VCE English and English as an Additional Language Text List (EAL) 2022

The following texts proposed by the English and English as an Additional Language (EAL)Text Advisory Panel have been approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) as suitable for study in Units 3 and 4 in 2022. Texts were selected in accordance with the following criteria and guidelines.

Criteria for text selection

Each text selected for the VCE English and EAL text list will:

* have literary merit
* be an excellent example of form and genre
* sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
* reflect current community standards and expectations in the context of senior secondary study of texts.

The text list as a whole will:

* be suitable for a diverse student cohort from a range of backgrounds and contexts, including students studying EAL
* reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
* include texts by Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
* include a balance of new and established works\*, including a Shakespearean text
* include texts that display affirming perspectives
* reflect engagement with global perspectives.

\*Established works include texts that are recognised as having enduring artistic value.

Guidelines for text selection

The text list for VCE English and EAL must adhere to the following guidelines:

* The text list must contain a total of 36 texts
* 20 for List 1: Reading and creating texts
* 16 for List 2: Reading and comparing texts (eight pairs).
* List 1 must represent a range of texts in the following approximate proportions
* eight novels
* two collections of short stories
* two collections of poetry or songs
* three plays
* three multimodal texts\*\*
* two non-fiction texts.

\*\*Multimodal texts are defined as combining two or more communication modes; for example, print, image and spoken text, as in films or graphic novels.

* List 2 must include eight pairs that
* are connected by themes, issues and ideas
* represent a range of texts, such as novels, short stories, poetry, plays, multimodal (including film) and non-fiction
* include a range of combinations of texts, such as a novel and a film or a non-fiction text and a play.

For **VCE EAL students only**, one text in each pair will be nominated for achievement of Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts.

* The text list must also contain
* at least five texts for List 1 and four texts for List 2 by Australian authors
* print and multimodal texts that are widely available
* titles that are different from those on the VCE Literature text list.
* The text list must be reviewed annually, with approximately 25 per cent of the texts being changed. Typically, texts will not appear for more than four consecutive years or less than two years. However, due to the complications of List 2, at times texts may appear for five consecutive years.
* Four texts have been replaced in List 2.
* Texts will be accompanied by full bibliographic details where necessary.

Information for schools

Teachers must consider the text list in conjunction with the relevant text selection information published on page 17 of the *VCE English and EAL Study Design* *2017–2021* for Units 3 and 4.

VCE English students

A total of four texts across the Unit 3 and 4 sequence must be selected from the text list published annually by the VCAA.

For Unit 3 Area of Study 1, students must read and study two selected texts from List 1.

For Unit 4 Area of Study 1, students must read and study one pair of texts (that is, two texts) from List 2.

At least two set texts must be selected from the following categories: novels, plays, collections of short stories, collections of poetry.

VCE EAL students

A total of three texts across the Unit 3 and 4 sequence must be selected from the text list published annually by the VCAA.

VCE EAL students must read and study one selected text from List 1 and a pair of texts (that is, two texts) from List 2.

Two texts must be used for Unit 3 Area of Study 1 – one selected from List 1 and one from the pair selected from List 2 (identified as the EAL text).

The pair of texts from List 2 should be used for Unit 4 Area of Study 1.

In either Unit 3 or 4, at least one set text must be a written text in one of the following forms: a novel, a play, a collection of short stories or a collection of poetry.

All students

No more than one of the selected texts may be a multimodal text, for example, a film or graphic novel. A multimodal text may be selected from either List 1 or List 2, but not from both. Other multimodal texts may be used to support the study of selected texts.

At least one of the selected texts must be by an Australian writer or director, as indicated on the text list.

The annotations in this document are provided to assist teachers with selection of texts in accordance with the requirements in the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language Study Design 2107–2022*; they do not constitute advice about the teaching, learning or assessment of texts.

When selecting texts that do not come from the multimodal category, it is important to avoid genre confusion. A film version of a novel, short story, play or non-fiction text is not acceptable for the purposes of the examination, although it might be used in the classroom for teaching purposes.

While the VCAA considers all the texts on the text list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that with some texts there may be sensitivities in relation to certain issues. In selecting texts for study, teachers should make themselves aware of these issues before introducing the text to students.

The VCAA does not prescribe editions; any complete edition may be used. The bibliographic information in this document is provided to assist teachers to obtain texts and is correct, as far as possible, at the time of publication. Publishing details may change from time to time and teachers should consult the *VCAA Bulletin* regularly for any amendments or alterations to the text list.

Key to codes

List 1 is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. List 2 is presented in pairs, with the nominated EAL text in the first column.

Abbreviations in brackets after the titles signify the following:

* ‘(A)’ – this text meets the Australian requirement.
* ‘(#)’ – bracketed numbers indicate the number of years that a text has appeared on the VCE English and EAL text list; (1) for example, indicates that 2019 is the first year that a text has appeared on the text list.
* ‘(EAL)’ – this indicates that, for **VCE EAL students only**, the text is nominated for achievement of   
  Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts.

