



**THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AND RESOURCE CENTRE PRESENT THE
SUMMER READING CHALLENGE 2026**

For students entering Year 13 in September 2026

Dear Reader,

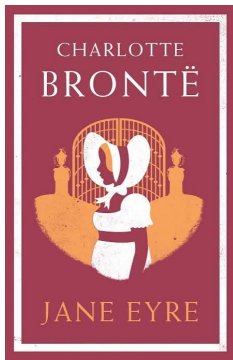
We are now launching our Summer Reading Challenge 2026. The Summer Reading Challenge is designed to promote independent reading and exploration of literature from a range of genres.

Independent reading has been identified as the greatest marker of academic success in education. While we often feel as though there is little time for reading, it has incredible benefits, both in terms of our knowledge and skills, but also in terms of our emotional enrichment as well.

For pupils entering Years 13, the reading challenge is optional, but as some pupils like to challenge themselves or read some of the recommendations, we have created this for them.

We have compiled this list from various sources, including new titles, recommendations and student voices. Sharing reading with others is also great practice, which is why we are asking you to read several from this list. We hope that you like the range of books on offer this year and look forward to hearing which ones were selected and enjoyed.

Which books do you plan to read?



OUR CLASSIC CHOICE – ‘JANE EYRE’ – CHARLOTTE BRONTË

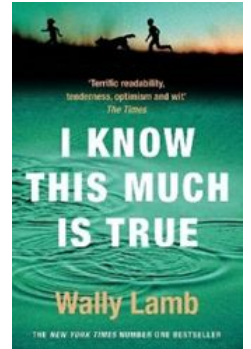
With a new challenge group for students wishing to extend their learning and thinking in English beginning in September based on this novel, *Jane Eyre* is our classic choice for the year. It is one of the nation’s most beloved novels – and features on all of the ‘must read’ lists that people generate. ‘*Jane Eyre*’ tells the story of a young woman who moves to the north of England to Thornfield Hall, where she is to serve as governess to two young children.

While there, Jane discovers that she is falling in love with her employer Mr Rochester, though he is of a different social class. Yet, when Rochester proposes to her, she seems to be living in a blissful dream, until someone reveals a shocking truth on their wedding day that has the potential to change everything about her life as she knows it.

‘I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE’ – WALLY LAMB

This is an incredible story of love, family, secrets and sacrifice – and now a major TV series. Dominick feels as though he has always had to put his life on hold in order to look after his brother Thomas, because Thomas has always needed help. Thomas has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and can become delusional and dangerous to himself. As Thomas is in and out of mental health care hospitals, which are woefully inadequate, Dominick does his best to act as guardian for his brother, while also struggling with his own life, which is falling apart after the devastating loss of his child and divorce.

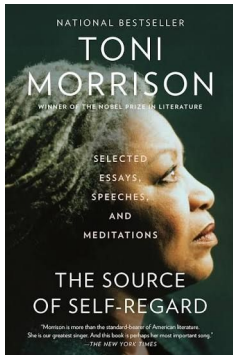
Throughout the book, Dominick is also reading an autobiography written by his grandfather, which sheds light on his incredibly dysfunctional family and their pain and suffering through generations. This book is a lengthy novel, but a gripping and emotional read throughout.



NON-FICTION CHOICE - *THE SOURCE OF SELF-REGARD* - TONI MORRISON

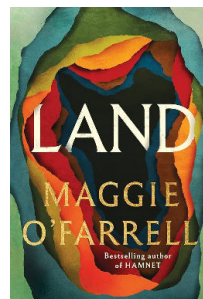
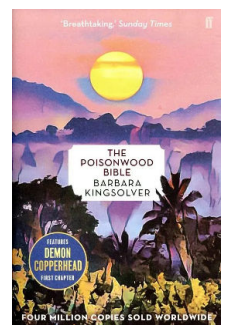
She is most famous for her novels, perhaps particularly *Beloved*. Toni Morrison has always shed light upon injustices and trauma through her fiction, but this is a collection of some of her most powerful essays, letters and meditations, reflecting upon the changes that Morrison experienced through the decades of her life. With a focus on race and racial equality and justice, Morrison speaks with the voice of someone always striving for a better future, and to speak for those whose voices have been silenced or marginalised.

This collection was published in the year of her death as the world mourned the passing of the 88-year-old Nobel Prize Winner, whose work has meant so much to so many, and will continue to live on for generations.



POISONWOOD BIBLE – BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *Demon Copperhead*, a modern retelling of Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, set in impoverished Southern Appalachia, has been read and enjoyed by numerous members of RMS staff this year. *Demon Copperhead* is not, however, Kingsolver’s most successful novel. Since its publication in 1998, *The Poisonwood Bible* has sold over four million copies. It is another epic family saga, in which the reader follows the story of a family of four daughters who are taken from their homes in the US to Kilanga, in what was then the Belgian Congo, as their father becomes a missionary trying to spread Christianity to the area. The novel delves into each of the girl’s thoughts and feelings as they navigate growing up in an unfamiliar world.

