VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL)
Text List 2026

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 2026. 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 for VCE English and EAL comprises two parts: List 1 (Reading and responding to texts) and List 2 (Creating texts). The text list 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 (List 1)
* provide a balanced range of mentor texts (List 2)
* 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 40 texts:
* 20 for List 1: Reading and responding to texts
* 20 for List 2: Creating texts (four sets of five texts aligned with the Framework of Ideas).
* List 1 must represent a range of texts in the following approximate proportions:
* 8 novels
* 2 collections of short stories
* 2 collections of poetry or songs
* 3 plays
* 3 multimodal texts\*\*
* 2 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 four sets of five texts aligned with each of the ideas from the Framework of Ideas that:
* link to the aligned idea from the Framework of Ideas
* represent a range of mentor texts, such as short stories, essays, speeches, monologues, feature articles, extracts from longer texts, poetry and songs
* include a range of combinations of texts.
* The text list must also contain:
* at least five texts for List 1 and eight texts for List 2 by Australian authors
* print and multimodal texts that are widely available
* texts that are different from those on the VCE Literature text list.

The text list must be reviewed annually, with approximately 25% of the texts being changed. Typically, texts will not appear on the list for more than four consecutive years.

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 21 of the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language Study Design* *2024–2027* for Units 3 and 4.

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

Across Unit 3, Area of Study 1, and Unit 4, Area of Study 1, students must read and study two selected texts from List 1.

The text type selected for study in Unit 3, Area of Study 1, must be of a different text type from that selected for study in Unit 4, Area of Study 1.

For Unit 3, Area of Study 2, students must read and study three mentor texts aligned with an idea from the Framework of Ideas from List 2.

No more than one of the selected texts from List 1 may be a multimodal text; for example, a film or graphic novel. Other multimodal texts may be used to support the study of selected texts.

No text studied at Units 1 and 2 may be studied at Units 3 and 4.

Either one of the texts selected from List 1, or two of the texts selected from List 2, must be by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other Australian authors or creators that directly explore Australian knowledge, experience and voices.

The annotations in this document are provided to assist teachers with their selection of texts in accordance with the requirements in the *VCE English and English as an Additional Language Study Design 2024–2027*; 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 some texts may contain sensitivities in relation to certain issues. In selecting texts for study, teachers should make themselves aware of these issues and plan for appropriate support where necessary before introducing the text to students.

The VCAA does not prescribe editions; any complete edition may be used. However, it should be noted that the editions nominated in the text list are those that will be used for examination development. The bibliographic information in this document is provided only 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.

All texts set for study – excluding multimodal texts – can be accessed from [Vision Australia](https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/library/join) in an audio format for students who are blind, have low vision or live with a print disability.\*

\*Vision Australia has advised that the reasons for print disability vary but may include:

* vision impairment or blindness
* physical dexterity problems such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, arthritis or paralysis
* learning disability, such as dyslexia
* brain injury or cognitive impairment
* literacy difficulties
* early dementia.

Reproduction of prescribed texts

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Key to codes

Both List 1 and List 2 are presented alphabetically by author. List 1 is presented according to text type; List 2 is divided according to the Framework of Ideas.

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. For example, (1) indicates that 2025 is the first year that a text has appeared on the text list.

List 1

Novels

Barker, Pat, *Regeneration* (1)

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (2)

Franklin, Miles, *My Brilliant Career* (A) (3)

García Márquez, Gabriel, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (3)

Harvey, Samantha, *Orbital* (1)

Jackson, Shirley, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (4)

Moss, Sarah, *Ghost Wall* (2)

Ogawa, Yōko, *The Memory Police* (3)

Short stories

Hadley, Tessa, *Bad Dreams and Other Stories* (4)
**Stories for study:** All

Malouf, David, *The Complete Stories* (A) (2)

**Stories for study:** ‘The Valley of Lagoons’, ‘Every Move You Make’, ‘War Baby’, ‘Towards Midnight’, ‘Elsewhere’, ‘Mrs Porter and the Rock’, ‘The Domestic Cantata’

Plays

Harrison, Jane, *Rainbow’s End* (A) (4)

Shakespeare, William, *Twelfth Night* (2)

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (3)

Poetry/songs

Hughes, Langston, *Selected Poems* (1)

**Poems for study:** All poems from ‘Afro-American fragments’, ‘Magnolia Flowers’, ‘Montage of a Dream Deferred’ and ‘Words Like Freedom’

Oliver, Mary, *New and Selected Poems, Volume One* (2)

**Poems for study:** All poems from ‘Dream Work’ and ‘American Primitive’

Multimodal texts

Films

Johnson, Stephen (director), *High Ground* (A) (4)

Wilder, Billy (director), *Sunset Boulevard* (4)

Other

Ottley, Matt, *Requiem for a Beast* (A) (4)

Non-fiction texts

Dank, Debra, *We Come with This Place* (A) (1)

Noah, Trevor, *Born a Crime* (4)

List 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Framework of Ideas | Texts for study |
| Writing about country | Chekhov, Anton, ‘[Gooseberries](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1883/1883-h/1883-h.htm#link2H_4_0007)’ (3)Clarke, Maxine Beneba, Chapter 2, *The Hate Race* (A) (3)Dillard, JD, ‘[An Open Letter to the Man Who Yelled “Go Back to Africa!](https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-the-man-who-yelled-go-back-to-africa-at-me)” at Me’ (1)Kassab, Yumna, ‘[The Conquest of Land and Dream](https://meanjin.com.au/essays/the-conquest-of-land-and-dream/)’ (A) (3)Lynch, Cassie, ‘Split’ (A) (3) |
| Writing about protest | Gillespie, Mark, ‘[Friday Essay: On the Sydney Mardi Gras March of 1978](https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-on-the-sydney-mardi-gras-march-of-1978-54337)’ (A) (3)Pankhurst, Emmeline, ‘[Freedom or Death](https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/apr/27/greatspeeches)’ (3)Parry, Jonathan, ‘[What’s the Point of Protest](https://www.lse.ac.uk/philosophy/blog/2023/02/15/whats-the-point-of-protest/)?’ (1)Vonnegut, Kurt, ‘Harrison Bergeron’ (3)Wyatt, Meyne, [Monologue from *City of Gold*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys2FTUmOnIg) (A) (3) |
| Writing about personal journeys | Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, ‘[The Danger of a Single Story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)’ (3)Duong, Amy, ‘[The Red Plastic Chair is a Vietnamese Cultural Institution, and My Anchor](https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2020/10/29/red-plastic-chair-vietnamese-cultural-institution-and-my-anchor)’ (A) (3)Garner, Helen, ‘[Dear Mrs Dunkley](https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/dear-mrs-dunkley-20121016-27orm.html)’ (A) (1)Hodge, Maya, ‘[bidngen](https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2021/11/09/sbs-emerging-writers-competition-2021-runner-maya-hodge)’ (A) (3)López, Matthew, [Walter’s speech (end of Part 1) from *The Inheritance*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Pd77JOgeNA) (3) |
| Writing about play | Gay, Virginia, [Monologue from *Cyrano*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apA0290YtFs)(A) (3)Huang, Coco X, ‘[Impromptu: Fiction for voice and piano](https://goingdownswinging.org.au/archives/impromptu/)’ (A) (1)Roffey, Chelsea, ‘An Open Letter to Doubting Thomas’ (A) (3)Russon, Penni, ‘All That We Know of Dreaming’ (A) (3)Winton, Tim, ‘[About the Boys](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/09/about-the-boys-tim-winton-on-how-toxic-masculinity-is-shackling-men-to-misogyny)’ (A) (3) |

Annotations

The following 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 1

Novels

Barker, Pat, *Regeneration*, Penguin, 2014, ISBN 9780241970768 (1)

*Regeneration*, published in 1991, is the first book in Pat Barker’s World War I trilogy. Set in an Edinburgh War Hospital, the novel is centred on army psychiatrist, Dr William Rivers, and his treatment of traumatised and shell-shocked British army officers. Barker’s novel incorporates recreations of real historical figures, most significantly anti-war poet Siegfried Sassoon, and this forms the main tension within the plot. Sassoon is a high-profile patient, and his recent anti-war declaration has placed the British army and the war effort under scrutiny. Dr Rivers, whose work is already undermined by accusations that the men he treats are simply cowards avoiding their patriotic duties, is faced with the task of convincing Sassoon to return to the front and to face, once again, the horrors of war.