List 1

Novels

Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart* (2)

Arnott, Robbie, *Flames* (A) (1)

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice* (2)

Doerr, Anthony, *All the Light We Cannot See* (3)

Erpenbeck, Jenny, *Go, Went, Gone* (1)

Jordan, Toni, *Nine Days* (A) (3)

Mandel, Emily St. John, *Station Eleven* (3)

Piper, Christine, *After Darkness* (A) (4)

Short stories

Kennedy, Cate, *Like a House on Fire* (A) (4)  
**Stories for study:** ‘Flexion’, ‘Ashes’, ‘Laminex and Mirrors’, ‘Tender’, ‘Like a House on Fire’, ‘Five-Dollar Family’, ‘Cross-country’, ‘Sleepers’, ‘Whirlpool’, ‘Cake’, ‘White Spirit’, ‘Little Plastic Shipwreck’, ‘Waiting’, ‘Static’, ‘Seventy-Two Derwents’

Munro, Alice, *Runaway* (2)  
**Stories for study:** All

Plays

Euripides, *The Women of Troy* (3)

Rayson, Hannie, *Extinction* (A) (4)

Shakespeare, William, *Much Ado About Nothing* (2)

Poetry/songs

Papertalk Greene, Charmaine and Kinsella, John, *False Claims of Colonial Thieves* (A) (1)

Wordsworth, William, *William Wordsworth: Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney* (2)

Multimodal texts

Films

Hitchcock, Alfred (director), *Rear Window* (4)

Polley, Sarah (director), *Stories We Tell* (4)

Other

Satrapi, Marjane, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, Jonathan Cape (4)

Non-fiction texts

Capote, Truman, *In Cold Blood* (4)

Laveau-Harvie, Vicki, *The Erratics* (A) (1)

List 2

For **VCE EAL students only**, one text in each pair is nominated for achievement of Unit 3 Outcome 1: Reading and creating texts. This text is indicated by ‘(EAL)’.

Pair 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Non-fiction text** | **Multimodal text – Film** |
| Beneba Clarke, Maxine, *The Hate Race* (A) (1) (EAL) | de Heer, Rolf (director), *Charlie’s Country* (A) (3) |

Pair 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Multimodal text – Film** | **Novel** |
| Frears, Stephen (director), *The Queen* (2) (EAL) | Malouf, David, *Ransom* (A) (5) |

Pair 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Short stories** | **Novel** |
| Amsterdam, Steven*, Things We Didn’t See Coming* (A) (1) (EAL) | Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go* (3) |

Pair 4

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Non-fiction text** | **Novel** |
| Szubanski, Magda, *Reckoning* (A) (3) (EAL) | Tóibín, Colm, *Brooklyn* (1) |

Pair 5

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Play** | **Novel** |
| Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible* (5) (EAL) | Ham, Rosalie, *The Dressmaker* (A) (2) |

Pair 6

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Play** | **Novel** |
| Ziegler, Anna, *Photograph 51* (3) (EAL) | Franklin, Miles, *My Brilliant Career* (A) (1) |

Pair 7

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Play** | **Novel** |
| Mailman, Debra and Enoch, Wesley, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (A) (2) (EAL) | D’Aguiar, Fred, *The Longest Memory* (5) |

Pair 8

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Non-fiction text** | **Multimodal text – Film** |
| Yousafzai, Malala, with Lamb, Christina, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (5) (EAL) | Warchus, Matthew (director), *Pride* (2) |

Annotations

These annotations are provided to assist teachers with text selection. The comments are not intended to represent the only possible interpretation or a favoured reading of a text.

List 1 is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. Films are listed by title. List 2 is presented in pairs, with the nominated EALtext presented first.

List 1

Novels

Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, Penguin, 2006 (2)

Set in Eastern Nigeria during the time of colonial expansion into Africa, *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Okonkwo, a proud and highly respected tribesman from Umofia, somewhere near the Lower Niger. From immature young man to respected clansman, Okonkwo must deal with the challenges of growing up in a changing world. Ashamed of his father, obedient to the gods and responsible for his many wives and children, Okonkwo is ‘turned upside down’ after he accidentally shoots an elder’s son, and missionaries   
and colonial administrators arrive in his small village, intent on shifting the power structure.

Chinua Achebe explores what it means to be an African man in a tribal society whose very existence is under threat from colonisers. Achebe immerses the audience in another world, using the themes of cultural difference, tradition and change, masculinity, religion and family to give the reader insight into a raw, brutal and beautiful life.

Arnott, Robbie, *Flames*, Text Publishing, 2018 (A) (1)

The unique and magical setting of Tasmania drives this original tale. Magical realism is at the heart of this story and students should be open to expect the bizarre and unforeseen. The text opens with the return of a cremated woman who appears to her estranged husband and immolates herself on his lawn. The story then follows her son’s desperation in finding a suitable coffin for his sister, whom he assumes is terrified of inheriting her mother’s fate. We learn more about this quest and are introduced to people, such as Thurston Hough, the enraged coffin builder, and Karl, the fisherman, who successfully forms a partnership with a seal to catch ‘Oneblood’ tuna. We see events and perspectives written in different formats in each chapter. Robbie Arnott creates humans and other entities, such as a personification of fire and a river god in the form of a water rat. Ideas of grief, family connection, betrayal, the development of heterosexual (and a same-sex) relationships and conservation are among the many concerns examined.