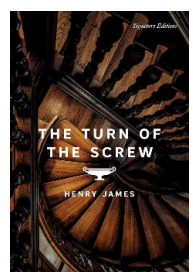


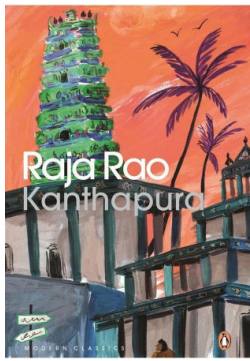
LAND - MAGGIE O'FARRELL

It’s an exciting moment for book lovers when a new Maggie O’Farrell book hits the bookshops. This is *Land* and newly released for the summer. The novel begins in 1865 and Tomás and his son Liam have been employed to work on the Great Ordnance Survey project to map the whole of Ireland. But the country is recovering from famine, the ‘Great Hunger’ and Tomás decides that his maps are going to ensure that what happened on the land will never be forgotten. *Land* is a book that both conveys incredible sensitivity towards people and relationships, but also to our relationship and dependency on the land, with beautiful descriptions of the natural landscapes on Planet Earth.

TURN OF THE SCREW - HENRY JAMES

In a classic idea, the novel begins with a group of people getting together to tell ghost stories or narrator in *Turn of the Screw* is a young governess (think *Jane Eyre* style), sent to look after two children, Miles and Flora, at Bly House. Miles and Flora have both suffered trauma in their past and the narrator knows that she needs to protect them. But in the house there are rumours of ghosts that are there and want to do harm to the children - and when the children start to see the ghosts as well - the narrator realises that they are in really serious danger.



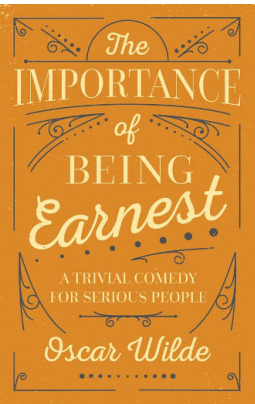
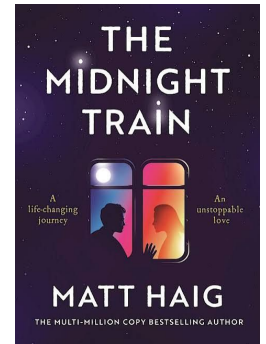


KANTHAPURA - RAJA RAO

In this incredibly important postcolonial piece of literature, Raja Rao presents the struggle for Indian independence from the perspective of a small village, who join the peaceful resistance movement advocated by Gandhi (though he is never named as such in the book). The narrator of the novel is an elderly woman and she tells the tale of the village of Kanthapura in a style that is reminiscent of oral and traditional Indian storytelling, combined with suggestions of modernist literature. Kanthapura is a village in which the caste system has been entrenched for generations - but now there is a chance to unite together in order to speak up against British rule. It is considered a seminal work in Indian fiction of the time, published nine years before India achieved its independence.

THE MIDNIGHT TRAIN - MATT HAIG

From the writer of *The Midnight Library* comes a new novel that serves not as a prequel or a sequel, but as a companion novel. *The Midnight Train* is another example of magical realism and a touch of the fantastical. In this book, Wilbur Budd dies, age 81. But dying is only the beginning of his next adventure. After dying, Wilbur boards a train in the afterlife that takes him on a literal journey back through the moments of his life - he can watch them, but not intervene. Wilbur sees the best moments of his life - and also the worst - having to come face-to-face with his deepest regrets once again. Matt Haig's new novel is a quick read, but leaves a long-standing emotional impact.



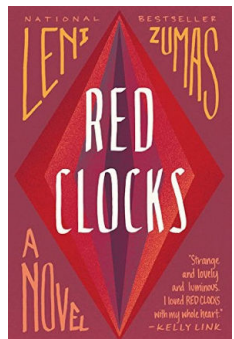
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST - OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Wilde's trivial comedy for serious people remains one of the texts that everyone should read. Although it is a really short play, it is rich with the comedy and wit that made Oscar Wilde one of the greatest writers in the history of the United Kingdom.

In the text we meet Algernon Moncrieff, perhaps the epitome of a loveable rogue. Algernon gets out of as many family gatherings with his overbearing aunt as he can by pretending he has a dying friend called Bunbury that needs his attention. But when his best friend Jack accidentally leaves behind a cigarette lighter at one of Algernon's parties, he realises that his best friend and the double life he is hiding may make him the greatest Bunburyist of all time.

SILENT COMPANIONS OR HOUSE OF SPLINTERS - LAURA PURCELL

There is almost nothing better than a great book... but when that great book generates a sequel, it's so exciting! *The Silent Companions* is Laura Purcell's 2017 gothic horror and a fantastic example of a modern horror novel that is genuinely creepy - put it in the freezer creepy. Protagonist Elsie is in a psychiatric hospital, having deliberately set fire to her home and burned it down. The reader follows Elsie's story as the novel flicks back and forth between the time in the hospital, and the time leading up to the fire, in which Elsie became increasingly distressed in her home due to the presence of the silent companions - small, wooden two-dimensional figures that somehow carried a curse from centuries before. And if you have already read this one, its sequel, *House of Splinters* was released at the end of last year for those who would like another really chilling page-turner. Both are quick to read, because you won't be able to put them down!



RED CLOCKS - LENI ZUMAS

In this 2018 novel, the reader follows the story of four women in a dystopian reality. Abortion has been banned in the US and swiftly following this is the removal of other rights, for women and others. Roberta is a single woman who wishes to conceive a child. Her student Mattie is a frightened and pregnant teenager, who does not want to become a parent. Gin is a healer, offering home remedies to women with no health insurance. Susan is a lawyer, but trapped in marriage and struggling with motherhood. All four of them feel the impact of the laws imposed by the state in different ways. A must-read for those who have enjoyed *The Handmaid's Tale*.