groups and individuals, in contexts ranging from New Orleans, Jamaica and Brixton to suburban Melbourne. Written by Maxine Beneba Clarke, an Australian writer and performance poet with Afro–Caribbean heritage, and the author of the memoir *The Hate Race*, this anthology has won numerous literary awards and was shortlisted for the 2015 Stella Prize.

Written with great empathy, each story captures various characters' struggles with upheaval and cultural exile. For instance, the titular story focuses on a relationship souring and alienation beginning after two young people move to a foreign land. Other stories depict, with bracing honesty, the pain and distress refugees in foreign countries experience, the copious challenges asylum seekers endure, the mindset of militancy and the insidious effects of ignorance. Clarke is a fine technician, varying point of view and structure to reflect her characters' dislocated lives.

Foreign Soil is colourful, confronting, poetic and deeply affecting. It explores the complexities of belonging and hope, the intergenerational struggles that can come with being an outsider in society, and the ongoing challenges of race and class. The stories give voice to those who are lost, alone, disenfranchised and disregarded. They offer multiple perspectives for study, and act as strong and often innovative models for narrative writing.

***Heart of Darkness* — Joseph Conrad**

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) was a Polish–English writer whose works explore the consequences of being isolated in a foreign environment and are characterised by a strong sense of place. *Heart of Darkness*, first published in 1899, follows this trend.

An anonymous narrator tells the story of Marlow, a riverboat captain who goes to Africa and becomes disenchanted with the physical, psychological and moral chaos of colonial occupation. As Marlow travels through the Congo, Conrad uses his confronting experiences and the onset of insanity in his counterpoint character, Kurtz, to critique the imperialist and racist attitudes he regarded as both fuelling and undermining colonial expansion.

The novel implies that being alienated from society leads to the collapse of social constraints, and raises questions about imperialism and how we might define civilisation. Debate about how *Heart of Darkness* represents Africa, race, gender and colonialism is extensive and ongoing.

***In Cold Blood* — Truman Capote**

Truman Capote (1924–1984) was an American writer and actor. He wrote *In Cold Blood* over a six-year period after reading about the 1959 murders of four members of a well-respected farming family in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas. As an investigative nonfiction work written in a fictional manner, *In Cold Blood* is generally accepted as the first novel to embrace the new journalism genre, also known as narrative or literary journalism.

The plot is a detailed reconstruction of the two perpetrators, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock's actions beginning with their release from prison through to the murders and their subsequent flight, confession and execution. Capote uses a three-layered structure, varying his chapters between descriptions of the two killers' backgrounds and lives to those of their victims, then other Holcomb citizens. The result is a gripping analysis of an horrific crime and the circumstances and psychologies that led to it. The work is especially noteworthy for its depiction of the complex relationship that existed between Smith and Hickock.

In contrast to its grim subject matter and journalistic origins, *In Cold Blood* is lavishly styled. Capote's work is a fascinating consideration of significant moral questions to do with the nature of evil, guilt and redemption, and how we deal with crime and punishment in society. It also firmly undercuts the mythical notion that the American dream is truly democratic.

***Life After Life* — Kate Atkinson**

Kate Atkinson is a contemporary British writer. She is prolific and versatile, writing detective fiction, historical fiction and magical realism. Her work has won numerous prestigious awards.

Life After Life, published in 2013, is evocative and often comic. It tells the story of Ursula Todd's lives, initially dying at birth in 1910, then becoming a child who drowns at sea, and later a victim of the Spanish flu, an abusive husband, and a bomb in World War II. When Ursula realises that she is experiencing repetitive life cycles, she decides to kill Adolf Hitler to prevent the war. The novel's structure supports its unusual premise by constantly looping back from the darkness of death to restart Ursula's life.

The question of whether Ursula's experiences are real or imagined will potentially interrogate concepts around the nature of human existence, and our relationship with the past. The novel also offers perspectives on ordinary people's lives during extraordinary historical junctures, women's developing social status during the first half of the 20th century, and the English class system.

***Mrs Dalloway* — Virginia Woolf**

Virginia Woolf, a highly influential English novelist and essayist, was a leading exponent of Modernism. Her work, often experimental and lyrical, explores a range of concepts, especially feminism and the British class system.

Mrs Dalloway is a stream of consciousness novel first published in 1925 and set in post-war London. The action takes place over a single day as the upper class protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, and an oppositional character, the traumatised war veteran, Septimus Smith absorb the reader into British life through direct and unfiltered access to their thoughts and impressions. The novel is constructed as a collection of interior monologues ungoverned by chronology. Dialogue is both direct and reported, with little distinction between the two, and Woolf imbues ordinary moments and objects with significant symbolic value.

The novel touches on numerous perspectives to do with our perception of time and the past, society's attitude towards and ability to negotiate and treat mental illnesses, women's traditional and non-traditional roles, self-perception, sexuality, and the fundamental purpose of human existence. *Mrs Dalloway* is an extraordinary rendering, a work of unlimited power, beauty and gravity.

***Only the Animals* (linked collection of short stories) — Ceridwen Dovey**

Ceridwen Dovey is an Australian who writes fiction and nonfiction. Published in 2014, this unique anthology of stories is a blend of fable and fantasy, a device Dovey uses to explore the often violent and unthinking human animal in a gently satirical and ironic style.

Each of the ten stories in *Only The Animals* uses a linear timeframe within a time of conflict, and is narrated posthumously by an animal who, in the tale of their dying, reveals profound judgments about human failings. Dovey employs aesthetic features with great skill. Symbol, irony, sensory

imagery and metaphor are woven delicately and purposefully throughout the tales. Her ability to find distinctive voices for each of her narrators — the loyal dog, the feisty mussel — and to weave these voices through multiple literary allusions adds power and depth to the narrative.

Each entry in the collection can be read as a single story and analysed accordingly. The clever connective layering between the stories also provides an opportunity to develop imaginative writing ideas.

***Pride and Prejudice* — Jane Austen**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen's 1813 comedy of manners, is arguably her most widely read and adapted work. Set in Georgian England, the novel reverberates with wit and wisdom, and contains memorable characters such as the Bennet family, pompous Mr Collins, formidable Lady Catherine de Bourgh and the overly proud romantic hero, Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Austen's story centres around Elizabeth Bennet, one of five unmarried daughters. Elizabeth's world is one of country walks, rural villages, the companionship of siblings and friends, great houses, wealthy suitors, clergymen, regimental officers, the joy and heartbreak of romance, and the pressures of avoiding family scandal and disgrace. This is all underpinned by women having to rely on men for social respectability and financial security. Elizabeth is feisty and independent enough to see through the artifice of this mannered world. As the story progresses, however, her strong heart eventually gravitates towards Darcy in one of literature's best-known love matches.

As with all of Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice* offers an acute rendering of a time and place where reputation was everything, and family, class and gender were the principal determinants of a person's future. Georgian England's rigid social framework, customs and expectations are depicted with biting, satiric humour. Students would benefit from developing a historical and social overview of Austen's world prior to reading the novel.

Short stories by Amy Witting

Amy Witting (1918–2001) is the pseudonym for a noted Australian writer of novels, poetry and short stories. Like many writers, Witting used her personal experiences as a source for fiction, often in an oblique though compelling manner.

Her stories frequently address the survival motif, unsurprising for someone whose childhood coincided with the Depression years. Witting, who as Joan Levick was a teacher of modern languages for many years, also wrote convincingly about schools and childhood, language and communication, the isolation imposed by illness or mental health difficulties, the fluctuations inherent in marital relationships, and the contrasts that exist between urban and outback life.

Witting is renowned for her understated writing style, which invites a non-judgmental, compassionate approach to concept and character. Her acclaimed short stories are self-contained narratives with interesting perspectives, and fine examples of spare but elegant realism.

Short stories by Annie Proulx

Annie Proulx is an American writer who specialises in stories set in rural locations with unique characters, many of whom struggle to fit into mainstream society. She is especially interested in depicting the trials of families with underlying dysfunctions.

Her stories of lonely people trapped in awkward situations are tender, whimsical, darkly comic and invariably created with great humanity. Some of the better known examples are 'The Half-Skinned Steer', about a man returning home after a death in the family, 'The Blood Bay', about a simple error that leads to tragic consequences, 'Them Old Cowboy Songs', about a 19th century couple who are unable to overcome adversity, and 'The Mud Below', about a man being destroyed by the activity that he loves.

Proulx's stories are recognised and cherished because of her distinctive aesthetic. She includes well-disguised plot twists and uses vernacular language patterns that are common to the area where the story is set. Her work is measured and reflective, and amply captures the American West's unique spirit and style.

Short stories by Anton Chekhov

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Anton Chekhov was a 19th century writer whose work embraced a level of social realism that appealed to the common people and, correspondingly, irked the wealthy classes. As with many artists, his own life proved to be a source for his creative interests. His father's fiscal and moral bankruptcy forced Chekhov, who qualified as a physician and worked as a journalist, to become a long-term provider for his family. Chekhov grew accustomed to living beneath the spectre of social and economic difficulties.

Chekhov's stories feature ordinary characters beset by apathy and the desire to live elsewhere or be someone else. His work has been lauded for its truthful depictions of life in a country with major social problems, many of which stemmed from an unbreakable rich–poor divide. For instance, 'Peasants' exposes the terrible conditions the lower classes endure, 'Ward No. 6' focuses on the horrors of living with mental illness, and 'The Bet' features two men debating the merits, or otherwise, of the death penalty.

Chekhov's stories also offer a masterclass in the art of writing narrative. His tightly constructed works are famously governed by the principle of 'Chekhov's gun', where every detail must contribute meaningfully to the effectiveness of the whole. His recognition that life is neither clean nor neat give his stories a striking level of verisimilitude. Teachers who are interested in introducing Chekhov to their students could also access American author's George Sanders' book, *A Swim In The Pond In The Rain*. Sanders analyses several 19th century Russian stories including three by Chekhov: 'In the Cart', 'The Darling' and 'Gooseberries'.

Short stories by Cate Kennedy

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Kennedy is an Australian novelist, poet, memoirist, and acclaimed short story writer. Her work, published locally and internationally, includes the collections, *Dark Roots* (2006) and *Like a House on Fire* (2012).

In an interview with Helen Garner, Kennedy spoke of her desire to explore how people respond to situations where they have been disempowered. In line with this, she writes convincingly of the hidden complexities that exist for individuals as they attempt to go about their everyday lives. Many of her stories feature characters who are on the verge of significant change and faced with making a choice that will have long-lasting consequences. Examples include, 'Cold Snap', a tale of revenge featuring a protagonist from the city who sets about disrupting a rural community, 'Kill or Cure', also set in the country, about a marital schism, and 'Angel', which depicts the effects of post-traumatic stress in a young refugee.

Although Kennedy's stories can include subject matter that may be seen as confronting, hope remains as a genuine possibility. The power of her writing, united with her willingness to focus on concepts such as personal awareness, truth in relationships, whether romantic or family-based, and the individual's desire for sanctuary and salvation, make her short stories highly accessible and study worthy.

Short stories by Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was a prolific critic, poet and story writer and a key member of the Romantic movement in America. His work was predominantly Gothic in style, exploring concepts related to the macabre and the unknown.