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice,* Penguin, 2003 (2)

First published in 1813 and originally titled ‘First Impressions’, *Pride and Prejudice* follows the setting up and unravelling of misunderstandings between the spirited Elizabeth Bennet and the wealthy Fitzwilliam Darcy. The introduction of siblings, cousins and suitors complicates the plot and deepens Elizabeth’s awareness of herself. The text follows the ways in which characters respond to the attentions of others.

Replete with irony and free indirect discourse, *Pride and Prejudice* is an extended meditation on the extent to which one must know oneself before they can truly know another. It also provides insight into the obsessions of Georgian England: marriage, rank and etiquette. While Austen’s original readers would undoubtedly have appreciated the twists and turns of the marriage plot, modern audiences will appreciate the way in which Elizabeth and her four sisters navigate expectations imposed by self and society, as well as the notion of an ‘accomplished woman’.

Doerr, Anthony, *All the Light We Cannot See*, Harper Collins, 2015(3)

Anthony Doerr’s novel explores the tragedy of war through the story of two young people caught up in the Second World War. Marie-Laure LeBlanc is a young blind girl living in France with her father, the master locksmith of the Paris Museum of Natural History. Self-reliant and resourceful, when the war begins Marie-Laure flees with her father to Saint-Malo and the house of his shell-shocked great uncle. Werner Pfennig is a young boy living in a German orphanage with his sister, Jutta, until his exceptional gifts with science and technology bring him to the attention of the Nazis. While Marie-Laure comes to aid the resistance, Werner is sent to the German military, where he tracks rogue radio operators. Eventually their paths cross during one of the final battles of the war in Europe.

The narrative moves between the perspectives of the two children as they navigate life before and during the war, creating detailed pictures of their very different worlds. Told primarily through a series of flashbacks, the story moves quickly through a sequence of short chapters. The vibrant characterisation and rich detail of the narrative allows the reader to reflect on the central themes of the resilience of the human spirit, the horror of war, the shared humanity that connects people even in the worst circumstances, and the roles of destiny and free will. The novel is a celebration of both science and human nature.

Erpenbeck, Jenny, *Go Went Gone*, Granta Books, 2018 (1)

Jenny Erpenbeck’s novel explores the bonds of empathy, truth, communication and nature of our relationship with ourselves. It opens with a Berliner university lecturer, Richard, who is looking forward to his retirement. His middle-class quandary recedes as he slowly sees and acknowledges the recent influx of refugees arriving in Germany from North Africa since 2013. Richard’s world isn’t just described by his reaction to the present tragedy, but by his own lack of reckoning, as an East German and the son of a Second World War German soldier.

The narrative voice shifts away from him to the refugees as Richard grows closer to them. Their haunting and, at times, opaque stories show the difficulty of dealing with the terror of dispossession and its aftermath. Erpenbeck shows how each character is facing a different pain, from the loss of their home, family or identity, and the attempts to reconstruct them anew. The novel also shows that the supposed safety of Europe is never assured, and that discrimination and oppression are still practised by bureaucracy and other easier, less-violent methods.

None of the characters is a saint: Richard is repeatedly shown to be selfish and shamelessly kept a mistress while he was married; some of the refugees are criminals and hot headed. Yet, the novel grants all of them humanity, partly through relating their experiences and partly through the book’s prose, which is terse, unmoving and emotionally uninvolved, much like Richard. The novel’s use of language, and the barriers that exist because of it, is repeated through word play, misunderstandings and the sparing use of other languages. Through it all the novel maintains its focus on the need to bridge the gap between cultures, ideologies and, most importantly, people.

Jordan, Toni, *Nine Days*, Text Publishing, 2012 (A) (3)

*Nine Days* is the third and most accomplished novel by Melbourne writer Toni Jordan. It won the Independent Booksellers of Australia Award for Best Fiction in 2013 and was shortlisted for a number of other awards. The front cover of *Nine Days* hosts an archival picture from *The Argus* newspaper of a troop train leaving a Melbourne railway station during the Second World War. The picture shows a soldier leaning out of a window for a goodbye kiss from a young woman on the platform, who sits aloft a stranger’s shoulders. A momentous occasion for the central figures is depicted.

*Nine Days* timeshifts between the eve of the war in 1939 to the early 21st century. The approach Jordan takes to presenting multiple perspectives over time is a non-linear one, held together by the linking of key themes and motifs across chapters. Each of the nine central characters has a day devoted to them, in which pivotal events take place, presented through their eyes and in their voice. Most of the action revolves around three generations of the Westaway family household in the predominantly Catholic, working-class suburb of Richmond. ‘Our part of Richmond, here on the hill, is an island. I can see over the roofs of the rest of it, mismatched shingle and rusty tin held down by lumps of rock and brick and jerry cans.’

The realities of life for the Westaways include events such as young, unmarried Connie’s unwanted pregnancy, which leads to a ‘backyard’ termination that ends tragically. Her younger brother Kip has the direction of his life changed by the death of his father, forcing him to leave school and take up work to support his family. There are chapters told from the viewpoint of Kip’s daughters, Stanzi and Charlotte, some 70 years later. These chapters express the kinds of modern sentiments and concerns that are likely to be relatable for today’s readers.

