VCE Literature Text List 2022

The following texts proposed by the Literature 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 Literature 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 for whom English is an additional language
* 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 Literature must adhere to the following guidelines:

* The text list will contain 30 texts.
* The text list must represent a range of texts in the following approximate proportions
* nine novels
* eight plays
* three collections of short stories
* four other works of literature
* six collections of poetry.
* One-third of texts on the text list must be by Australian authors.
* Approximately 75 per cent of texts on the text list would be expected to be familiar to most VCE Literature teachers.
* The text list must contain titles that are different from those on the VCE English and English as an Additional Language text list.
* The text list will be reviewed annually, with approximately 25 per cent of the texts being changed.   
  No text will appear for more than four consecutive years or fewer than two 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 15 of the *VCE Literature Study Design* *2017–2022* for Units 3 and 4.

The selection must include:

* one novel
* one collection of poetry
* one play
* two further texts selected from novels, plays, collections of poetry, collections of short stories or other literature.

At least one of the texts selected must be Australian.

Students must study a sixth text for Unit 3 Area of Study 1. The text used for Unit 3 Area of Study 1 must be an adaptation of one of the five required texts selected from the text list published by the VCAA. The text may take the form of, but is not limited to, a:

* live performance by a professional theatre company
* film, including a film script
* television miniseries
* script.

A student adaptation cannot be used as the adaptation text for Unit 3 Area of Study 1.

The literary criticism studied for Unit 4 Area of Study 1 is not prescribed.

The selection of texts should ensure that students experience a range of literature from early to contemporary works, dealing with a diversity of cultural experiences and a range of viewpoints.

Students are encouraged to read widely in both Units 3 and 4 to support the achievement of all outcomes.

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. However, it should be noted that the editions nominated in the text list are those from which the passages for the examination will be selected. For collections of poetry, poems are prescribed; students must study the poems listed in the text list.

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

The text list is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. 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 Literature text list; ‘(1)’, for example, indicates that 2019 is the first year that a text has appeared on the text list.

Novels

Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey* (3)

Cadwallader, Robyn, *The Anchoress* (A) (4)

Faulkner, William, *As I Lay Dying* (1)

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day* (1)

Lindsay, Joan, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (A) (2)

Stoker, Bram, *Dracula* (1)

Winterson, Jeanette, *The Passion* (4)

Wright, Alexis, *Carpentaria* (A) (3)

Zola, Emile, (Brian Nelson transl.), *The Ladies’ Paradise* (2)

Plays

Bovell, Andrew, *Speaking in Tongues* (A) (3)

Chekov, Anton, *Uncle Vanya* (1)

Delaney, Shelagh, *A Taste of Honey* (4)

Euripides, *Hippolytus* (3)

Morrison, Toni, *Desdemona* (3)

Parks, Suzan-Lori, *Father Comes Home from the Wars: Parts 1, 2 and 3* (1)

Reza, Yasmina, *Art* (4)

Shakespeare, William, *Othello* (3)

Shakespeare, William, *The Winter’s Tale* (1)

Short stories

Beneba Clarke, Maxine, *Foreign Soil* (A) (4)  
**Stories for study:** ‘David’; ‘Hope’, ‘Shu Yi’, ‘Railton Road’, ‘Gaps in the Hickory’, ‘Big Islan’, ‘The Stilt Fishermen of Kathaluwa’, ‘The Suki Yaki Book Club’

Dovey, Ceridwen, *Only the Animals* (A) (4)  
**Stories for study:** ‘Pigeons, a Pony, the Tomcat and I’, ‘Hundstage’, ‘Somewhere along the Line the Pearl would be Handed to me’, ‘Plautus, a Memoir of my Years on Earth and Last Days in Space’, ‘I, the Elephant, Wrote this’, ‘A Letter to Sylvia Plath’, ‘Psittacophile’

Munro, Alice, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Vintage, 2000 (2)  
**Stories for study**: All

Other literature

Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time* (1)

Winton, Tim, *The Boy Behind the Curtain* (2)  
**Selections for study:** ‘The Boy Behind the Curtain’, ‘A Space Odyssey at Eight’, ‘Havoc: A Life in Accidents’, ‘A Walk at Low Tide’, ‘Repatriation’, ‘Betsy’, ‘Twice on Sundays’, ‘The Wait and the Flow’, ‘In the Shadow of the Hospital’, ‘The Battle for Ningaloo Reef’, ‘The Demon Shark’, ‘Using the C-word’, ‘Stones for Bread’, ‘Sea Change’, ‘Barefoot in the Temple of Art’

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One’s Own* (4)

Poetry

Each poem listed must be studied. In the case of longer poems, extracts from the poem may be used in the examination.

Dickinson, Emily, *The Complete Poems*, (2)  
**Poems for study:** (45) ‘There’s Something Quieter than Sleep’, (228) ‘Blazing in Gold and Quenching in Purple’, (254) ‘“Hope” is the Thing with Feathers’, (258) ‘There’s a Certain Slant of Light’, (280) ‘I Felt a Funeral, In my Brain’, (389) ‘There’s Been a Death, In the Opposite House’, (441) ‘This Is my Letter to the World’, (465) ‘I Heard a Fly Buzz – When I died’, (533) ‘Two Butterflies Went Out at Noon’, (622) ‘To Know Just How he Suffered – Would Be Dear’, (709) ‘Publication – Is the Auction’, (712) ‘Because I Could not Stop for Death’, (754) ‘My Life had Stood – A Loaded Gun’, (761) ‘From Blank to Blank’, (986) ‘A Narrow Fellow in the Grass’, (1136) ‘The Frost of Death Was on the Pane’, (1235) ‘Like Rain it Sounded till it Curved’, (1764) ‘The Saddest Noise, The Sweetest Noise’

Plath, Sylvia, *Ariel* (4)  
**Poems for study:** ‘Morning Song’, ‘Sheep in Fog’, ‘The Applicant’, ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘Tulips’, ‘Cut’, ‘The Night Dances’, ‘Poppies in October’, ‘Nick and the Candlestick’, ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’, ‘Letter in November’, ‘Daddy’, ‘You’re’, ‘The Arrival of the Bee Box’, ‘The Munich Mannequins’, ‘Balloons’, ‘Kindness’, ‘Words’