These horrors faced by soldiers are explored within the novel, as Rivers treats men who have been deeply traumatised and irrevocably damaged by their war experiences. Barker’s novel is an exploration of masculinity, societal expectations, class differences, psychological trauma and the treatment of the mentally ill.

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, Penguin Classics, 2006,
ISBN 9780141441146 (2)

Originally published as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* by Charlotte Brontë (under the pseudonym Currer Bell) in 1847, *Jane Eyre* is a classic novel from the Victorian period. At its heart, it is an exploration of the inner life of an intelligent woman navigating a complex moral and social world.

As the novel begins, the 10-year-old protagonist is cast into a hostile environment, where she experiences neglect and cruelty under the guise of charity. The reader comes to admire her enormous strength in refusing to adopt the reductive and self-interested morality of those around her. Her journey to adulthood is marked by her physical, moral and spiritual resilience.

Brontë’s first-person narration enables the protagonist to converse directly with the reader. Jane’s incomplete understanding of the situations she experiences adds to the drama of the story. The text is rich in irony, imagery and symbolism. Readers of the Victorian era enjoyed what they perceived as the romance and Gothic elements of the text, whereas the modern reader is likely to reflect on the values presented more critically. By the novel’s end, Jane has taken control of her destiny and achieved an independence of mind that is inspirational.

Franklin, Miles, *My Brilliant Career*, Text Classics, 2012,
ISBN 9781921922190 (A) (3)

Miles Franklin’s *My Brilliant Career*, first 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 such as 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 is still relevant today.

García Márquez, Gabriel, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Penguin, 2014,
ISBN 9780241968628 (3)

This novella by Gabriel García Márquez, Colombian novelist, journalist and Nobel Prize winner, explores the events that lead to the killing of a young man. There is no secret that the killing will take place; García Márquez tell us of it in the first line of the novella. The text is not, then, a whodunnit but rather an explication of how such a killing could have happened. Based on a true story, the novella unpacks the attitudes, conventions, prejudices and stereotypes that construct and constrain the players in the drama, that create the multiple truths of the tale, and that begin to explain the many points of failure. This is a beautifully written story, at times funny and at others deeply tragic.

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was first published in 1981, to great acclaim. There is also a film adaptation (made in 1987) of the same name.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should be aware that there is a description of a murder at the end of the novella.

Harvey, Samantha, *Orbital*, Vintage, 2024, ISBN 9781529922936 (1)

Samantha Harvey’s acclaimed novel *Orbital*, winner of the Booker Prize 2024, follows a day in the life of six international astronauts circling Earth on a space station. Hundreds of miles above Earth, orbiting 16 times per day, the crew go about their daily routines of research, engineering, communication, exercise, eating and sleep, all while contemplating their abstracted view of their distant home planet. Harvey’s protagonists grapple with the contrast between the ordinariness of work and life on a space station and the strangeness of their distance from the rest of life on Earth, witnessing the spectacle of 16 sunrises and 16 sunsets in a day, and watching a massive typhoon gathering over the ocean, threatening the people and places they hold dear.

The six astronauts are from Russia, the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy, and though they have different missions, nationalities and allegiances, in orbit they live and work aligned in a harmony that renders the borders between them almost meaningless. The political tensions, national borders and conflict that might exist between them on Earth leave only a trace on the space station and their collective efforts to survive.

From space, Earth is familiar, fragile and faraway, and the strange perspective offered by distance allows the characters to reflect on the overwhelming beauty of human life on Earth; its vulnerability; our obsession with knowledge and progress; as well as their own memories, choices, ambitions and relationships. The distance from Earth is humbling and Harvey’s lyrical prose asks what we miss of the big picture when we are busy with the intricacies of our lives.

Jackson, Shirley, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Penguin Classics, 2009, ISBN 9780141191454 (4)

*We Have Always Lived in the Castle,* a 1962 mystery novel, is the final work of American author Shirley Jackson. The theme of persecution of those who exhibit ‘otherness’ is at the forefront of the novel, explored through the protagonists, Merricat and Constance, who become outsiders in a small town and are reviled by the small-minded villagers. The novel revolves around an unsolved crime: the murder of Merricat and Constance’s family six years earlier. Constance was initially blamed for the poisoning but was acquitted at her trial, leaving the public with no clear answer about who was actually to blame. Some aspects of their fraught family life are revealed through the ramblings of slightly confused, wheelchair-user Uncle Julian, who lives with the girls.

The story is narrated by 18-year-old Merricat, who practises sympathetic magic and frequently imagines living on the moon. Her sister Constance has an anxiety disorder. They have cut themselves off from the outside world since the family tragedy. They are strongly attached to each other, and their isolation appears to be a defence against living by the rules and norms of outside society. The arrival of Cousin Charles threatens to disturb the way in which they have been living, so Merricat acts to preserve the power they have over their day-to-day lives. They are shunned by the villagers, some of whom later appear to be penitent and try to make amends.

Moss, Sarah, *Ghost Wall*, Granta Books, 2021, ISBN 9781783787852 (2)

The works of contemporary novelist Sarah Moss, which intersect with the social and political issues of our day alongside the complexities of human nature, culture and legacy, have gained literary recognition in recent years. *Ghost Wall* finds its setting in rural Northumberland, UK, and centres on a family that has joined an immersive archaeological re-enactment of Iron Age life. A coming-of-age novel of sorts, it depicts teenage protagonist Silvie, accompanied by a menacing father with a capacity for violence and a cowed and compliant mother. This interpersonal tension is overlaid on the setting and brought to the fore as the novel progresses.

When a young female university student also on the field trip notices the true nature of her companions’ family dynamic, she shows courage and conviction in bringing it to light. It is in this assertion of agency and voice that an otherwise bleak recount of family violence finds its resolution. In its setting amid historical recount and reconstruction, the novel makes suggestions about cyclical violence and the intersection of the past and present. It also explores themes of identity, class and gender relations, power dynamics, nationalism and the impact of history on the present, all while maintaining a sense of foreboding and tension that propels the narrative.

*Ghost Wall* seamlessly weaves together literary and stylistic elements to create a haunting yet optimistic parable. Moss employs a first-person perspective, offering readers an intimate glimpse into the thoughts and experiences of Silvie, in a distinctive stream-of-consciousness style and northern patois. Characterised by its brevity, the novel's language is spare yet evocative, allowing readers to feel the weight of the ancient English landscape and the oppressive atmosphere of the story, amplified by supernatural overtones. Moss’ writing is characterised by its rich descriptions of nature, drawing parallels between the harsh beauty of the natural world and the brutality of the human characters. She employs symbolism, particularly the ‘ghost wall’ itself, to add depth and complexity to the narrative, making it a thought-provoking and intricately crafted work of fiction.