Mandel, Emily St. John, *Station Eleven*, Picador, 2014 (3)

Winner of the 2015 Arthur C Clarke Award, Emily St John Mandel’s fourth novel presents a non-linear narrative that carries the reader on a journey encompassing life before and after the end of civilisation. Celebrated for its visually stunning prose and sense of hope for the survival of modern culture, the novel gives a different take on the apocalyptic genre.

On the same night an actor dies in the midst of a stage performance of *King Lear*, the deadly Georgia flu eradicates much of the world’s population, with only a few survivors. Each of the characters, whose lives are cleverly developed before and after the flu outbreak, are connected intricately by their own pasts as they build new lives for themselves after the collapse of civilisation. Focusing on the concepts of memory, loss and nostalgia, Mandel’s novel stands by the premise, ‘The more you remember, the more you’ve lost’.

Piper, Christine, *After Darkness*, Allen & Unwin, 2014 (A) (4)

Christine Piper is a distinguished, prize-winning writer and her first novel, *After Darkness*, won the 2014 Vogel Literary Award. She also won the 2014 Calibre Essay Prize and was the 2013 recipient of the Alice Hayes Fellowship, awarded by the Ragdale Foundation in Chicago, Illinois. *After Darkness* is written in the first person. Ibaraki Tomokazu, a Japanese doctor who is interned in Australia in 1942, tells the story of his life in Japan and Australia. The novel opens in South Australia in 1942. Ibaraki then reveals his story by exploring his life in Tokyo and in Broome before the Second World War.

The text deals with a number of timeless ideas, including friendship, identity, trauma, loss and change. Possibly the most significant is the issue of personal conscience – the conflict we face when what we believe is right differs from what tradition or society holds to be right.

Short stories

Kennedy, Cate, *Like a House on Fire*, Scribe, 2013 (A) (4)

Victorian-based author Cate Kennedy was shortlisted for the Stella Prize in 2013 for her most recent collection of short fiction, *Like a House on Fire*. This collection has been recognised for its ability to capture the subtleties of the ‘real’ people of modern Australia. While often dark and challenging, many of the stories highlight moments of hope in the complex lives of everyday individuals and their families.

The home and its role in creating strong family bonds are at the core of Kennedy’s stories. The cliché of the house on fire within the title is subverted, as for many it provides an environment of physical and emotional danger instead of a sanctuary from the outside world. Themes of regret, understanding, awareness, salvation, the complexity of filial and romantic relationships, and the impact of chronic injury and sickness underpin this collection of stories. Students will find writing that offers a great deal of discussion about issues faced in today’s society.

Munro, Alice, *Runaway,* Vintage Publishing, 2006 (2)

This anthology of short stories, by the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature, conveys the inner lives of Canadian women living in the 20th and 21st centuries and how they endure the daily trials of modern life. Alice Munro presents and explores the lives of these women through flashbacks and other narrative devices. Many of the stories are connected by characters and plot twists.

Munro’s writing is clear and cogent, but she does not illuminate or offer judgement. Her dialogue is crisp and restrained, allowing readers to be drawn into the inner world of the characters and it is they who are left to question and query the nature and value of relationships. Munro provides scope for in-depth discussion of modern life, morality and self. Her writing is capacious, with the breadth of a novel and the artistry of the short story form.

Plays

Rayson, Hannie, ‘Extinction’ in *Endangered: Three Plays,* Currency Press, 2016 (A) (4)

Award-winning Australian playwright Hannie Rayson’s most recent work, *Extinction*, is a moving and sometimes confronting exploration of human fragility. When Harry Jewell runs over an endangered tiger quoll during a stormy night in the Otways, the event precipitates a moral crisis for the mining executive. Through his new-found relationship with conservation biologist Dr Piper Ross, Jewell is forced to re-evaluate the consequences of prioritising economic over environmental concerns, while Ross herself is confronted by a conflict: should she act for the greater good or for the good of herself?

Rayson explores human relationships, environmental issues and considerations of mortality through her depiction of a range of complex and flawed characters. Rayson’s symbolism invites students to discuss humanity’s obligations to nature, as well as the interplay between idealism and pragmatism.

Shakespeare, William, *Much Ado About Nothing*, Cambridge School Shakespeare, 2014 (2)

One of Shakespeare’s comedies, this play features characters from all parts of the social spectrum. Although set in Messina, Italy, the cast of soldiers, nobles, civic officials and women are easily recognisable to the English audiences of Shakespeare’s time and the comedy is typical of Shakespeare’s world.

The text provides value in the verbal sparring between Beatrice and Benedick and the somewhat pathetic pomposity of the constable Dogberry. The treatment of Hero would be seen as outrageous by Tudor audiences, as she is framed by the wicked Don John and totally innocent of the charges which make her fiancé, Claudio, cruelly repudiate her. Today’s readers may be horrified to see the double standards of the men in the play who expect one type of behaviour from women and another from themselves. In exploring the fate of Beatrice and Benedick, as well as Hero and Claudia, the text also throws up issues relating to the nature of true love.

Euripides, *The* *Women of Troy*, (Don Taylor, trans.), Methuen Drama, 2007 (3)

Presented in 415BC, Euripides’ episodic drama focusses on the horrifying consequences of violence, drawing upon the many atrocities that occurred during the Peloponnesian wars. As such, Euripides’ play is a lyrical commentary on loss – of a people, of a city, of a civilisation.