Slessor, Kenneth *Selected Poems* (A) (2)  
**Poems for study:** ‘Earth-Visitors’, ‘Pan at Lane Cove’, ‘Winter Dawn’, ‘Stars’, ‘The Night-Ride’, ‘Realities’, ‘Music’ (sections 1-6), ‘Captain Dobbin’, ‘Five Visions of Captain Cook’, ‘Country Towns’, ‘Out of Time’, ‘North Country’, ‘South Country’, ‘Williams Street’, ‘Five Bells’, ‘Beach Burial’

Wagan Watson, Samuel, *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (A) (4)  
**Poems for study:** ‘Magnesium Girl’, ‘On the River’, ‘Waiting for the Good Man’, ‘White Stucco Dreaming’, ‘Jetty Nights’, ‘A Verse for the Cheated’, ‘The Gloom Swans’, ‘Labelled’, ‘For the Wake and Skeleton Dance’, ‘Cheap White-Goods at the Dreamtime Sale’, ‘Poem 9’, ‘Hotel Bone’, ‘We’re not Truckin’ Around’, ‘Night Racing’, ‘Deo Optimo Maximo’, ‘Jaded Olympic Moments’, ‘Smoke Signals’, ‘Cribb Island’

White, Petra, *A Hunger* (revised edition) (A) (3)  
**Poems for study:** ‘Ode on Love’, ‘Selva Oscura’, ‘By This Hand’, ‘Magnolia Tree’, ‘Feral Cow’, ‘The Relic’, ‘Truth and Beauty’, ‘Woman and Dog’, ‘Ricketts Point’, ‘Southbank (1–11)’, ‘Highway: Eucla Beach’, ‘Highway: Bunda Cliffs’, ‘From Munich’, ‘Karri Forest’

Yeats, William Butler, *Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney* (1)  
**Poems for study:** ‘Adam’s Curse’, ‘To a Shade’, ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’, ‘Easter 1916’, ‘The Second Coming’, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, ‘Meditations in the Time of Civil War’, ‘Leda and the Swan’, ‘Among School Children’, ‘In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz’, ‘Coole Park and Ballylee’, ‘Byzantium’,   
‘A Last Confession’, ‘The Curse of Cromwell’, ‘The Man and the Echo’

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. The list is arranged alphabetically by author according to text type.

Novels

Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey*, Penguin Classics, 1995 (3)

*Northanger Abbey* was the first of Jane Austen’s novels to be written and offered for publication, although one of the last to be published. Originally titled ‘Susan’, the novel was most probably written between 1798 and 1799, after Austen had made several extended visits to the English resort town of Bath, its principal setting. The novel, a playful reworking of the Gothic fiction so popular in the 1790s, follows 17-year-old avid reader Catherine Morland to fashionable Bath, at the invitation of her relatively rich family friends, the Allens. Here she meets both the Tilneys and the Thorpes. In a development that subverts the tropes of popular fiction, naive Catherine quickly becomes enamoured of Henry Tilney and befriends the scheming Isabella Thorpe. Plot complication follows via the introduction of siblings and an opportunity for Catherine to remove herself to the Tilney abode of Northanger Abbey.

As Marilyn Butler comments in the introduction to the Penguin edition, *Northanger Abbey* is an extended meditation on the ‘theme of reading’: of novels, of people and of ‘the world’. While Austen’s original readers would have picked up on the nuances of her allusions to contemporary novels and events, modern audiences will appreciate the way in which Catherine learns to read outside her ‘genre expectations’. *Northanger Abbey* provides vivid insight into the obsessions of Georgian England: of the emergence of consumer culture and the need to delineate ‘real’ taste from vulgar ostentation. A number of television, stage and web-series adaptations are available.

Cadwallader, Robyn, *The Anchoress*, Fourth Estate, 2015 (A) (4)

A scholar of medieval studies, Robyn Cadwallader writes about 17-year-old Sarah, living in England in 1255. Cadwallader’s prose has been compared to Hilary Mantel’s; the story is told with historical accuracy and the style is contemporary. Sarah voluntarily becomes an anchoress, a holy woman who will spend her life locked in a small cell attached to the side of a church. This is as much a tale of extreme isolation and self-abnegation as it is of community.

Cadwallader depicts both the painful and transcendent aspects of Sarah’s psychological and physical journey. She gives up sunlight, most communication with others, and subjects herself to ascetic practices, as she struggles to control her bodily needs and functions in order to experience her faith more profoundly. Sarah is an important member of her village: she has two servants who communicate the outside world to her; she challenges a predatory feudal lord; she communes with priests from the local priory; and she dispenses guidance and prayers to villagers. The result is a complex portrait of English medieval life, particularly the relationships between peasants and landowners, the brutal treatment of women and the role of faith in society.

*The Anchoress* provides a wonderful opportunity to explore the workings of an expansive mind and the importance of valuing one’s voice in society. In keeping with Cadwallader’s historically accurate depiction of medieval Christian worship, the novel contains descriptions of the effects of prolonged fasting and self-flagellation, and teachers are advised to take these passages into consideration when selecting this text.

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying,* Vintage Classics, 1999 (1)

Set in the 1920s, in William Faulkner’s ‘apocryphal county’ as he would often describe it, *As I Lay Dying* traces events following the death of the family matriarch Addie Bundren. Anse and his five children face the challenge of transporting the coffin of their mother to Jefferson in Mississippi, some distance from their fictional homeland of Yoknapatawpha County, to fulfil her dying wish. Along the way, we are witness to their mental and physical trials and tribulations, notably during a climactic attempt to cross a flooded river on a washed-out bridge, nearly losing the coffin in the process.

Faulkner uses 15 different first-person narratives and a modernist stream-of-consciousness style, building tension. He is interested in how the aftermath of death forges family members into stubborn pathetic actions and flawed introspection. Nonetheless, these moments of bathos provide the characters with a touching humanity as they attempt to find a new sense of purpose, redefining their identities in the wake of shifting family dynamics.