Poe exploited his characters' psychological flaws and led them inexorably towards often grisly fates. His narrative style combined detective fiction's suspenseful plotting with horror writing's gritty aesthetic. Some of his best known stories are 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in which a nameless murderer tries to convince readers of his sanity, 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', a story that introduced the now standardised trope of the brilliant outsider as a detective, and 'The Cask of Amontillado', the tale of an horrific revenge.

Like much of Poe's work, these stories are well-honed examples of classic, Aristotelian structure. They also have the tonal directness and economy of detail that characterise traditional, short-form narratives.

Short stories by George Saunders

Saunders is an American professor of literature who writes prolifically across a range of forms, but who specialises in creating and analysing short stories. In addition to many awards for his stories and articles, Saunders won the 2017 prestigious Man Booker Prize for his experimental novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*.

Although the perspectives and techniques are significantly varied, Saunders' short stories frequently focus on people who are alienated from mainstream society. His style is darkly comic and satirical. He uses a speculative approach as a way of targeting social, economic and political concepts such as capitalism and the pervasive influence of the media. Saunders creates settings that are both realistically recognisable and dystopian, and his stories often hinge on fantastical or magical possibility. His best-known collection is arguably *Tenth of December*, published in 2013. *Liberation Day*, his most recent, was published in 2022.

At the heart of Saunders' enticing and unusual narratives is the desire to mock those absurdities in life that work towards dehumanisation, while championing our shared fallibilities and graces with an abundance of compassion.

Short stories by Ray Bradbury

Introduced to list — start of 2026

American Ray Bradbury was a prolific writer whose stories cover a range of forms and subjects. Much of his writing stemmed from his own experiences, especially those from his childhood and adolescence, and focused on the impacts of technological growth on social structures and human development. He had a vibrant, often poetic writing style and his short stories, plays and screenplays were widely published. As a novelist, he is best known for his influential work, *Fahrenheit 451*.

Bradbury's interests as a writer included the potential alienation of humans in our and other worlds, our capacity to cope with change and the consequences of misusing or becoming overly reliant on developing technologies. Despite the darkness inherent in his work, he remained optimistic about human ingenuity and creativity. Bradbury's best stories are transcendental. 'All Summer In A Day', is a deceptively simple treatise on childhood cruelty, 'A Sound of Thunder', is an exploration of the potential impact of the past upon the future, 'There Will Come Soft Rains', is a haunting story about the consequences of nuclear conflict, 'The Smile', is a story that reaffirms hope in a post-apocalyptic world, and 'The Veldt', is a cautionary tale about what might happen if humans allow technology to supersede our humanity.

Bradbury worked within contrasts: childhood and adulthood, creativity and conformism, imagination and reason, spirituality and materialism. Students can expect a wide range of ideas, economy of structure, clearly delineated characters and striking aesthetics. His stories offer much scope for analysis and act as fine models for narrative writing.

Short stories by Ursula K Le Guin

Ursula K Le Guin (1929–2018) was an internationally acclaimed American writer whose realist, fantasy and science fiction work was based around an often deeply ironic commentary on contemporary attitudes, values and beliefs.

At the heart of Le Guin's narratives lies the desire to initiate debate about the morality that underscores social and cultural decision-making. One of her best-known short stories, 'The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas', creates a hypothetical but entirely believable society which exists on the premise that a single person's suffering is justifiable if the consequence of that suffering is the happiness of the majority. Le Guin does not seek to judge the ethics of such a situation. Her stories pose questions and offer a multitude of ideas for analysis and reimagination. Other interesting examples of her work include, 'Sur', in which an all-female team undertakes an expedition to Antarctica, 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight', featuring an innocent child caught between two worlds, and 'She Unnames Them', an overturn of the traditional Biblical story of Adam having dominion over the animals.

Le Guin's short stories are notable for their versatile styles and sharp analysis of human behaviour. As a writer, she frequently used classical myths and legends and biblical stories as sites for reinterpretation, especially around issues of gender roles and feminism.

Stasiland — Anna Funder

Moves from EA to general list — start of 2028

Anna Funder's hybrid nonfiction work blends historical facts, personal narrative and others' lived experiences. *Stasiland* tells the stories of East Berliners who lived inside the Stasi (secret police) surveillance state, with the Berlin Wall looming large. It provides an internal view of a totalitarian regime's moral culpability and machinations. Widely translated and published across the world, *Stasiland* has won and been shortlisted for many awards.

The book begins with Funder's autobiographical account of her boss refusing to allow her to collect the East German stories, and her decision to ignore this. As Funder gathers personal histories describing what it was like to live in a tightly controlled society where both citizens and regime enforcers watch everyone's movements, she subjects herself to the residual effects of this history.

This powerful book is horrifying in its depictions of the surveillance state and uplifting as a celebration of human resilience, compassion and courage. As well as being a potent reminder of totalitarian ruthlessness, *Stasiland* asks readers to consider their own history, both at a personal

and national level. It also asks how we would cope with the levels of governmental control that defined pre-unified East Germany.

Snow Falling on Cedars — David Guterson

American writer David Guterson's novel was released in 1994. A year later, *Snow Falling On Cedars* won the prestigious PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and in 1999 it was adapted into a film.

The novel, set on the fictional Washington island of San Piedro in 1954, focuses on a Japanese citizen who has been charged with the murder of a well-regarded American fisherman. The trial of Kabuo Miyamoto forms the story's structure and operates as an extended motif for how truth may be intentionally or inadvertently misrepresented to privilege a preferred narrative. The novel is notable for the author's use of an isolated, contained setting to explore concepts such as justice, racism, the abrasions between the Eastern and Western values, and the difficulty of maintaining a consistent individual conscience in the face of broader hostility.

Snow Falling On Cedars offers opportunities to consider perspectives on estrangement and the process of depersonalisation, seeing people as conceptually representative rather than as individuals. Conflicting characters undergo parallel experiences as a way of highlighting the irony of their opposition, and Guterson uses a range of narrative devices such as the symbolism of nature and the metaphor of place to highlight the unsteady nuances that exist around human self-perception and national identity. His novel is a finely worked exploration of love and loss, betrayal and forgiveness.

Swallow the Air — Tara June Winch

Tara June Winch's first novel was published in 2006, a year after winning the David Unaipon Award. The protagonist's desire to find a place to belong and to be loved gives this quest story universal appeal beyond the apparent intimacy of the subject matter.

May, a young Aboriginal woman, lives on the Australian coast. Her life is frequently and profoundly affected by poverty, violence and discrimination. When her mother dies and her brother Billy turns to drug addiction, May leaves to find her father. Throughout this physical and moral journey to Darwin she is more focused on finding somewhere to belong than on her identity. A conventional finale that successfully resolves the main character's problems is not offered to readers. May's story, however, does end in hope, albeit compromised, as she returns to the place where she began her journey and re-establishes meaningful connections with her aunt and brother, who has rebuilt his life.

The quality of Winch's writing can be seen in the understated way in which she depicts the story's underlying violence. The language and content of *Swallow The Air* is unflinchingly explicit but faithful to the experience of a troubled young person seeking to overcome serious obstacles in her life and achieve self-determination. This powerful and often lyrical novel moves beyond coming-of-age tropes and asks questions about society's treatment of those who are disenfranchised, and their right to community, safety and dignity.

Terra Nullius — Claire G Coleman

Moves from EA to general list — start of 2029

Noongar writer Claire G Coleman's acclaimed 2017 novel is set in futuristic Australia after an alien species has invaded and colonised, with the people divided into Natives and Settlers.

The novel takes readers on a journey of survival, interweaving several characters' stories, including Jacky, who escapes a settler mission in search of his family.

It opens with Jacky fleeing into unfamiliar terrain, knowing that Settlers and skilled Native trackers, travelling more easily and swiftly, will be in pursuit. His journey is long and fraught, filled with hardships and battles for survival. Other characters whose stories intersect with Jacky's include Sergeant Rohan, the leader of the group in pursuit, Johnny Star, an ex-trooper and outlaw, and Esperance, a young woman trying to protect her own group from enslavement. Partway through the narrative, their stories shift as the novel heads in an unexpected direction.

Terra Nullius is nonlinear, providing an unsettling and multifaceted view of colonisation as a process and outcome. The novel subverts dystopian tropes as a way of forcing the reader to reconsider their perspective on colonial practices. The use of language as a tool to repress and control people is highlighted, as are contrasting views of land and ownership. This unconventional allegorical novel offers many opportunities for study and debate.

***That Deadman Dance* — Kim Scott**

Wirlomin Noongar writer Kim Scott's novel won the 2011 Miles Franklin Literary Award, as well as several other prestigious awards. Scott's historical research of the Noongar people's connection with the early whaling industry shaped the work.

That Deadman Dance begins in 1826, during the early days of European colonisation of Noongar country along the south coast of Western Australia. The protagonist, young Noongar man Bobby Wabalanginy, befriends English and American arrivals. Adaptable to change, Bobby learns to read and write the settlers' language, joins them on their whaling trips and creates songs and dance mixing English and Noongar languages. But when trouble occurs within the colony, Bobby is forced to choose whether to side with his traditional world or embrace the new colony's regime.

The novel uses a nonlinear structure with flashbacks. Scott provides varying points of view to offer perspectives from both the coloniser and the colonised, and to explore the concepts of relationship and community. The 'yarning' style of the novel provides an irrevocable connection to the Wirlomen people and gives Scott's work, and his subtle delving into power, culture, exchange and language, a remarkable authenticity.

***The Complete Maus* (graphic novel — two volumes) — Art Spiegelman**

Spiegelman, an American cartoonist and writer, created *Maus* from interviews with his father, who survived the Holocaust. Initially the work was published as a series of magazine chapters before being transformed into a duo of graphic novels.

The Complete Maus is organised as a dual narrative, exploring the disturbing experiences of Spiegelman's parents at Auschwitz as well as the author's fractious relationship with his father and his grief over his mother's death. Spiegelman uses animal symbolism to depict humans from different nations as a way of highlighting the absurdity of ideological divisions. Text dominates the artwork, and the narrative includes moments of lightness amidst the poignancy and reflection.

The Complete Maus can be read as both a personal memoir and a commentary on concepts such as survival, guilt, suffering and family conflict. The graphic novels also explore the phenomenon known as post-memory, where the children of trauma survivors experience, intergenerationally, the effects of that trauma themselves.

***The Good People* — Hannah Kent**

Australian writer Hannah Kent often locates her narratives within obscure historical intervals as a way of exploring the lives of women. Her 2016 novel, *The Good People*, is an example of this, an interesting and highly readable work that is grounded in Kent's research of Irish traditions and the power of nature, and women, in healing.

The novel immerses readers in the poverty and insularity of 18th century rural Ireland. The death of Nóra Leahy's husband marks a sinister shift in the balance of the community, and rumours of her hidden and ailing grandson feed local anxieties that he has been harmed by otherworldly folk. The healing powers of Nance Roche, an old woman with 'the knowledge', become significant as encroaching systems of faith and urban governance test the community's social fabric.