As dawn breaks on the ruins of Troy after the Athenian invasion, the city’s queen and women are confronted by the brutal reality of the battle and the cruelty of their fates. What ensues is a series of lamentations that questions the traditional pantheon of gods and the morality of men who seek revenge under the guise of justice. The play thus reflects the universal ugliness of war, exposing a single, tragic truth; that while war devastates women and children particularly, everyone suffers – victims and victors alike.

Please note: In the Methuen edition, the speech on page 22 attributed to the Chorus is, in most other editions, attributed to Cassandra.

Poetry/songs

Papertalk Green, Charmaine and Kinsella, John, *False Claims of Colonial Thieves*, Magabala Books, 2018 (A) (1)

This unique collaboration between two Western Australian poets, Charmaine Papertalk Green of Yamaji Indigenous heritage and John Kinsella of Anglo-Celtic extraction, sees the two engage in a dialogue that explores the impact of colonisation and how it manifests itself in the modern world. The poems are identified by the initials at the end, either CPG or JK, and often respond directly to each other, so readers get the views of each poet in a kind of conversation between the two. Other poems stand alone and there will be a string of poems by one of the writers with no direct response

All of the poems are deeply embedded in the Australian landscape and address the themes of dispossession, ownership, dealing with trauma, and personal, cultural identity. Overall, the collection is best described by the poems ‘Simply Yarning’ by Papertalk Green and ‘Yarn Response Poem’ by Kinsella, where Papertalk Green observes that ‘yarning puts us on common ground’ and Kinsella responds that he will ‘yarn right back at you – it’s what we do when we connect’. Although the book contains poems of powerful indignation it is ultimately a hopeful collection that in its very structure aspires to bring people together despite their differences.

Wordsworth, William, *William Wordsworth: Poems selected by Seamus Heaney*, Faber & Faber, 2016 (2)

The poetry of William Wordsworth forms a part of the Romantic movement in England and is partly a challenge to rapid industrialisation that was based on a reductive and exploitative attitude towards nature. His poetry is, above all, an exploration of the power of the natural world in its pristine beauty. To convey the effect of such beauty, Wordsworth’s writing adopts language that aims for greater immediacy and naturalism than was common in the work of earlier poets. Wordsworth’s evocative depictions of the English countryside form the backbone of many poems in this collection. Drawing on his own experiences, he uses the wonder elicited by natural scenery as the starting point for his sophisticated exploration of human feelings, emotions and the complexity of lived experience. The introspective focus of the writing offers rich possibilities for discussion of themes and ideas. The poems vary in length and style, enabling nuanced and varied exploration.

Multimodal texts

Films

Hitchcock, Alfred (director)*, Rear Window*, 1954 (4)

When professional adventure photographer LB ‘Jeff’ Jeffries breaks his leg on assignment, he is confined to a wheelchair to recuperate in his New York apartment. Frustrated and bored in the summer heat, he begins watching his neighbours across the courtyard. Boredom turns to suspicion when he believes that one of his neighbours has been murdered. Calling on the support of his socialite girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, and his visiting nurse, Stella, Jeff embarks on an investigation into the actions of that fateful night and turns up more than he expected.

Nominated for four Academy Awards and long regarded as one of the best films of the 20th century, *Rear Window* is a masterpiece of storytelling from the master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock. Filmed almost exclusively from Jeff’s perspective, this mystery thriller explores the various ‘ways of looking’ as the audience shares the journey with the three protagonists. Beautifully crafted, it is a film that stands up to repeat viewings and close analysis. (Rating: M)

Polley, Sarah (director), *Stories We Tell*, 2012 (4)

*Stories We Tell* is actor Sarah Polley’s second film as director. The film won many documentary awards, including Best Documentary Screenplay from the Writers Guild of America.

*Stories We Tell* is an autobiographical documentary: Polley compiles interviews with many of her family members, narration from her father and home video footage to create a chorus of voices as a means of investigating her family’s past. The film is an interrogation of history, and examines how stories can guide our memories, and whether one voice has a right to declare itself the truth. The layering of different documentary techniques allows students to investigate the role that stories play in our lives, as well the conflicts around the truth of family secrets. (Rating: M)

Other

Satrapi, Marjane, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood,* Jonathan Cape, 2003 (4)

Iranian-born Marjane Satrapi documents her childhood in Tehran, Iran, from age six to 14 in the graphic novel *Persepolis*. The book was met with critical acclaim, receiving several awards and being adapted into an animated film in 2007.

Growing up during the period of the Islamic revolution, Satrapi suffered under oppression and was exposed to violence and brutality. She does not shy away from exploring the often shocking and fatal repercussions of the repressive regime. However, *Persepolis* also offers a counter to this brutality by highlighting the courageous actions of Satrapi’s family, including her staunch Marxist parents and her activist uncle, Anoosh, whom she idolises. *Persepolis* explores the contradictions between public and private life, and how absurd they appear through the eyes of an innocent child. The graphic novel form provides much for students to discuss regarding the written and the visual, both of which can be considered when analysing the themes of grief, mortality, freedom and repression, and heroism and gender.