As we witness the slow disintegration of the family values, the novel captures the individual personal experiences and the challenges of reconciling them behind a common purpose that goes beyond dealing with grief and exposes the characters’, and particularly Addie’s, existential angst and frustrations.

Faulkner’s rustic settings and lyrical prose create an authentic and evocative close connection between his characters, the elements and the land, which are brutally harsh and unforgiving. A 2013 film adaptation, directed and co-written by James Franco, is available.

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*, Faber & Faber, 2010 (1)

*The Remains of the Day* is Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro’s third novel and the first to be set in Britain. The narrator is an ageing English butler, Stevens, who is nearing the end of his lengthy service at Darlington Hall. He has remained loyal to his former master, the late Lord Darlington, despite the latter’s complicity in the appeasement of the Nazis, his ill-fated flirtation with fascism and his ultimate disgrace. Following Lord Darlington’s recent death, Darlington Hall has been acquired by a wealthy American, Mr Farraday. Stevens describes his pedestrian attempts to ‘banter’ with his more informal employer, who lends Stevens his car for a motoring trip, the goal of which is a meeting with Darlington Hall’s former housekeeper, Miss Kenton. As Stevens motors around post-war rural England reflecting on his years of dedicated service, he is more comfortable musing on the nature of dignity and what constitutes a ‘great butler’ than acknowledging the lost opportunity for romantic love or the pain of witnessing the decline of his revered father. As the title implies, there is a sense of things drawing to a close and Stevens’ advancing years coincide with the decline in influence of the British Empire and aristocracy – as Salman Rushdie calls it, the passing of ‘a certain kind of Britain’.

*The Remains of the Day* won the 1989 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Its acclaimed Merchant Ivory Productions film adaptation of the same name was nominated for eight Academy Awards.

Lindsay, Joan, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Text Publishing, 2019 (A) (2)

Joan Lindsay’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is an Australian classic. It tells the story of a school excursion that turned into a disaster and the spiralling aftermath of disappearance and escalating tragedy. As the aftereffects of the doomed picnic continue to reverberate through the school, and outwards into the wider community, we are left to wonder at the mysterious cause of the girls’ disappearance. The horror deepens as we are faced with the incapacity of any of the organs of power to halt, deflect or resist the devolving crisis. This makes the story compelling, and the unresolved nature of the conclusion serves to increase its menacing fascination. There is a series of deaths in the text that are quite shocking, yet their violence is not gratuitous, rather they serve to underline the horror of the tale. The presentation of the Australian landscape, seductive yet sinister, is a fascinating element of this story; the various characters’ fear of that vast unknown which lurks beneath and beyond the façade of European settlement is interesting to consider. The presentation of the lost girls (whose burgeoning sexuality both compels and repels their society) as willing sacrifices to the hanging rock, gives the novel an uncanny power and considerable contemporary relevance. Lindsay’s prose brings her characters and their environment vividly to life, and her analysis of the girls’ school trope is insightful and sometimes funny.

In 1975 the novel was adapted as a critically acclaimed film directed by Peter Weir, and it returned to Australian screens in a 2018 television mini-series. As well as being an enthralling story, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* asks enduring questions of how we live in the Australian landscape, why we are transfixed by it and why we are afraid.

Stoker, Bram, *Dracula*, Penguin Classics, 2003 (1)

Bram Stoker’s classic gothic tale *Dracula* is an exciting read. This late Victorian novel stands the test of time, delivering both excitement and terror, even to 21st-century readers, as young Jonathan Harker and his friends pit their wits against the forces of darkness, tracking the seductive yet sinister Count Dracula from Transylvania to London, at no small cost to themselves. The story of the first vampire will be familiar to students, and this text allows them the opportunity to learn exactly where the legend began. Although the novel is quite long, readers are swept through the text, engaged by changing narrative styles, transported to exotic locales and always intrigued by the ominous presence of the count, who both compels and repels characters and readers. Elements of the text are quite risqué, within a Victorian context, and the characterisation of both the count and those who battle against him is interesting to consider, discuss and explore.

Because of its place in contemporary cultural imagination, this text offers a wide variety of adaptations for Unit 3 and there is a wealth of critical material that can be used to support a range of different theoretical approaches. The varying voices of the text and the evocative elements of the gothic genre also make the text interesting for close analysis. This text is one that rewards study, allowing students and teachers the opportunity to explore horror at its most terrible and thrilling.

Winterson, Jeanette, *The Passion*, Vintage, 1996 (4)

*The Passion* is set during the Napoleonic era and is narrated by Henri, a French peasant, and Villanelle, a Venetian croupier. Henri’s narrative depicts the gruesome nature of war and the often pathetic reality of life for the disempowered, as Napoleon drives his troops into Russia during the Zero Winter. Henri is Napoleon’s chicken chef and is devoted to his leader. Villanelle’s narrative begins in Venice, a ‘city of disguises’, where she is born the web-footed daughter of a boatman. While working at the casino, she loses her heart to the ‘Queen of Spades’, a married woman who ultimately does not return her love with the same intensity*.* Villanelle marries a rich man who eventually sells her to the French army. The two narratives converge when Villanelle reaches Russia and meets Henri, who falls obsessively in love with her. They escape together and return to Venice.

Jeanette Winterson blends themagical and fabulous with the vulgar and violent, and power and gender are central concerns. Early in the novel there is an incident in which drunken soldiers visit a brothel and their conduct is depicted with brutal realism. This scene and graphic images, such as the soldier with his feet frozen into the insides of a horse, are juxtaposed with magical, fairytale passages, such as when Henri attempts to recover Villanelle’s heart from the house of her lover. The language iseconomical yetrichly lyrical, sensuous and humorous. Both narratives involve convincing and moving evocations of passion and what Villanelle calls ‘the silent space that is the pain of never having enough’. Winterson’s prose is assured, playful and vivacious as she tests the boundaries of storytelling. The reader is repeatedly reminded that this is more historiographical metafiction than history: ‘I’m telling you stories. Trust me.’