Ogawa, Yōko, *The Memory Police*, Vintage, 2020, ISBN 9781784700447 (3)

Acclaimed Japanese novelist Yōko Ogawa’s most recent novella, *The Memory Police*, tells the story of an island where everyday items begin to disappear from the lives of the residents. Memory and knowledge are adjusted with each disappearance, affecting words and language and how individuals can communicate. These disappearances are designed and facilitated by the shadowy Memory Police. The narrator of the novella, herself a novelist, acts to resist the activities of the Memory Police and hides the editor of her books – one of the few people who can remember historical events, despite the actions of the Memory Police. The events begin to take a darker turn when the residents start to lose parts of their bodies.

Tapping into current experiences of cognitive dissonance – where the losses of species and glaciers seem to go unnoticed – and harking back to George Orwell’s ‘memory hole’ in *1984*, Ogawa provides the reader with a surreal landscape in which to explore contemporary anxieties and issues. The beauty of the writing and her delicate use of language heighten the poignancy of the message of how our stories, our language, our words and our memories not only make us human but can also offer solutions to what confronts and challenges us. Without stories and memories, we risk extinction.

Short stories

Hadley, Tessa, *Bad Dreams and Other Stories*, Vintage, 2018,
ISBN 9781784704049 (4)

Contemporary British author Tessa Hadley appeared on *The New York Times* Notable Book of the Year list for her short story collection *Bad Dreams and Other Stories.* Hadley’s short stories are praised for their ability to illuminate ordinary life. This collection captures characters as they face a crucial moment of transition, highlighting ordinary acts and events, and elevating them into the extraordinary. The real things that happen to her characters are often as mysterious as their dreams. Hadley explores the large consequences of small actions through mostly female protagonists in the 20th and 21st centuries, capturing their inner thoughts as they face a turning point in their lives, often without realising it.

Hadley’s collection interrogates the lives of characters both young and old. Themes of identity, transformation, social self-awareness, the power of knowledge, and the consequences of everyday actions are explored through Hadley’s distinct voice. Her writing is easily accessible and clear-sighted as she beautifully captures both the predictable and unpredictable nature of people. Students will find that her writing stimulates rich discussion on topics faced in the 21st century.

Malouf, David, *The Complete Stories*, Penguin, 2018,
ISBN 9780143790853 (A) (2)

One of the finest Australian writers, David Malouf is a master of the short story form, and this collection showcases some of his best stories. From a pig hunt that inevitably highlights the fractures of a childhood friendship shifting into early adulthood, to the tensions that arise from a lived experience of war that can never be shared, these stories tell of the complexities of human relationships, and how our changing social and political landscapes inform our actions and behaviours.

Malouf weaves Australian vernacular with rich imagery to locate his stories in familiar landscapes and to build characters we might recognise and identify with, and that might challenge and repel us. In these representations and relationships, Malouf shows the depth and breadth of human frailties, and how the silences between us and the gaps in human connections are the sites of our greatest grief. He does offer the reader places of hope in reconciliation and return, but there are always ambiguities that cannot be breached and words that can never be said. Often tragic, these stories can also remind us to value that which
unites us.

All stories included in the ‘Every Move You Make’ section of the collection are set for study (‘The Valley of Lagoons’, ‘Every Move You Make’, ‘War Baby’, ‘Towards Midnight’, ‘Elsewhere’, ‘Mrs Porter and the Rock’, ‘The Domestic Cantata’).

Plays

Harrison, Jane, *Rainbow’s End* in *Contemporary Indigenous Plays*,
Currency Press, 2007, ISBN 9780868197951 (A) (4)

Set on the fringes of the Victorian town of Shepparton in the 1950s, Jane Harrison’s play illuminates the consequences of dispossession and colonisation for Koorie Peoples. The play opens on the Dear family, who are living with few possessions and in inadequate housing, listening to reports of the Queen’s tour of Australia. From here, Harrison explores the various ways in which the Dear family struggles to secure housing and physical safety, contrasting the Menzies era of enabling the great Australian dream of home ownership with the realities of systemic discrimination and racism.

While the men in the Dear family are often absent (such as Papa Dear, who is away seeking justice and a voice for his people) or dangerous (such as Dolly’s cousin), the women of 3 generations work to maintain and protect their family and to find purpose, joy and love in their lives.

Harrison’s play provides context, understanding, compassion and a way towards reclamation and reconciliation. As Larissa Behrendt suggests in her introduction to the collection, *Rainbow’s End* ‘is a durable, resilient stone that both builds upon Indigenous traditions but also lays the foundation for the generations that will follow’.

Shakespeare, William, *Twelfth Night*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, 2017, ISBN 9781107565463 (2)

Believed to have been written around 1600 as a celebration of the end of the Christmas festivities, *Twelfth Night* is a Shakespearean comedy. However, much as the end of the Christmas revelry in its European setting is both a celebration and a foreshadowing of a bleaker time ahead, *Twelfth Night* is an ambiguous mix of celebration and melancholy. The play is a complicated tale of requited and unrequited love, in which a lovelorn prince becomes entangled with shipwrecked twins in various disguises, and the antics of those understairs create further chaos. But it is a traditional comedy, and the escapades of misrepresentations, misunderstandings and deliberate inversions eventually culminate in true love, rightful roles and reinstated identities.

The power of Shakespeare’s language and its classic five-act structure all offer opportunities for students to explore the rich possibilities of dialogue as a communication mechanism.

The play explores the nature of both love and loss in many forms. It addresses questions of identity, and the fluid notion of gender has particular relevance today. As always, the bard demonstrates a compelling insight into human nature.

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* in *The Three Theban Plays*
(Robert Fagles, trans.), Penguin Classics, 1984, ISBN 9780140444254 (3)

Arguably the most famous of the surviving Greek tragedies, Sophocles’ masterpiece centres on an unbearable tension: the crimes Oedipus is determined to uncover are crimes that he himself has unwittingly committed. In his quest to rid the city of the plague by identifying what had displeased the gods, he must destroy himself. And, of course, the crimes in question are not ‘ordinary’. Oedipus has broken two of our greatest cultural and social taboos: he has murdered his own father and married his own mother. With such shocking events and a memorable protagonist who seeks truth at any cost, this play offers many entry points to explore character, concerns and language, and contains strong threads of imagery and symbolism.

The translation by Robert Fagles has been selected for its richness and authority. This edition has some interesting supporting material, including a detailed introduction.

Poetry/songs

Hughes, Langston, *Selected Poems* (with introduction by Kayo Chingonyi), Serpent’s Tail, 2020, ISBN 9781788164511 (1)

Reflecting the complexities of Black identity and the richness of African–American culture in the 20th century, Langston Hughes’ poetry invites readers into a world where the struggles and triumphs of the Black experience are brought to life with boldness and lyricism. As a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes embraced the rhythms of jazz and blues, weaving them into his verse to capture the vibrancy of urban Black life in the 20th century. His work is characterised by a deep empathy for those who have been marginalised, a fierce commitment to social justice, and an unwavering belief in the resilience of the human spirit.

Hughes’ extensive body of work often employs a conversational tone that resonates with the voices of everyday people. He skilfully blends personal narrative with collective history, illustrating the interconnectedness of individual and communal experiences. Hughes often experiments with free verse, jazz-influenced rhythms, and traditional African–American folk forms, such as the blues and spirituals. His ability to capture the essence of the ordinary and elevate it to the realm of the profound is a hallmark of his poetry. Hughes’ work not only entertains but is also thought-provoking, encouraging readers to confront issues of race, inequality and the enduring quest for justice. By focusing on themes such as love, despair, hope and the quest for identity, Hughes creates an exploration of the complexities of the African–American experience, while also challenging the societal norms of his time.