Focusing on a remote setting allows Kent to depict the conflicts inherent within a community that is caught between superstition and traditional wisdom, and the arrival of Christianity with its adherence to formal education and patriarchal control. Written with wisdom and compassion, *The Good People* encourages an examination of how women are represented in society in relation to Nature, knowledge, protection and safety, and offers perspectives on the role of belief systems in maintaining communities.

***The Labyrinth* — Amanda Lohrey**

In 2021, Australian writer Amanda Lohrey's novel won three significant awards: the Miles Franklin Literary Award, the Voss Literary Prize and the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction.

Erica Marsden lives in a shack next to a beach. Her adult son, Daniel, is in prison for killing six people in an arson attack. Erica, who does not believe that her son is guilty, responds by agreeing to burn his books, but slowly, drawing out the process. For her own sake and wellbeing, she builds a labyrinth out of stones. Jurko, an illegal immigrant with his own backstory, helps her. Their construction of the uniquely shaped labyrinth mirrors their developing friendship and helps Erica to move away from her reclusive lifestyle, form new relationships and rediscover her identity and purpose.

The Labyrinth is haunting and intimate, a carefully crafted novel that equates patterning in nature with families and the intersecting of their lives. The complex relationships that can exist between parents and their children, justice, redemption, perfectionism and art as self-expression are all explored in this deeply meditative narrative.

***The Man in the High Castle* — Philip K Dick**

American author Philip K Dick (1928–1982) was a prolific writer of science and speculative fiction novels and short stories. His work explores the nature of reality and how we might view or perceive our universe in all its multitudinous dimensions.

The Man in the High Castle, published in 1962, is a dystopian, alternative history novel set in a world governed by the Axis powers (Japan and Germany) who defeat the Allies (Britain and America) in World War II and establish their own autocratic regimes by dividing up the world's continents between them. In Germany's zone, Hitler is insane and incarcerated in a psychiatric institution while his henchmen occupy the top echelons of government, imposing Nazi ideology and continuing their expansive domination of territory by conquering other planets. In Japan's zone, society is ordered through strict codes and functionality, positioning the Japanese as the highest class.

The novel's characters struggle to live within this new world order, which is imbued with chaos and filled with delusion, suspicion and paranoia. The blurring of reality, made worse as time progresses, presents questions about whose version of history can be trusted. This concept is amplified by the presence of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, a book written by the man in the high castle, which explores the alternative outcome of the war, one dominated by the United States and Britain. *The Man in the High Castle* is a highly imaginative and provocative work that examines the presence of chance in our lives by asking the classic storywriter's question: what if?

***The Poisonwood Bible* — Barbara Kingsolver**

The Poisonwood Bible, Kingsolver's fifth novel, was released in 1998. It quickly became a best-seller for the American writer, winning and being shortlisted for a range of major literary awards.

The story of a missionary family who move from Georgia, USA to the Belgian Congo in 1959 occurs over three decades. While Nathan Price, the father and a preacher, is the dominant force behind the family's relocation and attempts to assimilate with their African community, the narrative unfolds, against a backdrop of political turmoil, from the perspectives of the five Price women. Their struggles to survive and evolve in the remote village of Kilanga are highlighted as their father remains obsessively zealous in his determination to convert the villagers to Christianity and a Western way of life.

The Poisonwood Bible is an allegory of the persecution and guilt associated with African slave trade to the Americas. As such, the novel is a powerful critique of colonialism and post-colonial practices. It also offers perspectives on family relationships and religion, especially the way that pantheism has been used to subjugate groups of people who hold opposing beliefs. This politically and culturally engaged novel advocates for unity over entitlement, and connection over servitude.

***The Quiet American* — Graham Greene**

English author Graham Greene (1904–1991) was a prolific writer who examined, with great clarity and moral courage, the social and political issues of his time, often through the lens of Catholicism. *The Quiet American*, released in 1955, combines the drama of political intrigue with a backdrop of romance, friendship and murder.

The novel is set in Vietnam, at the end of French colonial occupation of the country. A cynical war reporter, Thomas Fowler, is tasked with covering the conflict for an English newspaper. During this assignment, Fowler is befriended by an idealistic American, Alden Pyle. Pyle purports to be an economic attaché but he is actually an undercover CIA agent. When a badly timed bombing incident kills innocent women and children, Fowler is determined to uncover where the responsibility lies. His quest leads him to his friend, the quiet American of the title.

The novel raises questions, still highly relevant, about the contrasting political roles and expectations of various countries in terms of world conflicts and order. *The Quiet American* also offers perspectives on idealism and diplomacy, colonialism, loyalty and betrayal, and the moral responsibilities implicit within relationships that are based on friendship or love.

***The Remains of the Day* — Kazuo Ishiguro**

Japanese-born British writer Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is set in England in the summer of 1956. Stevens, the butler of Darlington Hall, is given the opportunity to drive to Cornwall to see a former colleague he once secretly loved, and persuade her to rejoin him in employment.

The Remains of the Day is a first-person narrative written predominantly in flashback. The protagonist has deliberately led a life that is characterised by dignity and restraint, prompting questions about regret over lost opportunities as well as national character. As a narrator, Stevens is not so much unreliable as unwitting. His determined absence of self-knowledge has cocooned him within a fiction of his own making. Although he has lived with dignity, the butler eventually realises that his rigid self-control has compromised his capacity to enjoy ordinary, daily pleasures, a situation that he seeks to revoke by the end of the novel.

Ishiguro uses landscape as a metaphor for this restraint of purpose. Stevens equates the nobility of the English countryside with his own belief as to what constitutes worthwhileness in a human being. The novel provides a compelling study of how class-based perceptions of morality can manipulate behaviours, and explores varying representations of love, especially of the misguided or thwarted kind.

***The White Tiger* — Aravind Adiga**

The White Tiger, the first novel for Indian writer and journalist Aravind Adiga, won the 2008 Man Booker prize. This powerful work gives representation and a voice to India's marginalised poor, and has since been adapted into a film of the same name.

Written as a bildungsroman, the novel juxtaposes an impoverished character, Balram Halwai's rise into selfhood, with India's development as a global economy. The protagonist is symbolised as a 'white tiger' whose wit and tenacity enable him to prosper, despite the disadvantage of his lowly birthright and the rigidity of India's caste system. Structurally, *The White Tiger* can be viewed as a quest novel, with the protagonist overcoming a series of barriers and setbacks to achieve his goal. The narrative, told in retrospect, is episodic and darkly humorous, and evokes a country that is characterised by the tensions that exist between ancient traditions and modern imperatives.

Adiga uses Halwai's narrative arc to highlight social and political injustices, especially the divisive effects of capitalism: the sociopolitical power of money, the debilitating effect of poverty on the human spirit, and the seemingly endless human capacity for violence and immorality.

***Things Fall Apart* — Chinua Achebe**

Things Fall Apart (1958) is the first novel written by African author Chinua Achebe. It is set in Nigeria in the late 19th century and depicts its main character, Okonkwo's tragic downfall.

Okonkwo lives in the village of Umuofia. Determined to avoid being like his wasteful father, he dedicates himself to building up his wealth and reputation through disciplined hard work. This approach earns him the Umuofian people's respect, but Okonkwo's fear of being like his father gives him a pathological insecurity regarding his own masculinity, one that is expressed in his inflexible worldview and a propensity towards violence. The novel explores life in Umuofia before colonisation and how Okonkwo's aggression, while providing esteem, also leads to conflict. It then recounts Okonkwo's exile in Mbanta because of a tragic accident, and his response to stories of white missionaries who have set up a church in Umuofia. This is followed by his return home and his ultimately tragic response to English colonisation that precipitates the end of traditional Umuofian society.

Achebe's depiction of the complex laws, rituals and social customs of pre-colonial African society challenges those Eurocentric representations of Africa and Africans that underpinned colonialist practices. However, it is Okonkwo's story, integrating both European and African narrative techniques, that gives this novel its universal, mythic dimensions. *Things Fall Apart* is about the conflict between two incompatible worlds colliding in a colonial context, but also about the

incompatibility between individual desire and social expectation that remains the core of the human experience.

***Wuthering Heights* — Emily Brontë**

Moves from EA to general list — start of 2027

Emily Brontë's only novel was published in 1847, one year before she died from consumption. Domestic in placement and Gothic-Romantic in style, the novel has become an enduring classic of English literature.

The story is set in the bleak West Yorkshire Moors. Two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, are embroiled in an intergenerational conflict that echoes across the decades with far-reaching consequences. Central to this conflict is the thwarted love between obsessive Heathcliff and defiant Catherine, a love Brontë depicts as hyperreal to the point of transcendence. The corrosive intensity of their relationship drives the action towards its brutal but tragic climax.

Wuthering Heights' narrative force, structural complexity and heightened, near-hyperbolic language makes it challenging but rewarding to study. The aesthetics that enhance Brontë's work, and her ability to forensically examine her characters' psychology, are especially noteworthy.

Plays and drama texts

***A Doll's House* — Henrik Ibsen**

A Doll's House, first performed in 1879, offers an acute analysis of the moral failings of the dominant middle class in 19th century Europe through the story of the Helmers, Nora and Torvald, and the unravelling of their apparently sound marriage. Written by Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), the play explores the uneven power dynamic within the Helmer's relationship and exposes the inconsistencies and failings of gender-based marital and social expectations of the time.

Torvald works in a bank. Earlier in their marriage, Nora had arranged for a loan to pay for a holiday to Italy, so that her overworked husband could recover from illness. Nora had borrowed the money illegally from Krogstad, because women were not allowed to organise such contracts. Krogstad's arrival at their home, and his determination to blackmail Nora and use her past actions for his own benefit, sets in motion a series of events that calls into question society's social, moral and religious structures.

Ibsen's plays examined ordinary people and situations in restricted, often claustrophobic environments. In *A Doll's House* he uses the device of outsiders invading the domestic space to force out uncomfortable truths. The play offers interesting perspectives on many concepts, such as ethical behaviour, social reputation, self-sacrifice and women's agency.

***A Man for All Seasons* — Robert Bolt**

Set in the 1530s, English writer Robert Bolt's play traces the decline of Sir Thomas More's career as High Chancellor of England and advisor to King Henry VIII. It presents a perspective on a key historical event, the proposed annulment of Henry's Catholic marriage and the subsequent establishment of the Church of England.

A Man for All Seasons explores the relationship between persecution and conscience. More, seen as reluctant to agree to Henry's plan, is systematically destroyed, going from being a wealthy, uncorruptible lawyer to a poverty-stricken prisoner who is eventually executed. Juxtaposed against his unshakeable integrity is the baseness of human nature personified in characters such as Richard Rich, who deliberately perjures himself in court to facilitate More's demise. The key struggle in the play, however, is More's inner turmoil as he grapples with the king's untenable demands while simultaneously trying to remain a faithful subject and relying on the law to protect his civil liberties.

This sobering story about non-conformity and authoritarianism offers perspectives on many concepts, such as the cost of integrity, and whether this is important enough to justify the fate More and his family experienced. *A Man for All Seasons* also asks readers to consider the nature of wealth, and points to the chasm that can exist between financial gain and moral acuity.

***Berlin* — Joanna Murray Smith**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Berlin was created by Murray-Smith, one of Australia's foremost stage and screen writers, after a family visit to that city. The play is a two-hander, naturalist in style but frequently touted as a romantic thriller. It focuses on a German girl and a Jewish foreigner, both in their twenties, whose brief affair quickly becomes compromised by their individual pasts.