Wright, Alexis, *Carpentaria*, Giramondo, 2006 (A) (3)

Set in the fictional north-west Queensland town Desperance, *Carpentaria* portrays a disparate community plagued by internal divisions. The non-linear narrative draws on traditions of Indigenous and biblical storytelling, and engages with the complexity of individual human experience as well as unresolvable social struggles. Unforgettable characters (Norm Phantom, Will Phantom, Elias, Angel Day, Mozzie Fishman and others), whose stories weave in and out of the narrative, were created by Alexis Wright ‘to demonstrate how the powerful essence of country is in our people’. The text addresses the legacies of colonialism, and Wright does not shy away from exploring issues plaguing contemporary Indigenous communities, such as substance abuse and deaths in custody. However, the breadth of vision of this ambitious text extends far beyond the themes of dispossession, racism and violence. The prose is sensuous and vital; the novel has an affirming and, at times, joyous quality. Wright was awarded the Miles Franklin Award for *Carpentaria* in 2007. Additionally, it won the Fiction Book Award in the Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards, the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal and the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction.

Zola, Émile, *The Ladies’ Paradise*, (Brian Nelson, trans.), Oxford World’s Classics, 2008 (2)

Set in Paris, *The Ladies’ Paradise* enables Émile Zola to denounce the abuses of capitalism in the form of the new department stores that were emerging in the 1860s. Led by the store owner and manager Octave Mouret, the readers are witness to all the tricks of the trade: psychological tactics to allure the ladies and encourage consumerism, ferocious trade with competitors and the merciless practices among the sales personnel. Zola captures this ruthless atmosphere to help criticise the emerging corruption and greed of French society during the Second Empire under Napoleon III. The female protagonist, Denise Boudu, who arrives from Normandy with her two brothers, finds herself torn between her allegiance to her uncle, who owns a small business suffering from the expanding department store supremacy, and her admiration for Mouret’s entrepreneurial talent. However, in her journey, from social and religious aspirations to capitalist conquering logic, Denise brings her own humanist values as well as a psychological love tension, while exposing the dilemmas arising in a changing French society, particularly modern Paris, famously restructured by Haussmann.

As part of a series of novels that aims to tell ‘a Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire’, this volume enchants us with many issues that are still relevant today: the emerging role of women in the workplace and as consumers, the dominance of big corporations and the resultant disappearance of small businesses and savoir-faire to the benefit of mass-produced goods, immoral capitalistic practices and class divisions. Zola’s prose, combined with Brian Nelson’s stirring translation, contains a verve that renders the text remarkably enjoyable and accessible. The recent BBC series adaptation *The Paradise* transposes the action to Victorian England, transforming Zola’s Gallic gritty realism into a gratifying British melodrama.

Plays

Bovell, Andrew, *Speaking in Tongues*, Currency Press, 2012 (A) (3)

In this contemporary play, first performed and published in 1998, Andrew Bovell explores the nature of communication and miscommunication in human relationships. In Part One, we meet two suburban couples whose marital relationships are awkward and failing. All parties desire more than they have but are locked into their own limitations and faults. As Bovell writes: ‘It maps an emotional landscape typified by a sense of disconnection and a shifting moral code. It’s about people yearning for meaning and grabbing onto small moments of hope and humour to combat an increasing sense of alienation.’

Part Two introduces a new set of characters, also experiencing dysfunction in their relationships, and Part Three draws together the threads from the preceding parts, widening the focus to encompass characters whose lives are peripheral to those in Part One but whose situations parallel them to an uncanny degree, suggesting the universality of the playwright’s concerns.

The staging is striking and inventive. The use of a split stage, or a split lighting focus, combined with mirrored actions and overlapping or intercutting dialogue, creates parallels between scenes occurring contemporaneously or in different time frames. Although at times the audience is aware of much more than the characters know, we still need to piece together the narrative at the end and question ourselves about the nature of commitment and trust.

Bovell adapted his own stage play to create the screenplay for the highly successful film *Lantana* (2001), directed by Ray Lawrence, which received numerous awards, including seven from the Australian Film Institute.

Chekhov, Anton, ‘Uncle Vanya’ in *Plays*, (Peter Carson, trans.), Penguin Classics, 2002 (1)

*Uncle Vanya* was first published in 1898 and premiered in Moscow at the Art Theatre in 1899. The play is set on a rural estate, exploring the dichotomy between a provincial existence and an intellectual urban lifestyle. The play weaves comedic moments with elements of tragedy, to explore the needs of the entitled thinking of the privileged urbanites with those of the hard-working rural communities. Anton Chekhov’s characters contemplate the futility of wasted lives and how real greatness should be measured, as they ruminate on the idea that real work is truly fulfilling. The stifling atmosphere of the storm brewing ignites the woes of the characters, as they reflect upon unrequited love and career choices. Emotions rise, shots are fired and a stolen vial of morphine creates anxiety for the mortality of the titular character Vanya.

Chekhov explores the situation of prominent rural families in the face of social upheaval and their movement from a more feudal society, in contrast to the expectations of an academic intellectual social set. The concerns about financial struggle were formative in Chekhov’s own adolescence and years of study, due to the change in his family’s means. This social change is further realised by the influence on his work of the Russian realist movement, which captured cultural shifts that were significant in the 1880s and fundamentally shaped the political climate that emerged in the 1900s.

Delaney, Shelagh, *A Taste of Honey*, Methuen Drama/Bloomsbury, 2016 (4)

*A Taste of Honey* was written by 18-year-old Shelagh Delaney, allegedly because she felt she could do better than well-known playwright Terrence Rattigan. Written in 10 days, it was her first play and captured the ethos of the staid 1950s, poised on the brink of the ‘swinging sixties’. The playwas radical in its representation of working-class women from a working-class woman’s point of view. It also broke new ground in its sympathetic construction of a gay man and its non-stereotypical portrayal of a black character.

Delaney’s subject matter – interracial sex, teenage pregnancy and homosexuality – taboo topics in the conservative 1950s, is treated simply as part of life’s diversity. The central character, Jo, a restless adolescent, lives with her vulgar mother, Helen, who is interested only in her new boyfriend, Peter, an unpleasant but wealthy younger man. Jo meets Jimmy, a black sailor to whom she becomes pregnant. He buys her an engagement ring and then leaves for a lengthy tour of duty. Jo moves into a shabby bedsit and soon meets a homosexual art student, who moves in with her and offers to marry her, but is forced to move out when Helen arrives on the scene. The fraught interactions between the central characters explore ideas about mother–daughter relationships, friendship, sexuality, homophobia and racism and the lack of options for women – especially working-class women.