As one of the most significant voices in American literature, Hughes’ impact continues to resonate, inspiring generations of writers and activists. His legacy is a testament to the power of poetry as a tool for social change, offering a lens through which to explore the narratives of Black life in America.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should be aware that some poems depict racial violence and use racial slurs. However, the poems contextualise Hughes’ life experiences as an African–American man growing up and living in racially segregated Jim Crow-era America and represent the lived experience of his contemporaries.

Oliver, Mary, *New and Selected Poems*, *Volume One*, Beacon Press, 2004, ISBN 9780807068779 (2)

One of the most popular American poets of recent times, and a bestseller – a genuine rarity for a poet – Mary Oliver brings some of our most important contemporary concerns to her poetry: the value of nature and the natural world, our place in the larger ecosystem, compassion for and understanding of the other, respect for First Peoples, the power of imagination and the importance of history. These two shorter collections within the larger volume cover the period of the 1980s, and some of Oliver’s most beloved and celebrated work.

The beauty of Oliver’s poetry is not just in its lyricism and imagery, but also in its accessibility. Her poems read like vignettes – little stories that take the reader into visceral landscapes and recognisable events with wry humour and humanity. Oliver also examines the refuge that nature, dreams and the subconscious can offer.

This volume of poetry won the National Book Award (USA) in 1992. There are many recordings available of Oliver reading her poetry.

All poems included in the ‘Dream Work (1986)’ and ‘American Primitive (1983)’ sections of the collection are set for study.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should be aware that the poem ‘Rage’ contains references to sexual abuse. They can choose to remove this poem from study in their classrooms.

Multimodal texts

Films

Johnson, Stephen (director)*, High Ground*, 2020 (A) (4)

Set after World War I, this Australian film, employing many of the characteristics of a western, follows the intersecting stories of two protagonists: World War I veteran Travis, and Gutjuk, a young boy orphaned when his family is massacred by white settlers. When Gutjuk’s Uncle Baywara seeks revenge on the white men who killed his family, Gutjuk enlists the help of Travis to track him down. Filmed and set in the vast landscapes of Arnhem Land, the film addresses the flawed colonial values on which our country was founded, while following Gutjuk’s journey of identity. Additionally, the film addresses issues arising from the unrelenting cycle of anger and presents the brutality and tragedy that can arise from this. (Rating: MA 15)

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should be aware that some scenes contain violence, both sexual and physical in nature; however, these scenes are utilised by Johnson to contextualise the realities of the colonial impacts on Australia’s First Nations Peoples.

Please note, [Departmental advice on the use of MA 15](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/selecting-suitable-teaching-resources/guidance/selecting-films-computer-games) materials includes the following guidance: ‘MA 15 rating – This resource can only be shown to students who are 15 years or older. Schools should only consider showing MA 15 rated resources to students under the age of 15 in exceptional circumstances where it is critical to deliver the educational program and where parent consent has been obtained … In all cases, students must be supervised by a teacher throughout the viewing/playing.’

Wilder, Billy (director), *Sunset Boulevard*, 1950 (4)

Joe is a broke and increasingly desperate writer who becomes trapped in a mansion with ageing and delusional film star Norma Desmond. He is notionally employed to write a script that will enable her to finally make her comeback, but in truth he is only indulging her fantasies while accepting her largesse. Joe’s decline is marked by his growing self-loathing, his hopeless attempt at a double life and his strange affinity with Max, Norma’s servant and chauffeur … and former husband.

A film about films, *Sunset Boulevard* explores illusion and reality and the often dark world of cinema and celebrity. The character of Norma, in particular, offers insight into the concepts of celebrity and fame, and the price of performance. The film also plays with masculinity and femininity, and how these constructions can imprison and distort.

*Sunset Boulevard* is, by turns, hilarious and hideous, creepy and comic. It features unsettling gothic elements, including a narrator from beyond the grave, a funeral for a chimpanzee and the full sweep of film noir tropes. It won an Academy Award for best story and screenplay (also by Billy Wilder). (Rating: PG)

Other

Ottley, Matt, *Requiem for a Beast*, Lothian Children’s Books, 2007,
ISBN 9780734407962 (A) (4)

Matt Ottley is the author, illustrator and composer of this rich multimodal work, which he describes as consisting of a graphic novel, a picture book, a novella and music. *Requiem for a Beast* contains two narratives: a young stockman embarks on a journey to understand himself as he pursues a wild bull through outback Queensland, and an older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman vividly reflects on her experience of the Stolen Generations. The past and present are woven together in both the written text and Ottley’s paintings, with landscapes drawing on generations of Australian oil painting tradition sitting alongside prose and sections laid out as a contemporary graphic novel.

When the Children’s Book Council of Australia awarded the 2008 Picture Book of the Year award to *Requiem for a Beast*, it evoked controversy due to the challenging and complex nature of the work, which asks the reader to consider the ways in which history impacts on Australian society and individuals today. The young man must confront his past as well as his family’s and community’s history of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people before he is able to see a way to move forward with his own life. The bull motif appears repeatedly in the imagery, both compelling the man to pursue it and threatening him with a raw power no individual can control. Readers are asked to consider their place in contemporary Australian society and how individual and collective pasts shape our present experiences, as well as the conflict between personal ethics and living as part of a community.

Music is included on a CD, incorporating a chamber orchestra, Latin hymns and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. Teachers may find the music supports their classroom practice, but for the purposes of internal and external assessment, it will not be considered part of the text.

Non-fiction texts

Dank, Debra, *We Come with This Place*, Echo Publishing, 2022,
ISBN 9781760687397 (A) (1)

Debra Dank’s extraordinary work *We Come with This Place* began as a doctoral thesis on narrative theory and semiotics. As such it defies easy classification. Neither a memoir or a biography, it has been called a ‘collective narrative’, a classification that reflects an understanding of Australia and of belonging. In this collection of stories, Dank provides insight into the complexity of an indigenous understanding of Country, community, relationships to elders, history and indeed an understanding of relationship to narrative as she reflects on identity and connection to place. She tells her own stories, her family’s stories, the stories of her people, but also the stories of the land, its animals, plants and geographic features. It illuminates both an understanding of country and an understanding of the power of story and voice to create identity. Its compelling instruction to ‘listen’ in order to be able to ‘see’ invites reflection.

Unlike Western convention, language is not used as a binary, where to understand one concept one must understand its opposite. Dank’s work reflects the nature of the matrices in indigenous language where meaning is determined by context and relationships and connections are not immediately evident. The text’s meaning is derived from an emersion into a fluid understanding of time and space and indigenous people’s connection to Country. This is achieved, in part, by the interweaving of different stories that span generations as if time were irrelevant. This careful juxtaposition gives insight into the deep connections that are forged through millennial stewardship of land. While such a narrative, inevitably in a settler society, covers physical, spiritual and geographic assault, the text is overwhelmingly optimistic about the power and future of the individual, family and indigenous experience, and demonstrates how a shared future can be achieved. The text weaves a web of understanding of both people and place, using rich and evocative descriptions of Country, experience and relationships. A circular structure, symbolism, figurative language and other poetic devices are not so much harnessed as offer themselves as vehicles to explore how identity is achieved within landscape and community. This text challenges the Western celebration of individualism as it explores the connections between humans, their world and communities and offers insight into another way of understanding Country, family, community and identity. Mixed with humour and wisdom, Dank explores her own story and its relationship to the past and its role in the future. This honest text does not sentimentalise Australia’s settler or indigenous past but instead builds a way in which narrative past and present can be harnessed to weave stories of the world into the future of our country and Country.