Tom, who is visiting Berlin for the first time, meets Charlotte, a bartender and poet. They go to her apartment and develop their relationship through dialogue that is clever, charismatic and erotic. Both, however, have significant secrets in their lives. Dramatically, these secrets collide, leading to a surprising though open-ended denouement.

The play's central conceit, to investigate how we can reasonably judge the past from our more privileged position in the future, is highly pertinent in the modern world. The *Berlin* script is smart, witty, bold and ideologically engaging, intertwining concepts such as loss and atonement, grief, sexuality, and innocence. Teachers should note that the reading and analysis of this play will be significantly enhanced for students who have a developed understanding of World War II and the Holocaust, and how these events are framed today.

***Black is the New White* — Nakkiah Lui**

Black is the New White by award-winning writer and Gamilaroi–Torres Strait Islander woman Nakkiah Lui is set in an expensive holiday home in a natural landscape on ancestral land where two families gather at Christmas. This award-winning play has links to romantic comedy and social satire, but generally defies genre.

The story features a narrator, the Spirit of Christmas, who provides background information and commentary. The first scene introduces Charlotte, a self-confessed 'Black woman' (a lawyer who has received offers to do a TV show and a scholarship to complete her PhD at Columbia) who is marrying Francis, a 'White man' (an impoverished, experimental classical composer from a wealthy family). Joan and Ray, Charlotte's parents, who met at a deaths in custody march in 1980 in Redfern, Sydney arrive next. Once Charlotte's sister and brother-in-law, Rose and Sonny, and Francis's parents, Dennison and Marie, appear, the stage is set for old rivalries and personal secrets to be revealed.

The play's fast-paced, witty dialogue covers a range of serious topics in a highly engaging manner, offering acutely observed perspectives on cultural appropriation, privilege, inequality, and ingrained social practices. The characters' interactions are frank and thought-provoking as they debate ideas and concepts about success, wealth, politics, love, post-colonial identities, conflict and relationships.

***Black Medea* — Wesley Enoch**

Enoch, a Nunukul Ngugi man, is a playwright and artistic director. In *Black Medea*, first performed in 2000, Enoch reframes the narrative and structural elements of Euripides' classical tragedy. Like Euripides, who was unusual for his era in his efforts to humanise his characters, Enoch tells a personal story that touches potently on the relationship between the individual and their spiritual destiny.

Medea, promised to another man, sacrifices her connections to land and people for her love of Jason and their child. However, their happiness is short-lived as Jason is destined to become like his own father: unemployed, drunk and violent. The Chorus, linking the action of the play and its audience, urges Jason to let go of Medea and their son, and as Jason deteriorates, for Medea to return home, so the child can know his people and ancestors. True to the horrific outcome of Euripides' tragedy, Medea provides her child with a monstrous 'escape' from the cycle of despair by invoking revenge and sacrifice.

Black Medea is poetic, bold and brutal. Despite its ancient origins, the play offers perspectives of love, gender, race and betrayal, which remain highly relevant for contemporary audiences.

***Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* — Tennessee Williams**

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof won the 1955 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The play, set in the 1950s on a Mississippi cotton plantation, spans a single evening in which a family is forced to confront the realities of their deceitful lives.

The play begins with the patriarch Big Daddy's birthday and what is apparently good news about his cancer diagnosis. The chief catalyst for the action is the toxic marriage of Big Daddy's son, Brick, and Brick's wife, known as Maggie 'the cat'. Brick's resulting alcoholism has destroyed his self-esteem and led to his deep-seated disgust at people's mendacity, which is slowly destroying him. Big Daddy, undeterred by his family's dysfunction and determined to rejoice in his positive health news, decides to grasp life with greater zest than before. The play's dramatic tension reaches its climactic point when the patriarch's indecision about who is to inherit his wealthy estate provokes Brick into revealing the truth about his father's terminal illness.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof offers significant insights into the complexities of family relationships, as well as perspectives on truth and lies, power and trust, betrayal and different forms of love, and especially how humans cope with mortality.

***City of Gold* — Meyne Wyatt**

Meyne Wyatt, an actor, artist and writer, is a Wongutha–Yamatji man. His 2019 play *City of Gold* is set predominantly in Kalgoorlie, mixing scenes from the past and the present.

Breythe is an actor trying to establish his career on Australia's east coast while continuing to honour his Indigenous heritage. His father's tragic death prompts him to return to his hometown, Kalgoorlie, to grieve alongside his angry brother Mateo and activist sister Carina. In so doing, he is forced to confront difficult questions about his relationships with both home and family, and his own regret, guilt and pain of loss.

The play is a realistic and compelling exploration of injustice, racism, inequality, intergenerational trauma and alienation. Wyatt asks probing questions about Australia's past and its present, and about the inequitable distribution of social and political power, in a highly nuanced, acerbically humorous and savage story.

***Constellations* — Nick Payne**

Nick Payne is a British playwright and screenwriter. *Constellations*, which debuted in England in 2012, was his first drama to be performed on Broadway, in America.

The play explores the possibility of people living parallel existences, meaning a range of possible futures are available depending on the decisions we make. The on-and-off romance between Roland, a beekeeper, and Marianne, a cosmologist, becomes a post-modernist experience that transcends time and disrupts traditional narrative structure. Their relationship, constructed as a jigsaw, repeats scenes, has different endings and tie-ins, and multiple potential realities. The play moves towards its conclusion when Marianne, diagnosed with a terminal illness, asks Roland for assistance in determining her future.

The structural complexity of *Constellations* allows Payne to present perspectives on broad philosophical questions about the purpose of existence and how humanity can determine and safeguard freedom of choice. The play also examines more familiar domestic concepts such as the nature of love and mortality, and how we choose to grieve.

***Death and the Maiden* — Ariel Dorfman**

Ariel Dorfman is a Chilean–American writer, academic and human rights activist. His work is highly political and framed by his exile from his home country after the existing democratic government is violently overthrown.

Death and the Maiden, first performed in 1990, is set in an unnamed Latin American country. Gerardo, a lawyer, has been appointed as head of a committee charged with investigating, but not prosecuting, crimes that occurred when the country was subjugated under a dictatorship. His wife Paulina, a former political advisor, does not accept this passive approach to justice. The play explores what happens when she inadvertently meets a man who, she believes, abducted and violated her in the past.

The play offers an interesting and often abrasive character study set against the conflicted backdrop of a nation still coming to terms with its return to democracy. Tautly written and plotted like a crime-thriller, *Death and the Maiden* examines perspectives of truth and how it can be proven or defined, and the moral imperatives that exist around innocence and justice, especially as they relate to revenge and reconciliation.

***Death of a Salesman* — Arthur Miller**

Arthur Miller, describing the closing moments of the 1949 premiere of *Death of a Salesman* in his autobiography, *Timebends*, recalled an audience so palpably moved by what they had witnessed that two or three minutes passed before the first signs of applause. More than 75 years later, this ‘tragedy of the common man’, as he called it, retains its poignancy and pathos.

Set in 1940s Brooklyn, *Death of a Salesman* focuses on the character Willy Loman, a 63-year-old salesman desperately trying to avoid the terrifying reality that he has failed as a husband, father and businessman. Alienated from those he loves, Willy becomes trapped in an emotional maelstrom where fantasy and truth are dangerously indistinguishable. A lifetime of chasing faulty notions of success, living in a perpetual state of self-deception and constantly comparing himself to others, leaves Willy a broken man.

Using a clever montage of past, present and imaginary events, and inventive staging choices, Miller conveys Willy’s brokenness and inner turmoil in a highly visceral manner. In projecting social realism through a thoughtful and creative dramatic lens, this modern American classic is a highly rewarding text to study.

***Hamlet* — William Shakespeare**

Introduced to list — start of 2029

Hamlet was written at the beginning of the 17th century, a time of significant political, intellectual and cultural tumult. The play deals with a young prince’s efforts to avenge his father’s death at the hands of his conniving uncle. It is widely celebrated for its probing existential insights and its characters’ psychological complexity.

Prince Hamlet of Denmark is grieving his beloved father’s death and his mother Gertrude’s rapid remarriage to Claudius, his father’s brother. An encounter with the King’s ghost convinces the prince that his father was murdered, and he pledges vengeance. Initially, his efforts are thwarted by his own paralysing uncertainty and a distrust of those around him, except for his good friend, Horatio. Hamlet does, however, reach a point where he is prepared to sacrifice all — friends, lover, family and himself — to right the moral and spiritual wrongs that have thrown Denmark into a state of ‘rottenness’.

Arguably Shakespeare's most widely interpreted and influential play, *Hamlet* offers a rich palette of perspectives for study. The play can be viewed as a philosophical examination of free will and determinism, a commentary on gender roles, a treatise on political power, and a piercing analysis of family and relationships. *Hamlet* is ethically, structurally and aesthetically potent, with the soliloquies in particular providing a wealth of material for investigation and debate.

***I'm With Her* — Victoria Midwinter Pitt**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

I'm With Her was created by Victoria Midwinter Pitt as a theatrical response to the #MeToo movement. The play is a verbatim work that repurposes the words of eight Australian women to highlight the sexism and injustices that have characterised and framed their lives, and the lives of women across the world. The people featured in the play — federal politician Anne Aly MP, sex worker activist Julie Bates, botanist Marion Blackwell, world champion surfer Pam Burridge, bartender Nikki Keating, Catholic nun Patricia Madigan, anthropologist and indigenous leader Marcia Langton and Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard — reveal their collective spirit, and rejoice in the strength of women who have opposed and/or defeated wrongful treatment based on gender.

Midwinter Pitt is a Walkley Award winner, and her skills are evident in the script's structure and framing. The women's accounts are layered throughout the text and interspersed with reflection and conversation. Each relates her aspirations as a child then uses anecdote and commentary to highlight the barriers she has faced as a woman, and how her experiences can be seen as representative of Australian social structures and expectations. The result is an authentic, unapologetically provocative work that suggests many of those barriers remain.

Despite the often challenging subject matter, which includes the degradation of women, sexual and physical assault, violence, suicide and racism, *I'm With Her* is a text that offers hope for future empowerment. The multiplicity of voices and experiences opens pathways to analyse numerous perspectives and cultural assumptions.

***King Lear* — William Shakespeare**

King Lear is set in ancient Britain and explores the complexities that exist around roles and responsibilities of succession. This concept was relevant to Jacobean audiences, uncertain about who would follow King James after the long and relatively stable reign of Elizabeth I. For modern audiences, the play retains relevance as a searing study of power and loyalty, suffering and justice.

Lear's decision to divide his kingdom among his three daughters at the beginning of the play has far-reaching consequences. The refusal of his youngest child, Cordelia, to submit to her father's ill-judged process, and the ruthless alliance between his other children, Goneril and Regan, results in anarchy, with Lear ostracised and gravitating towards madness. A subplot involving the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons Edmund and Edgar is in parallel to Lear's relationship with his children. Gloucester's wisdom also falters by trusting his illegitimate and scheming son over his 'legitimate' son, Edgar. The climax of this dark and often savage play sees the formerly imposing figures of Lear and Gloucester literally and figuratively blinded, and reduced to frail old men.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare depicts the tragic consequences of hubris. The royal family's destruction is a microcosmic equivalent to the kingdom's destruction, as Lear's pompous behaviour creates social and political chaos.