Adapted into an award-winning film, *A Taste of Honey* became one of the defining plays of 1950s working-class and feminist movements.

Euripides, ‘Hippolytus’ in *Euripides I*,(David Greene, trans.), University of Chicago Press, 2013 (3)

Winner of the dramatic competition at the festival of Dionysus in 428 BCE and celebrated in the classical past as one of Euripides’ best plays, *Hippolytus* is a compelling drama of love and betrayal, speech and silence, divinity and mortality. Greene and Lattimore’s updated verse translation beautifully realises Euripides’ poetry, revelling in the stylised horror of inescapable tragedy. Framed by divine prologue and epilogue, the human drama of Phaedra (scorned and vengeful), of Hippolytus (accused and betrayed) and of Theseus (angry and remorseful), remains compelling, and offers much to students both new to classical tragedy and those more familiar with this form.

There is a substantial amount of literary criticism about *Hippolytus*, and the play lends itself to many different interpretations, as well as being rich in the imagery and stylistic features that reward close reading and analysis. While the violence, misogyny and accusation of rape are shocking, Euripides’ aching sympathy for his mortal characters in the context of the pitilessness of his gods does not allow his audience to make superficial judgements of the complex issues he raises. At the heart of this drama is Euripides’ anxiety about the impact of a new technology that threatened his society. Though his concern is with writing, his fear makes the play particularly relevant for us as we, too, find ourselves in the grip of a technologically expanding world.

Morrison, Toni and Traoré, Rokia, *Desdemona,* Oberon Modern Plays, 2012 (3)

Toni Morrison’s artistic collaboration with Malian singer and songwriter, Rokia Traoré, has produced a powerful narrative that blurs generic boundaries. The text positions itself as a dialogue, not only with Shakespeare’s *Othello,* but also with its many interpretations and critical commentaries. Morrison and Traoré give voice to Shakespeare’s silenced characters and foreground the experiences of those often marginalised by history and literary traditions. The play is set in an imagined afterlife and is structured around a series of monologues and dialogues, mostly delivered by characters in *Othello,* interspersed with songs written by Traoré*.*

A review of the play in Sydney (2015) described it as a ‘piercing inquest into the crime at the heart of *Othello,* conducted by the victim herself’. What emerges from this interrogation of *Othello* is an invitation to reflect on the values, assumptions and prejudices embedded in the original text.

Reza, Yasmina, *Art*, (Christopher Hampton, trans.), Faber & Faber, 1996 (4)

First produced in Paris in 1994, Yasmina Reza’s comedy *Art* is a much-awarded play in the English-speaking world and in France, including a Tony Award for the Best Play (1998), the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Comedy (1998) and the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play (1998).

Three long-time friends find their friendship, values and philosophical perspectives tested when one of them buys a large canvas by a much-celebrated contemporary artist. The work is pure white, except for some scarcely perceptible diagonal white lines. Serge proudly tells his friends that it was a ‘steal’, at the (then astronomical) price of 200,000 francs. As an art follower who embraces modernity, he is delighted with his purchase, particularly since the artist has three works hanging in the Pompidou Centre. He is keen to show it to Marc and Yvan. Marc spares no feelings, as he accuses his friend of snobbishness, of being duped by market value and of having lost his sense of discernment.

The dialogue between different pairings, and then between the three together, is very funny, fast moving and searingly close to the bone, as the discussion moves from aesthetics and philosophy to personal recrimination. This dialogue is interspersed by monologues from each of the characters, as they reveal to the audience the vulnerabilities they’re not yet ready to share with each other. Their taunts are expressed crudely at times but always with a light pace and humour. Reza raises questions of aesthetics, modernity, market value in the world of high art, and the factors shaping ‘taste’.

Parks, Suzan-Lori, *Father Comes Home from the* Wars *(Parts 1, 2 and 3)*, Nick Hern Books, 2016 (1)

In 2002, Suzan-Lori Parks became the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for drama. She was a finalist for the second time with *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 and 3)*, which the Pulitzer Committee described as ‘a distinctive and lyrical epic … that deftly takes on questions of identity, power and freedom with a blend of humor and dignity’.

The narrative follows the journey of Hero, a slave who has been promised his freedom by his master, on the condition that he fights alongside him with the Confederates – as Hero puts it, ‘helping out the wrong side’. It is an epic exploration of slavery in America during the Civil War in three interconnected parts: 1. A Measure of a Man, 2. The Battle in the Wilderness and 3. The Union of My Confederate Parts. The first and third parts are set in a West Texan slave cabin, and the second part on a Confederate/Unionist battlefield.

Parks authentically and powerfully elevates the modern African-American vernacular by intertextually reworking Greek epic (*The Odyssey*) and tragic (*Oresteia*) tropes, including a Chorus, to create a new, brutal and subversive vision of American slaves. Her lyrically colloquial dialogue bravely explores significant political and philosophical issues concerning race, thus challenging binary understandings of power. Parks also uses humour, reshaping absurdist elements, and songs, to portray the complex humanity of unique characters who experience both loss and love. Her use of diverse theatrical styles and forms creates a memorable play that reshapes how audiences view a significant part of American history.

Shakespeare, William, *Othello*, Cambridge School Shakespeare, 2014 (3)

William Shakespeare’s *Othello* is set in the 16th century. The play begins in Venice but quickly moves to Cyprus, as the Venetians attempt to defend their island. Leading the Venetian army in the battle is Othello, not a native Venetian but a Moor, an outsider, unquestioningly given the role of General due to his incomparable skills in battle and warfare. However, accepting Othello as the General of the army appears to be the limit of acceptance from many, including Brabantio. As Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, marries Othello in secret, Othello is accused of using magic to steal the much desired Desdemona. Othello has already proven his worthiness to lead the Venetian army, yet he must further prove himself to be worthy of marrying one of their own, both to Venice and himself.