**Advice to schools**: This text recounts historically verified accounts of rape, assault and domestic violence. These may be confronting to some readers. It should be noted that stories of this time and place cannot be told in full without such inclusions and that there can be equally confronting unintended consequences of rendering only a sanitised version of Australia’s history.

Noah, Trevor*, Born a Crime*, John Murray Press, 2017,
ISBN 9781473635302 (4)

Trevor Noah, the product of a mixed-race relationship at a time when such a union was illegal, recounts his experiences growing up during and after Apartheid in his memoir *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. Frank, funny and at times shocking, the memoir offers a contemporary perspective on race issues and examines the ensuing social and economic disenfranchisement Noah experienced as he grew up. As such, he explores the impact of poverty and marginalisation, and the difficulties of forging an identity in a society that sees his very existence as a criminal act.

Over the course of the memoir, Noah details his early childhood with his mother’s family and then his stepfather, his high school years navigating the world of girls, and his journey to becoming an entrepreneur, selling bootleg CDs to the local bus drivers and his broader community. Woven into Noah’s reflections and anecdotes is the story of his mother, Patricia – a devout, independent woman striving to protect her son from the dangers of their world. Both a strict disciplinarian and a deeply loving woman, Patricia is celebrated for her strength and courage. She is a mother who understands the reality of her country and its history, and is determined to teach her son about surviving in it.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should be aware that there are some confronting scenes depicting racial and domestic violence. However, the scenes contextualise Noah’s life experiences as a mixed-race child living in South Africa and are ultimately tempered by Noah’s humour, strength and resilience as he comes to understand his life.

List 2

Writing about country

Chekhov, Anton, ‘[Gooseberries](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1883/1883-h/1883-h.htm#link2H_4_0007)’, The Project Gutenberg eBook of
*The Wife and Other Stories* (updated 10 September 2016) (3)

Considered an early Modernist, Anton Chekhov was concerned with the social mores and class interactions prior to the turn of the 20th century. Considered a master of the short story form, he developed many of the formal innovations that characterise contemporary short fiction. Laced with understatement, Chekhov’s works at times abandon an identifiable narrative arc in favour of feeling and internalised character development.

In ‘Gooseberries’, Chekhov recounts the story of two men travelling together and staying overnight at the estate of a third man. Written in 1898, ‘Gooseberries’ interrogates ideas of happiness and fulfilment, enlivened by imagination of the pastoral.

In this story-within-a-story, the narrator Ivan recounts the experience of his brother Nikolai, who lives a frugal life in pursuit of his tree-change dream of a smallholding where he might grow the eponymous gooseberries. Yet, as his dream is fulfilled, his manner and attitude become decidedly bitter, illuminating a critique of the nobility and land ownership, suggesting a hypothesis of humility being a true source of happiness.

In the story, students will find ample opportunity to identify hallmarks of the modern short story form and may be encouraged to adopt elements of Chekhov’s style, such as the employment of pathetic fallacy, imagery and sensory description. With the story posing more questions than it does answers, students may be intrigued to experiment with engendering depth and complexity in their own writing through the use of extended metaphor or embedded narrative.

Clarke, Maxine Beneba, Chapter 2, *The Hate Race*, Hachette, 2018,
ISBN 9780733640421 (A) (3)

Maxine Beneba Clarke’s writing is concerned with the experience of the ‘other’ in contemporary Australia. Drawn from her memoir *The Hate Race,* this chapter details her parents’ arrival in Australia and settlement in the newly developed suburb of Kellyville in 1976. Throughout the collection, 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, and her ideas about belonging and inclusion in a land and country dissimilar to that of her parents’ heritage and experience are a core concern of this piece.

The register of Clarke’s writing reflects her slam poetry roots, the patois of her forebears and refrains and elements of Batuque. Written in the third person about Bordeaux and Cleopatra, her work contains language that is rich and evocative, injected with superlatives and adjectival artistry to capture the magnitude of the experience for the young couple, and the ongoing dislocation of their settlement. The ominously named touchpoints of their unfamiliar environment signal the exclusion and disempowerment they are met with.

Students will recognise the universality of the experience of encountering something new and overwhelming and may be inspired by Clarke’s writing to explore stories of their own forebears, or personal experiences of encountering an unfamiliar landscape or culture. This text is aptly named *The Hate Race* because it reflects Clarke’s experience and the visceral effects of growing up in modern Australia, and the racism, prejudice and exclusion that have shaped her.

Dillard, JD, ‘[An Open Letter to the Man Who Yelled “Go Back to Africa!](https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-open-letter-to-the-man-who-yelled-go-back-to-africa-at-me)” at Me’, McSweeney’s Internet Tendency, published 22 August 2019 (1)

JD Dillard is a writer and actor based in Los Angeles, and a person of colour living in the contemporary milieu of the United States of America. His online presence makes visible his work and commentary, which demonstrate his engagement with a range of creative forms and media. The ‘open letter’ crafted by JD Dillard takes as its focus a slur directed at the narrator persona, and extrapolates this concept in a literal and thereby ludicrous manner. Adopting a satirical formal register with a subject matter addressing ‘the man who yelled “Go back to Africa” at me’, the piece documents a series of actions undertaken by the narrator in striving to reach his likely country of origin.

The open letter provides students with a clearly identifiable form and purpose to model their own responses on. It includes conventions such as a salutation and closing sign-off. In the letter, language features such as exclamation, sarcasm and irony, vernacular language, direct address, hyperbole and anaphora are present. The letter is peppered with contemporary references such as the ‘Ford F-150 Raptor’ and ‘Ancestry.com’.

Linking to the Framework of country, this piece invites students to reflect on concepts of origin and identity, prejudice and racism, and authenticity. Students are invited to consider the notion of what it is to belong. The closing envoi of the letter, ‘My man!... You sent me on this wild ride just to show me I was already home’, poignantly conveys this.

Kassab, Yumna, ‘[The Conquest of Land and Dream](https://meanjin.com.au/essays/the-conquest-of-land-and-dream/)’, *Meanjin*
(Spring 2021) (A) (3)

Yumna Kassab is an Australian writer who often writes about the interaction between place and identity. In ‘The Conquest of Land and Dream’, published in 2021 in the Melbourne-based literary magazine *Meanjin*, she explores ideas of possession and sovereignty, naming and words, farming and mining. The piece deals with the attempts of migrants to exploit, control and understand new lands, and, in the case of Australia, the impacts on First Nations Peoples.

A sense of unease permeates the piece, as Kassab writes from a second-person perspective with an almost accusatory ‘you’ to detail the homogenisation and horrors wrought by colonisation on this vast and varied land. She paints a stark and dark picture of dispossession: it is a ‘burial site … covered with denial’.

There are five subheadings that structure the piece: Terra nullius; Marks and lines; Homogenous; The supremacy of tongue; Conquest the ideal. These subheadings move the piece through time and subject matter, from the arrival of the British to more modern migration involving asylum seekers. The metaphor of the tower is used to show the ways in which claims about possessing Australia are maintained: ‘You build a structure … ignore the knock on the door … The tower is now a fortress and … your control is complete.’

Students could experiment with the use of second-person narration and reflect on their family’s stories of migration, dispossession or connection to place, as well as their own relationship with and understanding of Australian history.