Non-fiction texts

Capote, Truman*, In Cold Blood,* Penguin, 2008 (4)

A blend of factual reportage and narrative techniques, Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* has been described as one of the great books of American 20th-century literature. Capote travelled from New York to Holcomb, a small mid-western town, to explore the impact of the brutal and apparently random murder of four members of the Herbert Clutter family. What followed was five years of research; information gleaned through reports and interviews with various members of the Holcomb community, local law enforcement and the killers themselves, Perry Edward Smith and Richard Eugene Hickock.

Finding himself particularly drawn to Smith’s own tragic life story, Capote examines the American Dream, as represented by the Clutters, and sharply reminds us of its broader unattainability. Both critically and commercially acclaimed, Capote ultimately questions the ‘right to kill’ and within this framework he explores not simply the Clutter murders but the hypocrisy of the state, whose death penalty ‘kills’ criminals in its pursuit of justice for the ‘people’. In this sense, the stories within reveal the sadness of death, rather than just the causes and consequences of murder, a crime which, ‘all told, ended six human lives’.

Laveau-Harvie, Vicki, *The Erratics*, Harper Collins, 2019 (A) (1)

Vicki Laveau-Harvie’s memoir explores the impact of her mother’s mental illness on various members of her family. Laveau-Harvie returns to Alberta, Canada to support her father during her mother’s final illness and hospitalisation. Using the visit to frame the story, Laveau-Harvie probes the painful history of her family and the enduring repercussions of her mother’s abusive behaviour. In doing so, she confronts various aspects of her earlier life and gains a new layer of insight into her parents’ relationship. The memoir explores the critical role that interpersonal relationships play in our lives, while highlighting the devastating impacts of mental illness on the individual and those who are connected to them. The limits of family loyalty are questioned through difficult choices that reveal individuals’ priorities. Narrated in an intensely personal manner, Laveau-Harvie’s recollections also raise questions about the nature of memory and the subjectivity of individual perceptions and experiences. Readers are able to explore the extent to which the writer’s responses to the individuals around her constitute a fair and nuanced account of highly complex and traumatic experiences.

List

Pair 1

Beneba Clarke, Maxine, *The Hate Race*, Hachette, 2018 (A) (1) (EAL)

The confronting tone and taboo language of Maxine Beneba Clarke’s memoir ,*The Hate Race*, immediately shocks readers with her everyday experience of being ‘other’ in contemporary Australia. The distressing prologue enables readers to understand the nature of the title and the need for her story to be told. Set mostly in 1980s suburban Sydney, Beneba Clarke exposes the weaponry of language to show its power to hurt, maim and isolate those who are considered different in Australian society. Her migration and settlement story draws on her West Indian British heritage. Beneba Clarke’s ideas about belonging and inclusion are framed by her experiences as a young girl. Her struggle for acceptance eventually leads her to learn how to love and accept her cultural heritage. The register of Beneba Clarke’s writing reflects her slam poetry roots, the patois of her forebears, and refrains and elements of Batuque. This text is aptly named *The Hate Race*, as it reflects her experience and the visceral effects of growing up in modern Australia and the racism, prejudice and exclusion that has shaped her.

de Heer, Rolf (director), *Charlie’s Country*, 2013 (3)

Rolf de Heer’s film, co-written by and starring David Gulpilil, follows the protagonist Charlie’s attempts to define himself in the world. His revolts against the intrusion of mainstream Australian life in the Arnhem land of his home leads him to a failed attempt to live off the land, to hospital, to degradation in Darwin and to prison. Told with humour and an oblique style, the film addresses ideas of identity and failure in worlds that sit uneasily with each other. The struggles particular to Indigenous peoples are twinned with ordinary anxieties associated with how we understand ourselves and our places in the world. (Rating: M)

Pair 2

Frears, Stephen (director), *The Queen*, 2006 (2) (EAL)

*The Queen* follows the British Royal family’s public inertia following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. The film presents a family wedded to duty and sacrifice, but unequipped to respond adequately to the demands of the moment. At its heart is Queen Elizabeth, who, having determined to rule with authority, is unaware of or perhaps unable to understand the country’s emotions and act in a way that satisfies her people. The text is interested in balancing private emotion and public duty, and the inevitable sacrifices of leaders. The film also explores the life of newly minted Prime Minister Tony Blair, also coming to terms with the responsibilities of his public and private domains. (Rating: M)

Malouf, David, *Ransom*, Vintage, 2010 (A) (5)

David Malouf re-imagines the world of *The Iliad* through a little-known episode of the Trojan War. Maddened by Hector’s slaying of his dear friend Patroclus, Achilles takes revenge and subsequently violates Hector’s corpse. Priam – King of Troy and Hector’s father – journeys to Achilles’ camp seeking to ransom his son’s body. He travels in a donkey cart escorted only by a carter but aided by the god Hermes. The mission is a success and delivers to Priam enrichment in life and legendary status after death. *Ransom* reveals the powerful impact of love, leadership and paternal duty, and explores ideas of universal relevance, including the liberation of the spirit and what can be achieved through a vision of something new.