To make this even more difficult is Othello’s supposedly loyal ensign, Iago. Not being chosen by Othello to be his Lieutenant, Iago attempts to destroy Othello, not through warfare, but through subtle and patient psychological manipulation. Preying on his fears, insecurities and jealousy, Iago attempts to destroy Othello while charming us into an incongruence of loathing and admiration. Villainous characters, such as Lucifer in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Walter White in *Breaking Bad* and Frank Underwood in *House of Cards*, have all been influenced by Iago.

Shakespeare, William, *The Winter’s Tale*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, 2007 (1)

The first recorded performance of *The Winter’s Tale* was at The Globe Theatre, London, on 15 May 1611. It is difficult to classify as tragedy, comedy or romance, but may be seen as a combination of the three. In the first three acts, a dark shadow of suspicion, jealousy and revenge is personified in the all-powerful patriarch, Leontes, King of Sicilia, who accuses his pregnant wife Hermione of infidelity with his friend Polixenes, King of Bohemia. Leontes imprisons Hermione and commands that her newborn daughter be abandoned. Hermione and their young son Mamillius die of grief, and Leontes, learning from an oracle of Hermione’s innocence, is overcome with remorse.

The abandoned infant is found by a Bohemian shepherd and is named Perdita (‘the lost one’). Sixteen years later, Perdita and Polixines’ son, Florizel, fall in love but Polixenes considers Perdita, a ‘shepherdess’, unworthy of his son. The young lovers flee to the court of Leontes, who hears Perdita’s story and realises that she is his daughter. Miraculously, Hermione returns from the dead, through the agency of her loyal friend and confidant Paulina, and the play ends on a note of joyful reconciliation.

William Shakespeare’s lyrical poetry and passages of tense or tender dialogue provide much scope for close study. The ideas of power, loyalty, and love are as enduring in our time as they were in Shakespeare’s. The listed edition includes a useful introduction that canvasses a range of ideas and concerns in the play and contains detailed footnotes and references.

Available adaptations include a 1999 Royal Shakespeare Company production and a 2015 National Theatre Live production.

Short stories

Beneba Clarke, Maxine, *Foreign Soil*, Hachette, 2014 (A) (4)

This collection of short stories won the Victorian Premier’s Award for an Unpublished Manuscript in 2013 and gained Maxine Beneba Clarke a three-book deal with international publisher Hachette. Described in Overland as ‘a small tidal wave crashed into the face of the current Australian literary landscape’, Beneba Clarke inhabits the voice of characters from all over the world – from suburban Australia to Jamaica to Brixton – and comes to the fore in *Foreign Soil*.

In ‘David’, a ‘shiny cherry-red’ bike becomes an unlikely site of connection between a young woman of Sudanese background and an older, seemingly disapproving ‘Auntie’. Beneba Clarke returns to the streets of 1980s ‘suburban blond-brick Australia’ in ‘Shu Yi’, to depict the bullying meted out to a shy and beautiful young girl when she arrives at a new primary school in a new country. Told entirely in Jamaican patois, ‘Big Islan’ explores the connection between literacy, knowledge and restlessness, while ‘The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluna’ is set inside Sydney’s notorious Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. This story shifts in perspective between Asanka, a young asylum seeker, and his lawyer, Loretta. The final story, ‘The Sukiyaki Book Club’, is the most openly autobiographical in the collection. A young mother, living in a dilapidated flat overlooking the train line in Footscray, struggles to think of an ending for a story while the trains roll by and her children watch ‘Giggle and Hoot’.

There is confronting language in a number of these stories that matches their confronting subject matter, but Beneba Clarke writes in a way that is at once colourful, captivating, familiar and disturbing.

Dovey, Ceridwen, *Only the Animals*, Hamish Hamilton Penguin (Australia), 2014 (A) (4)

Born in South Africa, Ceridwen Dovey spent her childhood between South Africa and Australia and attended [North Sydney Girls High School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sydney_Girls_High_School) before completing a degree at [Harvard University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_University) in Anthropology and Visual and Environmental Studies. Her debut novel was the celebrated *Blood Kin* (2007) and her second book, *Only the Animals*, was shortlisted for the [2015 Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards](http://wheelercentre.com/projects/victorian-premier-s-literary-awards-2015). With her anthropologist’s eye, Dovey looks at human beings from the viewpoint of other species. She creates a diverse range of anthropomorphised (and also deceased) creatures who speak eloquently about their relationships with some famous (and infamous) humans, including Heinrich Himmler, Leo Tolstoy and Sylvia Plath. Dovey constantly blurs the boundaries between human and animal; it is the ‘souls’ of the creatures who tell the stories, an attribute considered exclusively human.

One of the most compelling stories, ‘Hundstag’, is a tale of loyalty and betrayal concerning Himmler and a German wolfhound, and it invites us to reflect on the kinds of relationships that demand unconditional loyalty and obedience. The souls of other animals caught up in human conflict include a mussel, who hitches a ride on a US naval ship bound for a war zone, and a parrot, deeply traumatised by the mindless violence in Beirut. These highly original narrative perspectives compel us to stand back from history and politics and consider the devastating effects of prolonged violent conflicts on all living creatures. *Only the Animals* won the inaugural [Readings New Australian Writing Award 2014](http://www.theguardian.com/books/australia-books-blog/2014/oct/29/award-for-the-australian-books-that-fly-under-the-radar) and the Steele Rudd Award (Short Story Collection) at the [2014 Queensland Literary Awards](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/awards/queensland-literary-awards).