Lynch, Cassie, ‘Split’, *Flock: First Nations Stories Then and Now* (Ellen van Neerven, ed.), University of Queensland Press, 2021,
ISBN 9780702263033 (A) (3)

A Western Australian author and descendant of the Noongar People, Cassie Lynch explores the divide between traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connection to Country and the modern, postcolonial treatment of the land through the recurrent motif of the ancient river that runs through – and divides – Perth.

The narrator follows Perth from its creation by the serpent Wagyl to the hustle and bustle of its central business district, where people use the land without acknowledging it. The story asserts that while settlers developed and changed the land through the process of colonising it, they have never been fully conscious of its history or importance, damaging it in equal measure.

Lynch extends this idea of ‘split’ country, the duality between the old and the new Swan River, and the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and settler peoples themselves, through her illustrative use of language. The work is a blend of magic, realism, traditional storytelling techniques and vibrant descriptions of nature clashing with cold, contemporary practices, though with some hope that a balance and compromise between the two disparate landscapes can be achieved. This contrast highlights the importance of knowing the history of one’s country, while encouraging a spiritual connection to it.

Students could consider how they might represent duality, and explore elements of magical realism or science fiction, in their own writing.

Writing about protest

Gillespie, Mark, ‘[Friday Essay: On the Sydney Mardi Gras March of 1978](https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-on-the-sydney-mardi-gras-march-of-1978-54337)’,
*The Conversation*, published 19 February 2016 (A) (3)

‘Friday Essay: On the Sydney Mardi Gras March of 1978’, published on 19 February 2016, explores the ‘momentous events’ of political protest in ‘Sydney between June and August 1978’. Anthropologist and author Mark Gillespie, from the University of Sydney, explores ideas of equality and the importance of compensation for the LGBTIQ+ community for decades of ostracism, abuse and discrimination.

Gillespie’s structure shifts from contemporary 2016, to the day of the iconic 1978 Mardi Gras protest and celebration, to the 1985 HIV epidemic in Sydney, and then returns to a present-day reflection. As Gillespie focuses on each aspect of defining moments in LGBTIQ+ movements, he reflects on his experiences and highlights his concerns for his future. His reflections are sharpened with direct quotes from the protests and photographic images of banners of celebration, police brutality and a police officer dancing and celebrating with the protesters.

The language of the article is both vulnerable and stoic, directly addressing the bureaucratic systems that failed the writer and the community. It connects personal reflection with facts, and honestly considers the value of an apology in light of the events of the past. Gillespie’s celebration of protest reinforces its importance and highlights that the journey is far from over.

Students could explore the use of a personal reflection or a historical reflection, experimenting with a hybrid of factual and sentimental styles within their own writing.

Pankhurst, Emmeline, ‘[Freedom or Death](https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/apr/27/greatspeeches)’, ‘Great Speeches of the
20th Century’ (series), *The Guardian* (online), posted 27 April 2007 (3)

Considered one of the greatest speeches of the 20th century, ‘Freedom or Death’ by activist Emmeline Pankhurst was delivered at Parsons Theater in Hartford, Connecticut on 13 November 1913. Pankhurst, a vocal and passionate believer in a woman’s right to vote, founded the British Suffragette movement and spent four decades protesting against inequality in voting rights.

Pankhurst’s speech shimmers with intensity and energy as she speaks of the requirement for revolutionary actions – defending the use of violence – and ‘militant’ tactics in the fight for equal rights. Gender discrimination and basic human rights are also referenced. Pankhurst’s speech is an example of the potency of language, inclusive of the connotative power of single words. Throughout the speech, Pankhurst speaks as a ‘soldier’. Under threat of further imprisonment for speaking out many times prior, Pankhurst draws extensively from the language and imagery of battle.

‘Freedom or Death’ demonstrates the speaker’s strong capacity for persuasion and her clear consideration of context, purpose and audience. Pankhurst expertly utilises metaphor and repetition to highlight how deliberate language choices can convey passion, strength and commitment. ‘Freedom or Death’ is a highly powerful example of protest. In the face of continued female oppression, this call to action still resonates on many levels today.

Students could focus on figurative language and extended metaphor in their own work, using Pankhurst’s text as a model.

Parry, Jonathan, ‘[What’s the Point of Protest](https://www.lse.ac.uk/philosophy/blog/2023/02/15/whats-the-point-of-protest/)?’, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method Blog, published 15 February 2023 (1)

‘What’s the Point of Protest?’ seeks to answer two essential questions: ‘What is the point of protest?’ and ‘What makes a protest successful?’ Jonathan Parry, a moral and political philosopher based in the Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics and Political Science, explores whether protest has to ‘effect change’ in order to be deemed a success or considered valuable.

Writing in 2023, on the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, Parry considers the purpose and value of protest primarily through the lens of the 2003 anti-war protests. Specifically, he explores the significance of the protesters’ slogan ‘Not in My Name!’ and the implications of this slogan on protests more generally. In deconstructing this slogan, Parry suggests that it matters to us whether we are personally implicated in actions and policies that conflict with our values, both materially and morally. Thus, Parry argues that whilst it may not lead to tangible change, the ability to voice our dissent and dissatisfaction through protest is what makes it truly valuable.

Published on the blog of the LSE Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method, Parry’s piece is logical and raises substantial philosophical questions in a concise and straightforward way. As such, he avoids academic jargon, instead relying on clear language and simple analogy to illustrate his perspective on protest.

This text provides scope to explore what constitutes a successful protest, and consider the moral implications of protest movements, both historical and contemporary.

Vonnegut, Kurt, ‘Harrison Bergeron’, *Welcome to the Monkey House*,
Vintage Classics, 2021, ISBN 9781784877033 (3)

‘Harrison Bergeron’, written in 1961, presents a dystopian society in which all citizens are deemed ‘finally equal’. Almost immediately, however, darkly satirical author Kurt Vonnegut explores ideas of authoritarianism and freedom while positing the pertinent question: Is total equality really something worth fighting for?

The titular character is presented as the epitome of defiance in a world that attempts to control the masses through ‘handicaps’ forced on citizens to ensure equality. Vonnegut employs a traditional short story structure, opening with the date (2081) and an impossible statement of social equality. As the story unfolds, each added detail (the ‘mental handicap radio’ that emits sounds that ‘scatter … thoughts’, the ‘canvas bags’ with ‘birdshot’ that individuals are forced to wear) contests the authority of the opening line and sets a challenge to the reader.

The language of the story is at once comedic and tragic; the silliness of the solutions employed to create equality are juxtaposed against the suffering of George and the ballerinas, and the lack of beauty, intelligence and joy for any member of society. Harrison’s protest is both painful and futile.

Students could explore the use of satire as a form of protest, experimenting with irony and wit in their own writings.

Wyatt, Meyne, [Monologue from *City of Gold*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys2FTUmOnIg), Australian Broadcasting Corporation (official channel), *Q+A* episode, broadcast 8 June 2020 (A) (3)

In this monologue, taken from the highly acclaimed 2019 play *City of Gold*, Wongutha-Yamatji writer, director and performer Meyne Wyatt presents an angry, urgent message from a man tired of ignorance, prejudice and, perhaps most frustratingly, acquiescence from white Australian society.

Initially, Wyatt explores ideas of tokenism and casual racism within Australian society, before angrily shifting tone to the consequences of such racism: the ongoing mental and physical effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Wyatt’s play is loosely based on his life and experiences, and this performance of the monologue on Australia’s Q&A was presented during an episode that discussed Aboriginal deaths in custody.