***Oedipus Rex* — Sophocles**

Oedipus Rex (along with *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*) is one of three Sophocles' plays set in Thebes that deals with Oedipus and his family. Drawing on ideas, stories and characters from Greek mythology, the work introduces the recently crowned King Oedipus, a heroic individual who had previously saved the city of Thebes from the murderous Sphinx.

As the play begins, Oedipus is confronted with a new challenge, a plague that is decimating the city. He discovers that this plague can only be lifted when the previous Theban king Laius's murderer is caught and punished. Oedipus, now married to Laius's former wife, Jocasta, is determined to ensure justice takes place. He begins a series of investigations that lead to several disturbing revelations about his past: he was raised by adoptive parents, his actual parents were Laius and Jocasta, he had unknowingly killed his father in a petty incident, years earlier, and he is now married to his mother. Overcome by these devastating disclosures, he blinds himself and is banished from Thebes.

Apart from its memorable and harrowing storyline, one of the main rewards of studying this Ancient Greek tragedy lies in its historical significance. It is recognised as Western drama's foundational text and its structure, concepts, focus on the tragic hero and use of dramatic irony set the pattern for many of the works that followed it.

***Photograph 51* — Anna Ziegler**

The inspiration for American playwright Anna Ziegler's 2008 play was Rosalind Franklin, a scientist and x-ray crystallographer. Franklin's role in creating the technique that identified the structure of DNA was not properly recognised until after her death in 1958, at the age of 37.

This one-act drama, set in London in 1953, reimagines the race to discover the structure of DNA. Franklin is portrayed as complex and brilliant, a perfectionist who is devoted to scientific discovery and prepared to work feverishly for results in a world where her fellow scientists are almost all male, and tensions, rivalries and ego invariably dominate. *Photograph 51* examines the many obstacles Franklin faced within this historical scientific contest, and suggests what her life might have been, had circumstances and events been different.

This compelling play explores technology, progress and research, the many challenges women in science faced, and ultimately loneliness. In Ziegler's own words, it is a play about 'ambition, isolation, and the race for greatness'.

***Rainbow's End* — Jane Harrison**

Australian playwright Jane Harrison is descended from the Muruwari people of New South Wales. Acclaimed and awarded for her work, Harrison has written a range of plays, as well as novels and short stories, that focus on the experiences of First Nation Australians.

Rainbow's End (2007) is set in an area known as The Flats, in 1950s Victoria. The story focuses on three generations of Aboriginal women and their ongoing battle for fundamental rights such as housing, education, employment, safety and acceptance. The women's situation is juxtaposed against the normalisation of privilege, affluence and containment in the lives of Australian settlers, a contrast that becomes more acutely realised when Errol Fisher, a salesman, falls in love with Dolly, the youngest of the three women.

Rainbow's End explores perspectives on endurance, social oppression, cultural and racial division, and gender disparity. Harrison's structure features the unification of starkly realistic scenes and colloquial language with music and dream sequences, a dramatic device that

enables a more visceral exploration of the psychology that underscores the play's important issues.

***Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* — Alana Valentine**

Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah is a 2010 play based on Australian writer Alana Valentine's conversations with Muslim women.

The narrative takes the form of a conversation between two Afghani–Australian women, Shafana, a young and idealistic Muslim, and her older, more conservative aunt, Sarrinah. The focus on the divide between generations is most evident when Shafana announces her intention to publicly wear the hijab as a symbol of her deep and abiding faith. For Sarrinah, however, this garment and its complex layers of meaning are a reminder of her past and the difficulties of being a woman in Taliban-run Afghanistan.

Valentine's naturalistic work uses a binary structure, featuring two characters with oppositional but related worldviews. The play's salient conflict lies in the choice between cultural integration or separation, symbolised by the hijab. Valentine uses setting to further represent this motif: the action takes place in a progressive science laboratory and the more traditional domestic family kitchen. Flashbacks and monologues develop Aunt Sarrinah's backstory, providing a context for her traditionalist thinking and wariness. *Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah* is a spirited play that raises questions about representation, religious freedom and intergenerational conflict.

***Terror* — Ferdinand von Schirach**

Von Schirach is a German lawyer whose short stories about his experiences with criminals and the judicial court have been internationally acclaimed. *Terror*, written in 2015, was his first play and is well-known for its ending, where audiences are asked to behave as a jury and vote on the guilt or otherwise of the story's protagonist.

The narrative is structured as a linear, courtroom drama that centres on a profound moral question: What constitutes the greater good? Major Lars Koch, the defendant, is an air force pilot who was ordered to divert a hijacked plane. When the hijackers changed course and directed the hijacked plane towards a packed sports stadium, Koch made the decision to shoot it down, killing the hijackers and 164 passengers. The play begins with Koch being charged with murder.

Although *Terror* offers perspectives on the spectre of international terrorism, the play is also a study of the relationship between the state and individual, and the uncertainties that can exist around how and when we must exercise moral responsibility. Von Schirach's complex plot and compromised characters address concepts such as how societies can determine guilt over innocence, whether homicide can ever be considered justifiable, and the potential gradation, or scaling, of wrongdoing.

***Wit* — Margaret Edson**

Edson, an American playwright and teacher, wrote the 1999 Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Wit* (also called *W;t*) after working as a clerical assistant in a hospital oncology ward.

The play traces the final hours of the life of a cancer-stricken literature professor, Dr Vivian Bearing. In line with her belief that intellectualising a problem is the only pathway to a possible solution, Bearing uses John Donne's poetry to come to terms with her terminal status. However, as her condition worsens, the doctor is pushed towards an acceptance of both her own mortality

and the view that compassion and empathy are as valuable and necessary for the proper functioning of society as abstract knowledge.

The narrative combines direct action, flashbacks and monologues, and uses an omniscient narrator who also acts as the protagonist of the story and establishes a key dramatic irony. *Wit* interrogates the nuances of language and explores key concepts such as our social and personal response to mortality, the dehumanisation that can underscore medical research and activity to the point that the treatment becomes as debilitating as the disease, and our need for kind connections in a world in which, for many, the prevailing condition is loneliness.

Film, television and multimodal texts

Title followed by director/creator.

***Anatomy of a Fall* — Justine Triet**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Justine Triet's 2023 film is a documentary-style contemporary drama that offers viewers the opportunity to sit in judgment, like a jury in a trial. *Anatomy of a Fall* won the prestigious Palm D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for five Academy Awards, winning an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.

Sandra is married to Samuel, a university lecturer. They live in a snowbound cottage in the French Alps with their visually impaired son, Daniel. When Samuel dies after falling from an attic window, Sandra is charged with homicide. The bulk of the film consists of her trial and includes numerous cleverly placed flashbacks that depict the couple's relationship in freefall, mostly due to accusations of infidelity, professional jealousy and plagiarism. This back-and-forth structure allows Triet to probe the idea that how we perceive reality can overtake reality itself.

Anatomy of a Fall is not a traditional legal drama. Rather than the trial being portrayed on a cause-and-effect basis and concluding with a finite, unequivocal conclusion, the film articulates the difficulties people and societies face in separating fact from fiction, not only in the courtroom but within the broader, less structured theatres of general life. In line with this, Triet explores the role of language as a barrier to, rather than a facilitator of, effective communication. Through the depiction of a legal system that is built on narrative creation rather than determining the unimpeachable truth, the filmmaker offers perspectives around how we might judge a person's character. The film should appeal as an open-ended literary text that poses a fundamental existential question: Can any given experience be truly defined?

***Arrival* — Denis Villeneuve**

French–Canadian director Denis Villeneuve's 2016 science fiction film is based on a novella, *The Story of Your Life*, by Ted Chiang. The movie follows a generic trend in focusing on a single narrative as a way of highlighting the human implications of international processes and decision-making.

Arrival centres around trained linguist Louise Banks. After alien life forms — dubbed the Hepapods — arrive on Earth, Banks is tasked with translating and interpreting their communications to learn their intentions. Through acquiring and understanding their logographic language, her understanding of time is altered, and she can foresee her future.

The film offers perspectives on the challenges of transcending barriers of race and language that continue to be significant in the modern world. But the greater strength of *Arrival* is its thoughtful examination of concepts such as love, fear, grief and compassion, and its brave attempt to answer that age-old question: What is it that makes us truly human?

***Beneath Clouds* — Ivan Sen**

Australian director and Gamilaroi man Ivan Sen's award-winning 2002 film is an elegantly crafted drama that explores representations of communities, relationships, family and, most particularly, identity.

The film is set in Moree, in northwestern New South Wales, and the surrounding countryside. It follows the journey of two teenagers, Lena, the daughter of an Aboriginal mother and absent Irish father, and Vaughn, who has escaped from juvenile detention, to visit his dying mother in Sydney. Both characters are alienated from their families and searching for a sense of identity and purpose in their lives. Initially they are wary of each other, but events bring them together.

This visually distinctive and poetic film is the deeply moving story of the individual's need to belong. Lena and Vaughn are motivated by the universal hope that there must be a better elsewhere. Their capacity to put aside the hardships of their lives and connect to both their ideals and each other makes *Beneath Clouds* a compelling portrayal of adolescent resilience and yearning.

***Everything Everywhere All At Once* — Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert**

Everything, Everywhere All at Once, which won a swathe of honours at the 2023 Academy Awards, is a delightfully quirky, entertaining and chaotic cinematic rush.

Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, the film tells the story of long-suffering laundromat owners, Evelyn and Waymond Wang. The stress of dealing with a struggling business, a failing marriage, a child seeking to forge her own path, and a demanding and critical elderly parent has placed significant strain on the couple. Salvation from this stressful situation comes in the most unexpected way when Evelyn journeys into the multiverse, a bizarre domain where multiple versions of herself exist simultaneously.

Offering viewers a gleefully anarchic mishmash of genres, intertextual references and a wide range of cinematic techniques, *Everything, Everywhere All at Once* explores a wonderfully diverse assortment of concepts and id, ranging from determinism and nihilism to the immigrant experience. This is an inventive text waiting to be explored, interrogated and used in equally inventive ways.

***Gattaca* — Andrew Niccol**

Gattaca was written and directed by New Zealand-born Andrew Niccol and released in 1997. It is a science fiction film set within a dystopian society that allocates roles to individuals based on the strength of their genetic profile. Those with superior genetically engineered profiles are allocated society's elite jobs. In contrast, naturally conceived individuals, known as In-Valids, have inferior profiles and are allocated menial jobs.

The central character in the film, Vincent, is an In-Valid who is determined to rise above his allotted station in life and become a crew member on a space exploration program. To do so, he develops a plan with Jerome, an embittered man who has a superior profile but is paralysed. Working together, the duo decides to fraudulently use Jerome's genetic material and enable Vincent to achieve his dream.

The film offers perspectives on the ethics of genetic engineering, the pursuit of perfection, how we might choose to map the future — or how it might map us — and the qualities that exist within us that ultimately make us human. Given the scientific advances that have occurred since its release, *Gattaca* remains highly relevant in the modern world.