Munro, Alice, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, Vintage, 2000 (2)

In her collection of short stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, prize-winning Canadian author Alice Munro explores the lives of girls and women in rural Canada before and after the Second World War. Written during a 20-year period, these spare and unflinching tales take us into the interior lives of young women on the cusp of adulthood as they confront first romance, gender roles, social expectations and family ties, all of which lend the collection a contemporary resonance. Munro’s finely observed characters elicit pathos in the ordinariness of their quotidian lives, their small victories and bitter disappointments. Their sense of entrapment within prescribed social and gender roles is writ large by the constraints of small-town boundaries, both literal and figurative. Occupying a liminal space between adolescence and adulthood, Munro explores how the quiet nurturing of female ambition that seeks a life beyond small towns can lead to a rejection of narrow-minded parochialism, mirrored in the stories’ stifling, claustrophobic interior spaces and fenced farmlands. Through her lucid, unsentimental prose, Munro has crafted a penetrating examination of the intensity of the adolescent experience, inhibited by the inexorable pull of the past and the ties that bind. Munro is the recipient of the 2009 Man Booker International Prize and the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Other literature

Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time,* Penguin Classics, 2007 (1)

Opening with an endearing and impassionate letter to his nephew, James Baldwin challenges America’s race relations while meditating on his position in society and reshaping his beliefs in the process. Written in 1962 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, *The Fire Next Time* captures the mind of someone who is rejected by his own country and, as a result, struggles to feel accepted and loved in segregated America. The detrimental impact on one’s identity and sense of belonging is evocatively explored, highlighting profound feelings of alienation and confusion, while aiming to restore some form of dignity. Baldwin retraces

his childhood in Harlem, meditates on the role of religion and reflects on his transformative encounter with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, in order to redefine American history and any chance of salvation for the future of civilisation.

Written with crystal clarity and eloquence, Baldwin’s essay is a tour de force that confronts the difficult truths not only within American society, but within the history of humankind. His astute observations still resonate strongly in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and other ongoing forms of social injustice. Baldwin’s words act as a rallying call to work together to salvage racial inequalities or else face a humanity that is divided and doomed. His compelling voice leaves no one indifferent to the plight of those ostracised and makes us ponder the role we each play in helping to construct a more harmonious society in which everyone feels included.

Winton, Tim, *The Boy Behind the Curtain*, Penguin Books, 2016 (2)

This non-fiction work by one of Australia’s most celebrated novelists is a collection of true stories from Tim Winton’s life and essays on salient issues of our time. Topics include the impact of his father’s motorbike accident, the embarrassment of the family car, growing up in a devout Christian family in a country town, surfing and the culture it has spawned, the campaign to save Ningaloo Reef from development, the mob mentality behind a shark cull and a childhood epiphany in an art gallery. Winton’s extraordinary ability to evoke a sense of place and his passion for the Australian landscape and coast resurface frequently in rich lyrical prose. A unifying idea through the text is that ‘the old war on nature (has been) for too long our prevailing mindset’ and this informs his rhetoric on colonisation, capitalism, politics, the media and national identity. Although it sheds light on some events and thematic concerns in his earlier works, this book is accessible to anyone who is unfamiliar with, or even resistant to, Winton’s fiction. This is an important and timely collection that addresses issues, such as masculinity, gender, family, parenthood and the power of language and stories, with insight, wit and generosity of spirit.

In the title piece – which Malcolm Knox termed ‘an exploration of fear-driven extremism’ – Winton discusses the disturbing allure of guns and the dangers they pose to individuals and society. Although Winton unambiguously condemns America’s gun culture and praises Australia’s firearms controls, teachers are advised to take these passages into consideration when selecting this text.

Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One’s Own*, Vintage, 2001 (4)

Based on a series of lectures delivered at two women’s colleges at Cambridge University in 1928, *A Room of One’s Own* examines the social, economic and material conditions that have, since the time of William Shakespeare, affected the ability of women to write literature. In this essay, long considered a key work in 20th-century feminism, Virginia Woolf constructs a tradition of female writers – including Aphra Behn, Jane Austen and the Brontës – but also explores the limitations placed upon these women as a result of their gender.

The title of the essay relates to Woolf’s now famous observation that ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction’ and the essay revolves around a witty series of vignettes exploring the circumstances of both real and imagined women writers. Perhaps the most affecting of these is the story of Shakespeare’s fictional sister, Judith. Judith Shakespeare, Woolf writes, is every bit as clever as her famous brother but, when she goes to the theatre to enquire about becoming an actress, she is propositioned by the theatre manager. She eventually becomes pregnant by the theatre manager and, in despair, commits suicide one winter’s night and lies buried at some crossroads where omnibuses now stop.

Poetry

Dickinson, Emily, *The Complete Poems*, Faber & Faber, 2016 (2)

Emily Dickinson wrote nearly 1800 poems during her lifetime, although she preferred to focus her attention on home, health, and family. Those poems that did appear in print were published anonymously or without her consent. She recorded about 800 of her poems in handmade booklets that she showed to no one, and she shared selected poems only with a small circle of family and friends. It was only after her death that her work began to be known, and she is now recognised as a great poet.

Dickinson’s poems are frequently concise and invariably commanding in their structure and style. She is celebrated for her use of slant-rhyme, conceits, paradox and unconventional punctuation, which some scholars believe anticipated the Modernist poetry of the 20th century. Most of her poems are written in the first person, asserting a sense of self through the frequent use of ‘I’, although the tone and attitude of her speakers is widely varied. Her poems are moving explorations of extremes of emotion, immortality, death, nature and art. They draw on a wide array of images drawn from her familiarity with law, music, religion, commerce and medicine, yet these everyday references are used to explore abstract ideas in profound and unexpected ways. Dickinson is frequently described as a recluse. However, her wit, sense of humour and wide-ranging intellectual interests reveal her engagement with the world. Students will appreciate Dickinson’s originality and the accessibility of her language, and they will find many avenues of analysis.

Plath, Sylvia, *Ariel*, Faber Modern Classics, 2015 (4)

Sylvia Plath is acknowledged as one of the outstanding poets of the 20th century. Published in 1965, *Ariel* was compiled following Plath’s death by her estranged husband, the English poet Ted Hughes. Plath is often described as a ‘confessional poet’, due to her frequently conversational style and the ways in which she exposes and expresses personal, often painful, aspects of her own life. Her unresolved grief over the death of her father when she was eight years old, the unravelling of her marriage and her ambivalence about motherhood contribute to the conflicts in Plath’s poetry.