Wyatt bookends his monologue with the motif of being forced to ‘sit down’ and ‘stay humble’ as an Aboriginal man in Australia, detailing his own experiences in the entertainment industry and using the example of the sustained racism Adam Goodes endured during the 2015 AFL (Australian Football League) season. Moreover, Wyatt’s use of repetition serves as a reminder of the cyclical nature of violence and discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, making his ultimate refusal to ‘be quiet, be humble and sit down’ a powerful protest against such treatment.

Students could explore the use of monologue as a form of protest, experimenting with tone shift, lyricism and repetition in their own writing.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should note that there is some explicit language in this monologue; however, it serves to contextualise Wyatt’s frustration and is not gratuitous in nature.

Writing about personal journeys

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, ‘[The Danger of a Single Story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)’, TEDGlobal*,*2009 (3)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a celebrated author of short stories and novels. In her TEDtalk ‘The Danger of a Single Story’, she weaves together a series of personal anecdotes and literary theories to posit that it is necessary to create space for diverse stories.

Beginning with her own personal experiences of reading as a child in Nigeria, Adichie identifies that she ‘did not know that people like [her] could exist in literature’. This is because the children’s books that she read came from the United Kingdom and did not fully reflect her own experiences and reality. She moves on to identify moments in her life when she limited others to a single story and was limited by others’ perceptions of her. She makes it clear that her own personal journey as a ‘middle-class’ Nigerian has not been well reflected in literature, owing to the pervasive narrative that Africa is a land of ‘catastrophe’ and ‘incomprehensible people’. She condemns single stories because they ‘rob people of their dignity’. Building on this concept, she argues for the need to tell more complete stories, rather than fuelling stereotypes. Throughout the speech, Adichie uses humour, including self-deprecating humour, to expose how easy it can be to believe these single stories.

Students could explore the personal journeys of those who are not often highlighted in the Australian media landscape, or consider arguing for more inclusive storytelling. They can consider the use of personal anecdotes, thesis statements and humour to put forward their message.

Duong, Amy, ‘[The red plastic chair is a Vietnamese cultural institution, and my anchor](https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2020/10/29/red-plastic-chair-vietnamese-cultural-institution-and-my-anchor)’, 2020 SBS Emerging Writers’ Competition, SBS (online), published 2 November 2020 (updated 14 July 2023) (A) (3)

Published as part of SBS Australia’s Emerging Writers’ Competition, Amy Duong’s memoir is not about her own personal journey as the daughter of Vietnamese refugees; rather, it is a reflection on the hardships and sacrifices her family made in coming to Australia before she was born.

Duong begins her piece by homing in on the titular plastic red chairs, items that may initially be seen as mundane and merely utilitarian yet serve as an integral part of Duong’s identity and Vietnamese culture at large. These chairs are a catalyst for childhood memories, musings, regrets and an uncomfortable reckoning with the past. Just as Duong refers to the chairs as an ‘anchor’ to her past, she uses the motif of red chairs to structure her piece. These chairs have been ubiquitous throughout her life and are ever present throughout the story. At every important turn, the red chairs are there in the background.

Duong ruminates on the disconnect she feels, as a first-generation Australian, from her aunt and mother: her limited grasp of the Vietnamese language, her privilege of not knowing the same adversity as her elders did, and her own complicity in creating a generational divide within her family. Her writing is sharp, personable and authentic. While her writing is anecdotal and conversational in tone, Duong also uses purposeful descriptive language to enhance the emotional and challenging aspects of her family history.

Although Duong’s ideas are specific to her own unique experiences, students could use them to explore items of cultural, historical or nostalgic value and how these symbolise literal or metaphorical journeys.

Garner, Helen, ‘[Dear Mrs Dunkley](https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/dear-mrs-dunkley-20121016-27orm.html)’, The Sydney Morning Herald (online), published 21 October 2012 (A) (1)

Helen Garner is an Australian novelist, short story writer and journalist, and in ‘Dear Mrs Dunkley’ she reflects upon her formative years at school, and the ways in which later in life we come to see how past experiences shape who we are in the present.

Using an epistolary structure, Garner explores what it means to really know someone – and how our formative experiences and associated memories can shift and blur as new information is revealed. Initially telling the story of her transfer from a small country state school to a private girls’ school in Geelong, this powerful bildungsroman draws upon Garner’s experience of being out of her depth in this new environment, and the profound impact of lessons learned in the classroom. Throughout this letter, Garner uses rich imagery to outline the challenges she faced, and the lessons learned, in Mrs Dunkley’s Grade 5 classroom. Later in the piece, she explores how her understanding of this complex character from her youth changed over time, and how impactful she was on the writer Garner became.

This text explores how profoundly childhood experiences shape people as adults and acknowledges the impact of key figures who have inspired or shaped our interests and passions.

**Advice to schools**: This text can also be accessed in *Sincerely: Women of Letters* (Marieke Hardy and Michaela McGuire, eds), Viking, 2012, ISBN 9780670076710

Hodge, Maya, ‘[bidngen](https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2021/11/09/sbs-emerging-writers-competition-2021-runner-maya-hodge)’, 2021 SBS Emerging Writers’ Competition,
SBS (online), published 10 November 2021 (A) (3)

First published in 2021 as part of SBS Australia’s Emerging Writers’ Competition and now part of *Between Two Worlds*, an anthology of stories from the competition, Maya Hodge’s ‘bidngen’ features an unnamed narrator who reflects on the important role that memories, culture and stories have played in shaping her.

The narrator recounts her childhood in a town ‘festering with racism and drugs’ where, in spite of the hardships and poverty her family endured, they were able to ‘[stitch] the house together with love’. Hodge highlights the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and how it is passed down through the generations. Indeed, her intention to pay tribute to this strength is evident through the fact that the title, ‘bidngen’, means ‘woman’ in the Lardil language.

The power of storytelling is a central theme, with Hodge highlighting that stories not only serve to connect us with our culture and memories but can also be a source of comfort and healing. The narrator recalls her grandmother reading fairytales to her and how reading allowed her to feel ‘the scars inside her softly close over’. She also explores how stories can be told through music as she picks up her violin and ‘lets the stories of her people pour from her fingers into steel strings’. Hodge’s use of subheadings highlights the fact that, while seemingly unconnected, all of these memories allow us to gain an understanding of the narrator’s journey and what has shaped her. Additionally, the fact that the headings are written in the Lardil language emphasises that language and culture are central to her identity and that she needs to constantly navigate living between two worlds.

Students could explore the importance of language, culture and storytelling in their own journeys and experiment with incorporating subheadings and phrases in languages other than English into their own writing.

López, Matthew, Walter’s speech (end of Part 1) from *The Inheritance*,
‘[The Walter Project – Matthew López & The AIDS Memorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Pd77JOgeNA)’, posted 1 December 2020 (3)

*The Inheritance*, first performed in 2018, is a contemporary two-part play exploring the legacy of AIDS in the gay community in New York City. Walter’s speech is an extract from the end of Part 1, in which Walter is speaking with his young friend Eric about how he came to own the ‘rambling old farmhouse’. The house was purchased at the height of the AIDS crisis by Walter and his partner at the time, Henry, and located far away from the bustling city, where ‘there was no illness’. While Henry wishes to shut the virus away, Walter realises that ‘the answer was not to shut the world out, but rather to fling the doors open and invite it in’.

This difference of view proves irreconcilable, the relationship ends, and Walter retains the house. A series of young men who have AIDS, and nowhere else to go, come to stay with Walter at the house, and ‘one by one, they died there’. Despite the gravity and melancholy of the journeys that these young men take, Walter’s reflection focuses on the courage and resilience of his community. López symbolises Walter’s compassion through ‘an enormous cherry tree’, which superstition suggests has ‘pig’s teeth’ stuck deep within the bark. The tree is believed to cure all illnesses. Yet as it blazes through the seasons, the lives of countless young men continue to be cut short by a virus that is ignored and stigmatised by the wider community.