Pair 3

Amsterdam, Steven, *Things We Didn’t See Coming*, Hachette, 2016 (A) (1) (EAL)

Winner of the Age Book of the Year (2009), *Things We Didn’t See Coming* is an episodic novel of ‘stories’ connected by an unnamed narrator attempting to navigate his life in unpredictable times. Beginning on the eve of the millennium celebrations and spanning decades, Amsterdam explores a future of social and environmental collapse. What follows is a speculative vision of a world beset by political upheaval and corruption, at the heart of which is an exposition of human nature – what we will do to survive and how our experiences help us work out how we want to live and die. Including an exploration of the themes of personal and political morality and identity, Amsterdam examines how we find peace in a world rife with uncertainty.

While the novel is at times bleak in asking how people cope when faced with fear and turmoil, the novel ultimately offers hope and a vision of humanity bound together by love, compassion and the importance of connecting with others. Teachers should be aware that there are sex scenes in some of the episodes, however they are not gratuitous but develop Amsterdam’s broader message of the importance of human connection – physical and emotional.

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *Never Let Me Go*, Faber & Faber, 2005 (3)

Nobel Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro received extensive praise for his sixth novel, including being dubbed *Time* magazine’s Book of the Year in 2005. Set in England in the late 1990s, *Never Let Me Go* explores issues of identity and conformity, the importance of memory and friendships, and freedom and confinement.

The novel opens with 31-year-old narrator Kathy revealing that she is a ‘carer’, a person who looks after clones who have been raised in order to become organ donors. As she awaits her own call up to donate, she reminisces about her time at Hailsham boarding school and her complex and important friendship with fellow clones Ruth and Tommy. Aware of their destinies, all three must learn to come to an understanding of themselves and their society.

Pair 4

Szubanski, Magda, *Reckoning*, Text Publishing, 2016 (A) (3) (EAL)

While loved for her portrayal of the quintessential Aussie netballer ‘Sharon’, Magda’s own childhood experience was more like that of an outsider. Her immigrant experience, cross-cultural Polish–Scottish heritage, experience as a childhood tennis player and emergence as a ‘fat lesbian’ in a 1980s feminist setting stand her apart from most suburban ‘Sharons’. Even her childhood spent playing in the (car-less) streets and roaming the wilds of Croydon will be exotic to today’s young reader.

However, that which she feels sets her apart, her signifier as an outsider, is her father’s role as an assassin in the Polish resistance movement in the Second World War. *Reckoning* is a rich and complex autobiography awash with themes of family secrets and untold history, as well as documenting the rise of a form of comedy over the past 30 years that reflects Australian culture. Szubanski captures the defining elements of a situation or personality and reveals, with warmth and compassion, the tragedy as well as the comedy in both the mundane and the exceptional.

Tóibín, Colm, *Brooklyn*, Picador, 2009 (1)

Colm Tóibín’s novel, set in the 1950s, tells the story of an Irish girl sent to the United States for a better life, and explores the migrant dilemma of place, identity and belonging. Eilish Lacey, through the advocacy of the local parish priest, moves to Brooklyn to live in a ghetto-like Irish enclave and to work in a local department store. She becomes paralysed by homesickness but manages to overcome this to forge a relationship with a local boy and to plan her future in America. However, when tragedy strikes in Ireland, she faces the problem of going ‘home’ and making sense of who she has become and where she wants to be. Tóibín lucidly presents two cultures and the young woman caught between them, offering both the struggle that faces those who are ‘other’ by dint of migration, and the seduction of finding a place of acceptance and safety.

Pair 5

Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible*, Penguin Classics, 2000 (5) (EAL)

Set against the claustrophobic and dangerous times of the Salem witch trials in 1692, *The Crucible* recreates the terrifying reality of a village in New England, where a group of young girls accused of witchcraft attempt to escape retribution by pointing the finger at others. Of particular fascination is the flawed but ultimately heroic response of the protagonist, John Proctor. His battle with Puritan authorities, jealous neighbours and those bent on personal revenge suggests that love, integrity and dignity can prevail.

Ham, Rosalie, *The Dressmaker,* Duffy & Snellgrove, 2000(A) (2)

In the 1950s in fictional Dungatar, a small town in the Victorian wheat belt, Myrtle ‘Tilly’ Dunnage returns home to care for her sick mother after a hiatus of some 20 years. The rumour mill quickly kicks into action, but this seemingly does not bother Tilly as she has no desire to reintegrate herself into the everyday business of the town, instead stoically getting on with the matter of tending to her mother. However, she quickly becomes revered for the dressmaking skills she honed while studying in Europe, and the desire to be dressed in Tilly’s haute-couture designs must be balanced against the townsfolk’s enthusiastic and spiteful marginalisation of the Dunnage women. What ensues is the unravelling of past grievances, a tragic love story and dramatic revenge against small-minded bigotry.

A host of characters are used to highlight the shortcomings of humanity, and question those who act maliciously and cast suspicion upon others in order to direct attention from their own conduct or idiosyncrasies. By adopting a gothic style, Rosalie Ham is able to offer extreme depictions of the vulgarity of people, and the repercussions of such poor behaviour. *The Dressmaker* questions the nature of heroism and resilience.