***Interstellar* — Christopher Nolan**

Interstellar, released in 2014 and directed by Christopher Nolan, is a science fiction film about the bleak future of an over-populated world.

The story is set in the mid-21st century, a time when Earth has been devastated by climate disaster and famine. A group of astronauts, led by ex-NASA pilot and farmer, Joseph Cooper, takes on a previous mission, the eponymously named *Lazarus*. They must travel through a 'wormhole' near Saturn to confirm the existence of a galaxy with habitable planets that can potentially become humankind's new home. Their arrival on the planet, the 'dilation' of time and the continuing presence of the first *Lazarus* mission create a series of technical and human obstacles that threaten the success of Cooper's quest.

With its crisscrossing timelines and mind-bending technology, *Interstellar* is a complex movie. It poses a universal question: How much are humans, as a species, prepared to sacrifice to survive? The film also offers perspectives on family relationships, love and heroism, the ways we treat our planet, and the potential future impact of our decisions.

***Knives Out* — Rian Johnson**

American film director Rian Johnson's 2019 *Knives Out* was conceived as a modern classical whodunnit mystery. This ensemble film was nominated for a range of awards and has since become the first entry in a successful franchise.

The witty and convoluted plot of *Knives Out* pays homage to the novels of Agatha Christie — a group of dysfunctional characters assemble in a country house after a mysterious death. The victim is wealthy mystery novelist, Harlan Thrombey, whose difficult relationships with his family provide plenty of scope for motive. The screenplay offers humour and suspense as the characters feign their allegiances while simultaneously seeking to implicate each other as perpetrators of the crime.

In addition to being a fine example of genre, *Knives Out* investigates concepts such as class warfare, wealth and inequality, and immigration and race in contemporary American society. As such, the film is an entertaining story and a sharp social and political commentary.

***Looking For Richard* — Al Pacino**

As the title of his docudrama suggests, *Looking for Richard* is Al Pacino's search for a more complete understanding of Shakespeare's play, *Richard III* and in particular the play's protagonist, Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

Like Iago from *Othello*, Shakespeare's Richard is a deliciously evil misanthrope, a man who is filled with bitterness, cunning and gall. Conducting interviews with people on the street, as well as academics and actors such as John Gielgud, Kenneth Branagh and Vanessa Redgrave, Pacino explores not only the possible ways Richard and other characters should or could be represented on stage, but also the enduring legacy of Shakespeare's body of work.

Several key scenes from *Richard III* are performed throughout the docudrama and these mini-enactments provide opportunities for interesting class discussions on invited, resistant and alternative character readings. Pacino's playful docudrama should also stimulate discussion on the extraordinary power of Shakespearean language and the ways different choices in setting, costume and casting can influence audiences' perceptions.

***The Last of Us* (TV series) — created by Craig Mazin and Neil Druckmann**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

The Last of Us is an intertextual rarity — a live-action video game that has been successfully adapted into a television series. This post-apocalyptic horror drama, watched by millions of viewers worldwide, has won several Emmy Awards, with further seasons planned.

The premise is eerily reminiscent of the 2020 global pandemic, if somewhat elaborated. In 2003, a parasitic infection has swept the world, turning people into violent beasts. In 2023, a survivor, Joel, is tasked with smuggling a teenager, Ellie, to a rebel group's research laboratory because she is immune to the infection and her DNA may hold the key to vaccine development. Like its parent video game, this is essentially a quest series in layers. The television version, however, focuses more on characters and their relationships and less on action sequences, although these are present and often violent. Backstories are more thoroughly explored, leading to a better understanding of human motivations and actions. Within the framework of Joel and Ellie's harrowing journey, intimate tales of resilience arise and offer a way forward.

As well as its complex character studies, the series offers opportunities for discussion around the ethics of survival. Given its sweeping focus across a range of concepts — futurism, the role of family in our lives, loss, grief and what it means to be connected in the modern world — *The Last of Us* could be especially effective as a springboard for creative writing.

***Mad Max: Fury Road* — George Miller**

Australian director George Miller's 2015 post-apocalyptic film *Mad Max: Fury Road* is the fourth instalment of his Mad Max franchise. The film, which revisits the dystopian universe of earlier iterations, has won numerous accolades, included six Academy Awards.

Max, the road warrior and ultimate survivor, is captured by a ruthless despot known as Immortan Joe. Max then becomes embroiled in a battle between Joe and his lieutenant, Furiosa, who steals Joe's enslaved wives to take them to a haven known as 'The Green Place'. The ensuing conflict, featuring a plethora of car chases and confrontations, expands generously on the Western-as-science-fiction genre.

This gritty action film offers perspectives on the fundamental human instinct to engender and survive violence. There is a powerful emphasis on the impact of conflict on the environment, and humankind's manic depletion of natural resources. Still, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is explicitly grounded in a world based on repression, especially that of men over women.

***Pan's Labyrinth* — Guillermo del Toro**

Mexican director Guillermo Del Toro's 2006 film is an oblique fantasy that is strongly underscored by the brutal realities of war and its vengeful aftermath. *Pan's Labyrinth* has won multiple honours, including three Academy Awards.

This visually impressive film is set in Spain in 1944. The civil war is over but there are still rebel soldiers in the mountains, using guerrilla warfare to regain control. Two parallel tales are told, one through the eyes of a girl, Ofelia, and the other from the point of view of her stepfather, the sadistic Captain Vidal, who is on a mission to hunt down and exterminate the rebels. These tales, one fantastic, the other steeped in harsh realism, inevitably collide as difficult choices about good and evil provide further catalysts for the action.

Pan's Labyrinth is a challenging text, both in terms of its frequently dark content and the complexity of Del Toro's conceptualisation. The film offers perspectives on the potential collision between reality and fantasy, or entrapment and escape, and political ideas such as how we might choose to deal with fascism and overcome oppression. At its heart, however, *Pan's Labyrinth* asks viewers to consider the paradigm of relationships, within and external to family.

***Parasite* — Bong Joon-ho**

Acclaimed director Bong Joon-ho's 2019 tragicomedy is the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and an Academy Award for Best Picture. It also won the 2019 Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film and the BAFTA Award for Best Film Not in English. A film that resists being categorised as reflective of a particular genre, it is a part murder mystery, part dystopian fantasy and part thriller.

Parasite focuses on two families from opposing socioeconomic backgrounds. The Kim family live in poverty in a semi-basement, while the wealthy Park family live in an architecturally spectacular house, far removed from the slums of Seoul. The two families' lives connect when the Kim's son, Ki-woo, cons his way into a tutoring job with the Parks. Recasting himself as Kevin, Ki-woo then convinces the Parks to employ his sister and parents, with deadly consequences.

Joon-ho's film is a visually invigorating examination of the class divide, satirising the social, economic and cultural corruption of countries in which wealthy people survive and thrive by exploiting the labour of those who are less fortunate. In addition to this biting commentary, *Parasite* offers a daring narrative structure. The film's shift from comic family drama to brutal, bloody revenge story is as brilliant as it is unconventional.

***Picnic at Hanging Rock* — Peter Weir**

Based on the 1967 historical fiction novel by Joan Lindsay, the Australian film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, released in 1975, is a mysterious drama directed by Peter Weir.

Set in the early 1900s, the plot revolves around a group of schoolgirls from Appleyard College undertaking a school trip to the Macedon Ranges, in Victoria, to celebrate St Valentine's Day. Against the headmistress's instructions, three girls venture away from the picnic group, climb an unusual volcanic formation called Hanging Rock and disappear. A teacher who follows them also disappears. One of the girls eventually returns but is unable to remember what has happened. The consequences for the individuals involved in the mystery and the school itself are significant, ending with the collapse of the College and the death of its headmistress.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is a haunting, stylish film that is underpinned by adolescent perceptions about love, and concepts of death and femininity. The film also provides an opportunity to explore colonial tropes such as the vanishing child, and sacrifice to the Australian landscape's imagined menace and mystery.

***Psycho* — Alfred Hitchcock**

Alfred Hitchcock's most famous film was released in 1960. Initially, controversy about the stark depictions of violence, depravity and sexual desire dogged the film, but this eventually diluted. Since then, elements such as the tightly controlled narrative, sharply realised dramatic tension and memorable score have given *Psycho* status as an enduring classic.

The plot is relatively simple. Marion Crane, a secretary, steals money from her employer and flees her home city of Phoenix. Forced by rain into staying at a motel run by Norman Bates,

Marion is murdered in the now notorious shower scene. When Marion's family become suspicious, and a private investigator begins to snoop around the motel, it soon becomes evident that Norman is a psychopath.

Psycho has been touted as an early example of the horror/slasher genre, but the film has considerable psychological complexity, best seen in the clever use of motifs such as stuffed birds, eyes and mirrors. Like other examples of Hitchcock's work, *Psycho* skilfully exploits human fears of 'the monster within', the notion that people have the capacity to resort to primitivism and amorality, given the right set of circumstances. This film classic offers further perspectives on reinforcing gender stereotypes, violence and victimisation, corruption, mental health and alienation.

***Radiance* — Rachel Perkins**

The 1998 Australian film *Radiance* was adapted by Louis Nowra from his own play, and directed by Rachel Perkins, an Arrernte and Kalkadoon film and television director, and screenwriter. *Radiance* was her first feature film.

The story centres around three sisters who reunite at the family home during the 24 hours following their mother's funeral. It is as much a character study as a narrative about the process of grieving and the difficulties of negotiating past negativities. The film details, with compassion, humour and pathos, the emotional collisions that occur between May, the embittered eldest sister; Cressy, an internationally acclaimed singer; and Nona, the only one of the three to be raised in the family home. When the three women learn that the owner, also their mother's lover, will reclaim the home, they band together and take drastic action.

Radiance is a gritty, at times confronting but also uplifting film that offers perspectives on family relationships, identity and the Stolen Generations. It was made at a time when Aboriginal films were less common in Australia, and is notable for its character-based focus and its narrative's rawness.

***Raise the Red Lantern* — Zhang Yimou**

The 1991 award-winning film *Raise the Red Lantern* has been described as a political allegory. Directed by Zhang Yimou, it tells a tale of adultery, conspiracy, hatred and entanglement in China in the 1920s.

Wealthy Lord Chen Zuoqian — an emblematic figure rarely sighted in the film — has three mistresses living in separate houses. When 19-year-old Songlian is forced to join the lord's highly formalised community as a concubine after a family dispute, the competition among the four women for their master's attention intensifies. Plots and counterplots abound, as all seek 'the red lantern' of visitation, and the power that accompanies this recognition.

Raise the Red Lantern manages the difficult task of being an exquisitely crafted film about sexual enslavement. The protagonist has little choice but to enter a place and system where the patriarchy, fuelled by wealth and privilege, is utterly dictatorial. Songlian's life, and those of her rivals, are controlled by rules and customs which owe their continuation to tradition and longevity, rather than logic. Despite its confronting subject matter, the film's focus is predominantly on the system and its regulation, enabling and valuing repression.

***Ripley* (TV series) — Steven Zaillian**

Introduced to list — start of 2026

Ripley (2024) is an eight-part television narrative based on Patricia Highsmith's 1955 novel, *The Talented Mr Ripley*. The series, created in a black-and-white film noir style, has won numerous awards, including four Emmys.