Students could explore how the younger generation can learn about the journeys of those who have gone before them, experimenting with symbolism and the significance of setting in their own writing.

Writing about play

Gay, Virginia, [Monologue from *Cyrano*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apA0290YtFs), Australian Broadcasting Corporation (official channel), *Q+A* episode, broadcast 9 September 2021 (A) (3)

This monologue is from Virginia Gay’s ‘freely adapt[ed] and reimagin[ed]’ version of Edmond Rostand’s 19th-century play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, as a positive, queer and feminist story. The monologue, performed by Gay, engages with the thrill of falling in love, playing with the possibilities of the future and indulging in imaginings of limitless joys.

Offered as a stumbling and intimate stream of consciousness, the monologue presents a lovely long list of experiences and actions – travel, work, home, food, drink, children, guests – through evocative vocabulary and language features. Gay employs questions to engage directly with the audience, positioned as her surrogate lover. She proposes ideas, only to retreat from them, or to have them both exist as mutual truths. There is aching sensuality and everyday pragmatism side by side, and every word is suffused with hope and optimism.

Students could play with looking forward with hope and joy to an unfolding future, exploring mischievous vocabulary and figurative language, or with looking backwards to events of the past with the same uplifting tones. The exploration of promise and faith can often go missing in contemporary writings; this mentor text provides space to experiment with that voice.

**Note:** In the play, this monologue is a dialogue between the lovers.

Huang, Coco X, ‘[Impromptu: Fiction for voice and piano](https://goingdownswinging.org.au/archives/impromptu/)’, *Going Down Swinging* (online), published 15 June 2020 (A) (1)

Coco X Huang’s ‘intermedia’ text ‘Impromptu’ was first published online in *Going Down Swinging* in 2020. The text combines music and the spoken work to reflect on what constitutes honesty in playing an instrument for others. Huang uses a first-person narrator retrospectively narrating her journey from child prodigy to her adult silence. The piece finishes with ‘the only music [she] can play without feeling like a fraud.’ The piece is narrated and performed with apparently improvised music. The irony is that the apparent improvisation is carefully crafted to deceive and indeed was created digitally. The many ways in which playing and listening to music can deceive the listener are explored in an effort to discover where authenticity in performance lies.

The piece not only subverts accepted ideas about performance but plays, in a similar way, with linguistic structures and features. The narrative voice appears to be genuine and honest, but this honesty is exposed by the narrator as a self-interested lie. Ironically, the very act of doing this encourages the reader to believe in the authenticity of the narrative voice. The pathos of the imagery used encourages the reader to relate to the narrator. The apparent simplicity of the account is reinforced by the unpolished musical performance accompanying it. Strategic account of conversations and childhood memories are used to position the reader to feel great sympathy for the narrator. The text leaves the reader questioning their own response to music.

The piece explores the meaning of playing music and experiments with retrospective narratives. The way in which this text creates a ‘voice’ represents the authentic self at various stages of development.

Roffey, Chelsea, ‘An Open Letter to Doubting Thomas’, *From the Outer*(Nicole Hayes and Alicia Sometimes, eds), Black Inc., 2016,
ISBN 9781863958288 (A) (3)

‘An Open Letter to Doubting Thomas’ is the first entry in the 2016 collection *From the Outer*, which presents 30 voices celebrating the many experiences of supporters of the AFL (Australian Football League). The author, Chelsea Roffey, was the first woman to officiate at an AFL Grand Final. Roffey’s letter invites readers to reflect on views about gender and the role of umpires in game-playing.

Published years before the AFL issued a formal apology for the ‘horrendous treatment of female umpires’\*, Roffey’s text raises questions about the ways in which playing a game can reveal society’s unacknowledged values and how confronting these can lead to profound change. The extended open letter form allows Roffey the freedom to present ideas using both formal and informal conventions and hence models how traditional structures can be subverted. Her letter reveals the courage involved in challenging traditions played out in games and how boundaries can be redefined by confronting those all-too-real playing behaviours.

The letter format invites students to consider the power of explicitly addressing an audience. Roffey’s use of tone, including the interplay of irony and mockery, models ways in which a writer achieves ‘voice’. Her use of allusion will open a world of opportunity for students to enrich their own writing by building on the ideas and philosophies of others. The personal style adopted, with its effective use of understatement, humour and imagery, demonstrates how appropriate debate about contentious topics can be instigated.

(\*Dr Victoria Rawlings is the author of the report that triggered the apology.)

Russon, Penni, ‘All That We Know of Dreaming’, *Something Special*, *Something Rare*, Black Inc., 2015, ISBN 9781863957298 (A) (3)

Dr Penni Russon is an award-winning author of novels for children and young adults. This captivating short story (her first short story for adults) was published in *The Big Issue Fiction Edition* in 2009, and then picked up by Delia Falconer for Black Inc.'s *Best Australian Stories 2009* and *Something Special, Something Rare: Outstanding Short Stories by Australian Women* (2015). It was written while Russon and her family were living in Victoria’s Kinglake area, which was devastated by bushfire in 2009.

Russon uses the short story form to explore the rich reflections, vibrant memories and striking daydreams of a mother who has ‘stopped dreaming’ as she moves through an autumn day. The distinct, first-person voice gives rise to these playful reveries that allow Russon to unveil the intimacy of our most precious relationships. Her mastery of imagery and figurative language brings to life the pleasures of childhood, the satisfaction of raising a family in an orchard, and the vibrant countryside setting. However, something darker lurks in her drifting thoughts and it is moments of playful reminiscing and vivid reflection that take the edge off the narrator’s unknown pain, and reduce the severity of loneliness and death.

Russon leaves us asking: Why do we dream? What role do dreams play? What power can dreams hold? This demonstrates how students could, within the short story form, use voice, imagery and figurative language to add depth and complexity when writing about play.

Winton, Tim, ‘[About the Boys](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/09/about-the-boys-tim-winton-on-how-toxic-masculinity-is-shackling-men-to-misogyny)’, *The Guardian* (online), published
9 April 2018 (A) (3)

‘About the Boys’ is an excerpt from a speech made by Tim Winton and published as a feature article by *The Guardian* in April 2018. In it, he explores rituals that limit and constrain boys and ways to liberate them from ‘the race, the game, the fight’. Winton raises questions about how gender is formed through childhood and the way that boys ‘play’ at becoming men. He uses a conversational tone and his personal experience to legitimise the theories that he has formed by observing boys in the surfing community.

Through powerful allusion, Winton suggests that young people look for cues from the flawed adult world to shape their role-playing and their ‘rehearsal’ for adulthood. He presents a stark and compelling picture of a bleak and dangerous situation. His transition between pronouns is one of the ways in which he presents a confronting challenge to the reader and the Australian community. The text stresses ideas about the impact of ‘silence’ in the face of ‘misogynistic trash talk’. Alliteration and repetitive sentence structures are employed to draw the reader into understanding the ‘first step’ that Winton believes is necessary to change the future for young men and our community.

Through imagery and figurative language, Winton explores what is offered to young men to replace ‘the coherence of tradition’. This allows the reader to envisage both the problem and its consequences. His writing models how to discuss social problems in a challenging and yet respectful way.

This text illustrates the language features students could use to create an informal, authentic voice to project authority into their own writing about the experience of childhood and the way young people’s play reflects society’s underlying beliefs and values.

**Advice to schools:** Teachers should note that there is some use of expletives in this text.