Pair 6

Ziegler, Anna, *Photograph 51*, Oberon Books, 2018 (3) (EAL)

*Photograph 51* traces the scientific breakthrough, made in the 1950s, regarding the nature and shape of DNA, and juxtaposes it with the social stasis that women experienced in scientific circles at the same time. Revolving around the polarising figure of Dr Rosalind Franklin, this play explores the events leading up to conceptualising and understanding the molecular structures of DNA. It was Franklin’s ‘Photograph 51’ – made by Franklin’s student, using Franklin’s techniques – that finally revealed the double helix shape of DNA. But despite Franklin’s dedication to her research and her innovative approaches, she was excluded from the collaborative work done by her male colleagues because of her gender and her abrasive personality. The men who used Franklin’s work to inform their own research were awarded the Nobel Prize for that work in 1962 while Franklin died, underappreciated, of ovarian cancer in 1958.

Anna Ziegler’s play interrogates the role of gender in opportunity, community, success and failure, and poses contemporary questions of how we might make our own ‘breakthroughs’ to understand the nature and shape of sexism.

Franklin, Miles, *My Brilliant Career*, Text Publishing, 2012 (A) (1)

Miles Franklin’s *My Brilliant Career*, published in 1901, is a deservedly admired Australian classic. The story describes the travails of Sybylla Melvyn, whose intelligent and rebellious nature is curbed alike by her gender, her poverty and her isolation in the bush. She longs for music and literature, the theatre and the company of people like herself, but spends much of her girlhood in household drudgery, exacerbated by her father’s alcoholism. Feisty and unconventional, Sybylla is a very modern heroine who refuses to marry for economic comfort without love. She refuses to conform to society’s expectations of feminine behaviour even when this means conflict with her family. Sybylla’s ambition is to be a writer and, through this, to achieve independence.

*My Brilliant Career* touches on timeless problems like the treatment of the homeless and the situation of married women who have no money of their own, such as Sybylla’s mother. Sybylla’s voice is fresh, honest and at times lyrical. A reflection on growing up, the book is a view of life in Australia over a century ago that still is relevant today.

Pair 7

Mailman, Deborah and Enoch, Wesley, *The* *7 Stages of Grieving*, Playlab, 2002,(A) (2) (EAL)

To ensure readers of this script understand the context of this play, this work is preceded by a number of pertinent discussions, establishing the importance of this work and its place in the evolution of Indigenous art. Neville Bonner, Australia’s first Indigenous member of parliament, Wesley Enoch, artistic director and Hilary Beaton, dramaturg, discuss Aboriginal creativity and the authenticity of this play in combining forms of art as reflected in the tradition of storytelling. The inclusion of a chronology of the cultural history of Australia, before and after contact, highlights a growing awareness of Indigenous recognition, culminating in the enactment of native title.

*The 7 Stages of Grieving* script opens with an Indigenous family grieving the death of a grandmother. It explores the anguish experienced in losing family members, land, culture and traditions through issues such as the stolen generations, deaths in custody and racial discrimination. While the focus is on the sorrow of what has been lost, the characters’ resilience and the final scene of the Walk for Reconciliation leaves plenty of room for the audience to see some hope in the future of a nation. The mournful nature of personal grief is juxtaposed with the ‘joy of being’ around your community to celebrate the life of a loved one. Hope comes from an acknowledgement that understanding can come when the majority has greater knowledge of what a displaced people have lost.

D’Aguiar, Fred, *The Longest Memory*, Vintage, 1995 (5)

This concise novel explores the story of Whitechapel, the oldest and most respected slave on a plantation in Virginia in the 18th century. Reflecting on his life, Whitechapel remembers his past as a valued slave and advisor to his master, central to the functioning of the plantation. The key event that changed and marred his life is revealed through his reflections as he considers his role in the events leading to the death of his son. The narrative moves between first, second and third person, and between reflection, verse, diary entry and newspaper report. The novel examines the nature of slavery, sacrifice, power and the insidious nature of racism.

Pair 8

Yousafzai, Malala, with Lamb, Christina, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014 (5) (EAL)

In 2012, 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai was shot on her way home from school in retaliation for her refusal to be intimidated by those who believe that girls should not receive an education. This lead to greater international recognition for her cause. While the name Malala may now be well known, the story of how she came to be a leading voice in her own country and the strength that helped her to fight on is less known. *I Am Malala* is not just a biographical account of her life, it tells the story of a generation of girls who still have to struggle for equal opportunities, of the love of parents who valued and encouraged their talented daughter when others saw value only in sons, and of a country that is caught between religious extremism and the rights of the individual.

Warchus, Matthew (director), *Pride*, 2014 (2)

In this British film, *Pride* comes to mean different things for the variouscharacters whose communities come together in London and Wales during the miners’ strikes of 1984–85. The story begins with the formation of the London chapter of ‘Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners’ by Mark Ashton, who decries the treatment of the miners by the government, the police and the newspapers, and claims, ‘If anybody knows what this treatment feels like, it’s us.’ Immediately, the film explores the nature of support offered and received by the most unlikely of groups at a time of dramatic social upheaval and conservative rule. Challenges are presented when two very different communities come together, but friendship and mutual respect overcome these differences and offer a hopeful message about inclusion and fellowship. The devastating impact of the onset of AIDS is delicately explored, as is the troubling effect on the individual when one is forced to hide their true self due to societal pressure and prejudice. The film asserts the value of solidarity in fighting for rights, equality and love. (Rating: M)