Tom Ripley is an opportunistic conman in New York when the wealthy Herbert Greenleaf hires him to go to Italy and persuade Greenleaf's bohemian son, Dickie, to return home and assume a more responsible life. But Ripley, lured by the carefree, idyllic and moneyed nature of Dickie's lifestyle, wants more. He ingratiates himself with Dickie and his girlfriend Marge before brutally murdering Dickie and assuming his identity. Another murder follows, that of their friend Freddie, who suspects Tom's culpability, as Ripley uses disguise, deception and speed to outwit the Italian police.

The series is a stylised psychological thriller that addresses concepts such as the nature of identity, privilege in social structures, and the tenuous relationship that can exist between beauty and savagery. Zaillian's skilful use of light and shadow, and visual symbology is especially noteworthy. The series abounds with noirish images of rain, darkness, empty streets and long staircases. It makes frequent reference to the Italian painter Caravaggio's evocative and disturbing artworks, contrasted with classic 1960s Italian architecture. *Ripley* is intricately constructed, an intriguing, slow-burn narrative that offers potential both as a text for analysis and as stimulus for perspective-based creative work.

***Run Lola Run* — Tom Tykwer**

This fast-paced and energetic 1998 film is an interactive thriller from German director Tom Tykwer.

Run Lola Run focuses on the titular character's desperate attempt to find the money needed to save her boyfriend's life. She decides to ask her father, a bank manager, for assistance, with varying results as the film revisits the opening sequence and riffs off alternative narrative choices. This unusual structure allows characters, objects and events to take on different roles and meanings with each repetition of the story.

The film encourages viewers to consider the role of chance in their lives. How much does free will determine what we do? It also offers perspectives on time and memory, gender and social roles, and postmodern text construction.

***Shutter Island* — Martin Scorsese**

Based on the Dennis Lehane's 2003 novel of the same name, Martin Scorsese's menacing film is a slick, clever work that draws a variety of genre tropes: psychological thriller, Gothic horror and detective noir.

Set in the mid-1950s on a remote island in Boston Harbour, *Shutter Island* opens with two U.S. Marshalls, Edward 'Teddy' Daniels and Chuck Aule, visiting the penitentiary, an institution for the criminally insane, to investigate a female inmate, Rachel Salando's disappearance. Over the course of the film, the viewer is drawn into an increasingly disturbing tale as Teddy, isolated and haunted by traumatic events from his past, seeks to find the truth about Rachel's disappearance.

The brooding settings, surprising plot twists, relentless tension build-up and Scorsese's masterful manipulation of filmic conventions make *Shutter Island* an excellent, albeit unsettling, study text.

***Sweet Country* — Warwick Thornton**

Acclaimed Australian director and Kaytetye man Warwick Thornton's film *Sweet Country* has won many awards, including the Special Jury Prize at the 2017 Venice Film Festival.

This visceral Australian Western, set in the outback of the Northern Territory in the 1920s and based on real events, focuses on Sam, a middle-aged Aboriginal man. Sam's employer, Fred Smith, is a preacher who sends him to help bitter war veteran, Harry March, renovate his cattle yards. Sam's relationship with the cruel and ill-tempered Harry ends with a violent shootout. As a result, Sam becomes a wanted criminal for the murder of a white man and is forced to flee with his wife across the outback. A hunting party led by Sergeant Fletcher tracks Sam down.

As with many Australian films, the cinematography in *Sweet Country* is visually stunning, making great use of the nation's harsh and unforgiving landscape. The film offers perspectives on colonialism, racism, gender disparity, dispossession, and the importance of the Indigenous Australian connection to Country. Its setting in the decade after the horrors of World War I provides another context: the social and psychological damage war inflicted on individuals and societies.

***The Gods of Wheat Street* (TV series) — Wayne Blair, Catriona McKenzie and Adrian Russell Wills**

The Gods of Wheat Street (2014) is a six-part television drama series that explores the story of the Freeburns, an Australian Aboriginal family. The series is directed by Wayne Blair, a Batjala/Mununjali/Wakka man; Catriona McKenzie, a Gunai/Kurnai woman; and Adrian Russell Wills, a Wonnarua man.

The series focuses on Odin, the reluctant head of the family and a man who is challenged by his clan's difficult dynamics. Twenty years before, Odin promised Eden, his dying mother — who reappears to give him advice beyond the grave — to keep the family unit intact. Unfortunately, the world has conspired against Odin. One brother in prison, another in love with a family enemy's daughter, and the difficulties inherent in raising two daughters on his own, provide plenty of obstacles. However, Odin Freeburn is nothing if not resourceful. With humour, compassion and a touch of magic, he does his utmost to keep his pledge to his mother.

The series offers various representations of love and family relationships, particularly within the context of Aboriginal culture. The need for people to rationalise past woes and injustices as the key to moving more positively into the future is also a significant perspective.

***True Grit* — Ethan Coen and Joel Coen**

This 2010 film by prolific American directors and brothers, Ethan and Joel Coen, is a remake of a classic John Wayne western loosely based on Charles Portis's novel of the same name.

Unlike the original, this version of the story, set in 1878, is told from the perspective of fourteen-year-old Mattie Ross. After her father is murdered, Ross joins an ageing US marshal, Rooster Cogburn, and another lawman, LaBeouf, in tracking her father's killer into hostile territory.

The hostility between the two men and Ross's feisty determination add further layers of conflict as the trio embarks upon their quest. Numerous plot twists provide interest and suspense as the action spirals towards a deadly climax.

True Grit provides ample opportunity for the directors to parody the genre's longstanding traditions and heroic ideals. Within this, the film offers perspectives on revenge, virtue and evil, loss and redemption, and the idea of journeying as a way of achieving change.

***Wadjda* — Haifaa al-Mansour**

Wadjda was the first film to be shot entirely in Saudi Arabia. A groundbreaking work, it has been hailed as a story that provides significant insight into the tightly structured lives of women in this country.

The film tells the story of Wadjda, a 10-year-old girl living in a suburb of Riyadh, the capital city. Despite living in a conservative, rule-bound world, Wadjda is fun-loving, entrepreneurial and keen to push boundaries to see what she can get away with. After a fight with her friend Abdullah, she sees a bicycle for sale. Wadjda's mother won't allow her to purchase it as they live in a society that considers bicycles dangerous to a girl's virtue. Unfazed, Wadjda begins entrepreneurial efforts to raise the money herself.

Wadjda is formulated on a universal juxtaposition, that of the sometimes naïve but always buoyant optimism of childhood contrasting with the stringent realities of adulthood. In its examination of roles and relationships, and how these are attuned to social and cultural expectations, the film details the inner lives of its female characters with fullness and empathy. Rather than focusing on the framework of social limitations that organise life in Saudi Arabia, *Wadjda* is an intimate character study built on courage and self-determination.

Poets

Options by poet.

Alison Whittaker

Alison Whittaker is a Gomeri writer from Gunnedah near the Namoi River in New South Wales. In 2015, while studying at the University of Technology Sydney, she was named the National Indigenous Law Student of the Year. Awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Harvard University, she was honoured as the Dean's Scholar in Race, Gender and Criminal Law.

Whittaker's debut poetry collection was *Lemons in the Chicken Wire*. Critics described the poems in this text as powerful and impassioned, as well as playful and joyous. *Blakwork*, published in 2018, offers a hybrid of writing including fiction, nonfiction, social commentary, and poetry. At the time of writing, Whittaker's latest work, as an editor, is *Fire Front: First Nations Poetry and Power Today*. This innovative collection is organised into five sections, each prefaced by a noted writer's commentary on the poetry, songs and essays that follow. As with her own collections, this lively and varied work explores language, identity and relationships in a divided world.

As well as writing and editing, Alison Whittaker is passionate in campaigning against gendered violence and supports First Nations Australian women who have experienced trauma.

Christina Rossetti

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) was one of the most prominent women poets of the Victorian era. A devout Anglican, she devoted her life to her faith, her family and her writing, which, as well as poetry, included religious prose, and rhymes and stories for children.

Rossetti's ideas about writing were influenced by poets like Dante, John Keats, Walter Scott and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and her poetry employs a structure of riddles, paradox, and allusions to the Bible. Some of her best known works are 'Remember', a sonnet about how we think of loved ones after death, 'In An Artist's Studio', about the objectification of females in art, 'Shut Out', an allegory about desire and fruition, and, most famously, 'Goblin Market', a narrative poem with allusions to temptation that has often been interpreted through a feminist lens.

While she led a quiet, humble life, Rossetti's poetry is often passionate and lively. She wrote about love, mortality and spirituality, and explored the role of women in poems that were not necessarily radical in tone, but did question and challenge accepted norms around gender and power in Victorian England. Her faith is also reflected deeply across her work.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) was a contemporary of Christina Rossetti. Like Rossetti, and many girls from wealthy families during this period, Barrett Browning was educated at home by tutors. Influenced by writers such as John Milton and William Shakespeare, she had written her first book of poetry by the age of twelve.

Barrett Browning used verse to speak out on issues considered taboo for women to express an opinion. For instance, she was critical of her family making its fortune from Jamaican sugar plantations, and highly vocal about the exploitation of children in British mines and factories. Some of her best known works are 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point', a dramatic monologue and searing indictment of slavery, 'Aurora Leigh', a long, epic poem about the

restrictive roles Victorian society allocate to women, and 'Beloved, Thou Hast Brought Me Many Flowers', one of many love sonnets to her husband, Robert Browning.

Barrett Browning's writing explores various secular and theological concepts, including the metaphysical idea of romantic and spiritual love. She was particularly eager to emphasise the central place of poetry in society to represent individual thought and emotions.

Ellen van Neerven

Born in 1990, Ellen van Neerven is a writer with Mununjali Yugambah and Dutch heritage. Named as the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Best Young Australian Novelist in 2015, critics praised van Neerven's voice as sharp, honest and powerful. Their debut work *Heat and Light* (2014), won a range of awards including the David Unaipon Award, the Nita May Dobbie Literary Award and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards Indigenous Writers Prize.

Van Neerven has since published two poetry collections, *Comfort Food* (2016) and *Throat* (2020), both of which offer perspectives on a range of challenging and complex concepts including racism, grief and trauma, capitalism, identity and memory. In the first collection, the poet explores the removal of indigenous artefacts and remains in 'Pinions', and makes links between climate change and colonial domination in 'Love and Tradition'. In *Throat*, they explore Australia's Racial Discrimination Act in '18Cs' and personal sexuality in 'The Only Blak Queer in the World'.

Van Neerven's innovative work explores Australia's colonial past and present in poems that can be political, intimate, radical and tender, and always powerful.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Born in Essex, England in 1844, Gerard Manley-Hopkins is regarded as one of the Victorian era's greatest poets. Educated at Balliol College, Oxford, he studied Classics and in 1864 converted from the High Anglican faith to Catholicism. In 1867, he entered the Jesuit order, and began teaching and preaching.