Fascination with Plath’s biography has sometimes obscured appreciation for *Ariel’s* extraordinary exploration of poetic expression. The collection communicates Plath’s conscious process of crafting language and the emergence of the writer’s voice and identity. *Ariel* opens with ‘Morning Song’, which introduces some of the central figures and situations in the collection, including domestic spaces, the combination of wonder and confusion that accompanies motherhood, and the symbolic evolution of the child’s voice. The collection contains significant works, such as ‘The Applicant’, ‘Lady Lazarus’ and ‘Daddy’. These poems contain dark humour and are laced with hostility towards the expectations and conventions of society. Moving beyond the personal, Plath introduces complex imagery evoking the Holocaust that represents her condemnation of mass inhumanity and her bleak view of the modern world. Many of the poems have a hallucinatory, other-worldly quality that dramatises the acts of observing and remembering, as Plath’s speakers make associations between experience and thought using a range of forms, striking imagery and astonishing conceits.

Slessor, Kenneth, *Selected Poems*, A&R Classics, Harper Collins Publishers*,* 2014(A) (2)

Kenneth Slessor is one of Australia’s best-known poets of the 20th century. Born in 1901 in Orange, New South Wales, he became a journalist with several Sydney newspapers and periodicals, and later an official war correspondent during the Second World War. His early poetry, written in the period immediately after the First World War, was influenced by the views of Norman and Jack Lindsay and Hugh McCrae and the group that produced the literary journal *Vision*. It plunges us into an exotic and hedonistic world, inhabited by the Greek deities, nymphs and fauns or, more often, stone statues representing them. The poetry is pervaded by an air of nostalgia for a world that is no longer possible, if it ever was.

Other poems reflect an appreciation of the Australian landscape, natural and human, and a dry wit in describing such scenes. Throughout his oeuvre, we find a variety of styles, ranging from jaunty rhythms to longer elegiac rhythms, a concern for the striking image and a love for the musicality of language. The metaphor of tidal flux, with its associations for Slessor of time, memory, recurrence and change, is explored in many of his later poems and is at the heart of what is probably his best-known poem, ‘Five Bells’.

Students will find his poetry accessible but also challenging in the ways that the images and sounds resonate throughout. Readings and musical settings of some of the poems are available.

Wagan Watson, Samuel, *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, University of Queensland Press, 2004 (A) (4)

Samuel Wagan Watson was born in Brisbane in 1972. He is of Birri-Gubba, Mununjali, Dutch and Irish descent, and part of a family noted for its cultural richness, diversity and achievement. Wagan Watson’s poetry explores his world and his responses to it. The metaphor of the journey is a unifying strand throughout the collection. Barely punctuated, his verse slides through his consciousness, his parameters expanding from the ‘white stucco’ of Mount Gravatt to the ‘smoke encrypted whispers’ of ‘one of Brisbane’s least-known burial grounds’, his strongly evoked sense of place fusing with an intricate awareness of the complexities of understanding and responding to experience. The subject matter is the man, the poet and his world, both personal and public. He writes of the desolation and beauty of nature, of the ugliness of the urban landscape, of the trivial and of the metaphysical, of what divides us and what connects us, of the damage done by colonisation and of the irrepressibility of the human spirit.

He acknowledges the influence of Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō, who relinquished his sword to spend his life wandering and writing poetry. Wagan Watson’s voice is engaging, evoking the riotous energy of ‘The Happy Dark’ symbolised by his ‘White Stucco Dreaming’. Such is the vitality with which he creates the icons of his suburban roots that he can claim that the ‘police cars that crawled up and down the back streets’ were ‘wishing they were with us’. Wagan Watson’s fresh and unconventional use of language can jerk readers into fresh realisations about a landscape with which they are familiar.

White, Petra, *A Hunger*, John Leonard Press, 2018 (revised edition) (A) (3)

Petra White has emerged as a highly regarded Australian poet during the past decade. *A Hunger* incorporates White’s two previous collections and shows an expansion of her poetic concerns as she looks back to Renaissance poets and becomes more deeply philosophical. Beginning with ‘Thirteen Love Poems’, White alludes to Neruda’s ‘Twenty Love Poems’ but her exploration of love is less concerned with sensuality and passion than with questions about what constitutes love. She writes of joyful, all-consuming love, but also conveys a need to distance herself and reclaim her soul.

Other poems speak of memories, relationships and significant places, particularly in Australia. White explores aspects of city life and the natural world, seeing below the surface of things where ‘skill tugs at the muscles and drives the bones’. She moves easily between odes, elegies, lyric sequences and near-sonnets and shows considerable technical flair, particularly in the use of metaphor. A cleaning woman, for example, is a moonwalker, trailing her cargo through ‘an obsidian triangle’ of city offices. As a celebration of the fluidity and flexibility of language, the poems’ strong impact will be more fully appreciated when they are spoken aloud and listened to. They also provide a rich and rewarding source for close analysis and will accommodate differing literary perspectives.

The poems selected for study cover a range of forms, from the ode to the near-sonnet, and students will find intertextual references to poets such as John Donne, William Shakespeare, John Keats and Dante Alighieri. In her use and subversion of forms and voices, White endows her poetry with a rich texture of complexity and multiple levels of meaning.

Yeats, WB, *Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney*, Faber & Faber, 2004 (1)

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) is one of Ireland’s most revered poets and a significant voice in 20th-century literature. Although best-known as a Modernist poet, Yeats also co-founded and wrote plays for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, an institution which aims to promote Irish literature. An advocate of Irish independence from England, Yeats served two terms as a senator with the Irish Free State after they won power in 1922. In 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature ‘for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation’.

As Seamus Heaney comments in the introduction to this selection, Yeats ‘lived a life that coincided with an era of great social and political change’. Not only were Yeats and contemporaries such as TS Eliot, Ezra Pound and James Joyce witness to the decline of the British imperial enterprise, but also to the unprecedented loss of human life in the First World War and then the post-war rise of fascism in Italy and Germany. In Ireland there was the War of Independence from the British from 1919–21, followed by the Civil War between those in favour of a treaty with Britain and those who favoured a more radically independent model.

While Yeats was clearly committed to Irish nationalism, his poetry resists the temptations of propaganda. Yeats draws from Irish folklore and Celtic landscapes in many of his poems, but students will also perceive his interest in many other non-Christian sources of spiritualism. Alongside more overtly political poems, such as ‘Easter 1916’, Yeats offers others, like ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, which are more centrally concerned with psychological truth and the mysteries of existence.