Manley-Hopkins' poetry is inventive in its language use and ability to generate rich aural patterning. His significant body of work includes, 'Felix Randal', a sonnet that acts as a lament but also provides an example of the poet's famous use of 'sprung rhythm', 'God's Grandeur', a musically rhythmic work that aims to persuade readers as to the power and beauty of God, 'I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day', a poem which plumbs the depths of sorrow and anguish, and 'Peace', a work that reveals the poet's concerns with his nation being at war and his own impending move to a city that he despised.

Manley-Hopkins' work echoes the sentiments of his contemporaries that industrialisation was a pollutant force. His writing style, significantly influenced by nature and a connection to God, is more reminiscent of metaphysical poets than the Victorian poets.

Gwen Harwood

Gwen Harwood was born in Taringa, Brisbane in 1920. After marrying, she spent most of her adult life living in Tasmania. Inspired throughout her life by the work of philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, her poetry experiments with voice, plays with language and is often underpinned by a deeply grounded, satirical wit.

Many of her works are well-known and celebrated. Examples include, 'Barn Owl', a poem which captures that critical moment in life when childhood innocence is compromised, 'In The Park' and 'Suburban Sonnet', two powerful pieces about the difficulties of motherhood and the domestic

entrapment women experienced in the 1950s, 'Thought is Surrounded by a Halo', a quietly philosophical work about the limitations of language in truly describing our world, and 'Last Meeting', a wistful, evocative and tightly structured poem about a relationship ending.

As a poet, Harwood had a rare capacity to convey complex feelings and ideas. The subject matter of her work offers perspectives on relationships between children and parents, and between lovers, and the domestic aspects of women's lives, music, nature, and memory.

Kae Tempest

Born in 1984 in London, Kae Tempest is best known as a poet and spoken word artist. From the age of sixteen, they attracted a worldwide following and are now recognised as one of Britain's foremost performance artists. Their dramatic performance poem 'Brand New Ancients' won the prestigious Ted Hughes Poetry Award for innovation in poetry in 2013. Tempest has also written a novel and adapted Ancient Greek drama for modern audiences.

Tempest's work combines the power of storytelling, music and lighting, and the sounds, patterns and rhythms of language to connect with audiences and with readers. Notable works include, 'More Pressure', about the difficulties of living in modern society, 'Man Down', a powerful exploration of gender expectations, 'Ballad of a Hero', an anti-war polemic in the form of a narrative, and 'Europe is Lost', an indictment of liberalism and its consequences.

The experiences and stories in Tempest's poetry are universal explorations of global inequality, capitalism, celebrity culture, environmentalism, poverty, and urban gentrification.

Les Murray

Murray was born in 1938, near Bunyah, New South Wales, and died there in 2019. His childhood was marked by losing his mother, leaving Murray and his father grief-stricken and bereft. In high school, Murray experienced sustained bullying. These formative years, as well as the rural landscapes and communities that were his preferred milieu, informed much of his writing in a career that included widespread international publication and acclaim.

Some examples from Murray's prolific body of work include, 'Driving Through Sawmill Towns', a compassionate depiction of small towns and the often marginalised people who inhabit them, 'An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow', a tender work about a man's highly public spiritual experience, 'Equanimity', a discursive piece detailing Murray's view that we need to embrace the totality of the world, rather than limit ourselves to our immediate circumstances, and 'It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen', a poem about Murray's son, and his experience with autism.

As a poet, Murray's strengths were his ability to infuse ordinary lives and objects with more profound meaning, his verbal dexterity and wit, and his scathing social indignation. He was a champion of rurality who was able to write poetry that was as sacred as it was conversational.

Lionel Fogarty

Lionel Fogarty is internationally regarded as an important voice in Australian poetics and writing. A Yugambeh and Kujjela man, born on Wakka land at Barambah, Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve, Fogarty's work is frank and uncompromising in examining the experiences of First Nations Australians.

Fogarty has published numerous collections of poetry, beginning with *Kargun*, released when he was just 22 years old. At the time of writing, his most recent work is the highly regarded and multiply awarded collection *Harvest Lingo* (2022). In Fogarty's work, culture, spirituality and the

struggles Murri people face are expressed through Aboriginal English, Bundjalung language and vernacular. His poetry challenges traditional structures and forms, and the English language itself. Examples of his poems include, 'Come Over Murri', about the international struggle of indigenous people, 'Consideration of Black Deaths (story)', about the crisis of Aboriginal deaths in custody, and 'Fellow Being', about kinship and Country.

The poet has spoken out on issues and concepts ranging from the Land Rights movement and Aboriginal health, to education, housing and legal services. He is committed to his work in activism and advocacy for First Nations peoples.

Maya Angelou

Angelou was born in St Louis, Missouri in 1928, and died in 2014. After a childhood tarnished by abuse and suffering, she emerged as a strong social and literary role model. Her commitment to civil rights is well documented, and she worked with both Martin Luther King and the activist, Malcolm X. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama in 2010.

Angelou's writing style has been described as playful yet humble, and accessible yet relentless, in its quest for justice. Well-known examples of her poetry include, 'Still I Rise', a rousing celebration of self-determination and the indomitable human spirit, 'Caged Bird', a poem about freedom with clear links to the poet's autobiography, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, 'Equality', a powerful and rhythmic work which addresses racial discrimination, and 'Woman Work', which focuses on gender stereotypes and the isolation of women in underprivileged communities.

Much of Angelou's work centres on her own experiences and perceptions of the challenges in her life. Her poetry explores representations of racism, poverty and violence wrapped around key concepts such as love, hope, Godly faith and the importance of resilience. It can be viewed as an expression of the poet's deep inner strength, integrity and unwavering belief.

Pablo Neruda

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) is often referred to as Chile's national poet. In a career that was both literary and political, he travelled the world as a poet-diplomat, advocating for social change. In 1971, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Neruda documented numerous influences on his work, including the poet Mistral, French novelist Proust, Russian novelists Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and modernist writers Conrad, Joyce and Lawrence. Some examples of his work are 'Keeping Quiet', in which the poet advocates that humanity needs to slow down and reflect, rather than feed our obsession with progress, 'Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines', a work about a lost love that manages to be both wistful and pragmatic, 'If You Forget Me', a poem that explores the complexities of love and links the natural world with emotional experience, and 'What Spain Was Like', which reflects Neruda's affection and concern for his adopted, war-torn country.

Neruda's experiences of communism, widespread social injustices, love and intimacy, and the natural environment are among a range of concepts that underpin much of his poetry. He was interested in surrealism and magical realism, and enjoyed experimenting with form and structure, and creating vivid aesthetics and striking symbolism in his significant body of work.

Rosemary Dobson

Rosemary Dobson (1920–2012) made a significant contribution to Australian literature and was recognised with numerous awards and honours, including the Order of Australia in 1987, the Patrick White Award in 1994 and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sydney in 1996.

The poet's work explores ideas ranging from the transcendent potential of art, the paradox of time, the poignancy of existence and the mystery of death. She was especially skilled in the ekphrastic mode, or the poetic transformation of a work of visual art. Some of her notable poems are 'Painter of Antwerp', which reimagines Brueghel's 1555 painting of the fall of Icarus, 'The Three Fates', which invokes the power of fate over mortality, and 'A Fine Thing', an invocation of the optimism required to combat loneliness.

Dobson's evocative poetry is both classical and modernist in style. Her body of work offers multiple perspectives on concepts such as nature and renewal, friendship, relationships and the place of the individual in the world.

Sarah Holland-Blatt

Gold Coast-born writer, editor and academic, Sarah Holland-Batt, is currently Professor of Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Queensland University of Technology. She has produced three exceptional and deservedly lauded anthologies of poetry, *Aria* (2008), *The Hazards* (2016) and, most recently, *The Jaguar* (2022).

Holland-Batt's work reflects not only her deep literary knowledge but also her profound understanding of, and respect for, the craft of writing. Her poems have been praised for their lyricism and their inventive, memorable imagery. Whether she is writing about family members, relationships, childhood recollections, illness, death, grief, love, landscapes, mythology, history, art, music or literature, Holland-Batt does so with linguistic confidence and flair. Most significantly, her poetry leads readers to deep and sometimes uncomfortable revelations about life and the world around us.

Studying the poems of Sarah Holland-Batt will provide students with access to a rich and bountiful body of work by one of Queensland's most gifted contemporary poets.

Seamus Heaney

Born in 1939 and raised in County Derry, Ireland, Seamus Heaney won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. His verse tells stories from his farm and about his family and his younger years, as well as exploring war and conflict, especially the experiences of two Irelands — Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

'Digging' is one of Heaney's earliest and best-known poems. It reflects on his father's and grandfather's skills in using a spade and suggests that whilst Heaney felt he could not emulate either man, he was still their successor. Another key work, 'Exposure', highlights the fear of failure and the poet's desire to belong to his own people. 'Blackberry-Picking' aligns the act of picking with the loss of innocence that comes with adulthood, and 'Clearances', a sequence of eight poems dedicated to Heaney's mother, uses his personal experience as a way of exploring Irish history.

Heaney's work is known for the aural beauty of its text. He was often described as a regional poet reminiscent of the traditionalist approach taken by William Wordsworth, but Heaney himself felt a particular affinity with the writing of Russian poets Mandelstam and Brodsky; Polish poets Milosz

and Herbert, and the Czech poet Holub. Like Heaney, these poets witnessed and endured sociopolitical turmoil and unrest in their homelands.

TS Eliot

Born in St Louis, in the United States, Eliot moved to England in 1914 at the age of 25. He eventually became a British subject and renounced his American passport. In 1948, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

One of his best-known poems, 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' is a dramatic monologue that captures the concerns of the Modernist movement. Other key works include, 'The Waste Land', a lengthy poem which explores the soullessness of post-war England, 'The Hollow Men', a five-part work which invokes a sense of being trapped in a twilight world, 'Ash Wednesday', another long work about the poet's conversion to faith and desire for salvation, and 'Four Quartets', in which each quartet has five 'movements' that connect history with spiritual renewal.

Eliot's study of Dante's poetry and English writers John Webster and John Donne, as well as the French symbolist Jules Laforgue, contributed to the development of his style. A Modernist who staunchly rejected Romanticism, he focused on the disillusionment of the postwar generation and promoted Orthodox Christianity as necessary for social order. His work was often melancholy and derivative of how he saw life, as an unending and often pointless struggle.

WH Auden

The poet, author and playwright Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England in 1907. Considered one of the greatest English poets of the 20th century, he is known for his versatility and inventiveness, writing in almost every verse form. His body of work won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1948.

Much of Auden's work addresses moral issues, with a strong political, social and psychological underpinning. Well-known examples include, 'Funeral Blues', also known as 'Stop all the Clocks', an elegy about the isolation and world transformation experienced by those who are grieving, 'Musée de Beaux Arts', an exploration of human suffering and the alienation of the individual in an often uncaring world, 'Autumn Song', in which the poet uses the season as a metaphor for the presence and alignment in the world of both beauty and bleakness, 'The Fall of Rome', an allegory about the nature of civilisations and the corruptions that can lead to collapse, and 'The Unknown Citizen', about the subsuming of the individual by a vast, indifferent state.

Auden regularly explored the interplay between death and patterns of existence in his work through evocative imagery and figurative language features. He was a fine stylist whose poetry offers perspectives on culture and politics, religion, morality, and love.



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