

## Junior Cycle English

### *Guide to the Prescribed Novels*

Stone Cold – Robert Swindells

The Dare – John Boyne

Shadows on our Skin – Jennifer Johnson

The Weight of Water – Sarah Crossan

Lord of the Flies – William Golding

The Outsiders – S.E. Hinton

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee

Noughts and Crosses – Malorie Blackman

Jane Eyre – Charlotte Brontë

Once - Morris Gleitzman

Animal Farm – George Orwell

The Book of Lost Things – John Connolly

Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

Chalkline – Jane Mitchell

Trash – Andy Mulligan

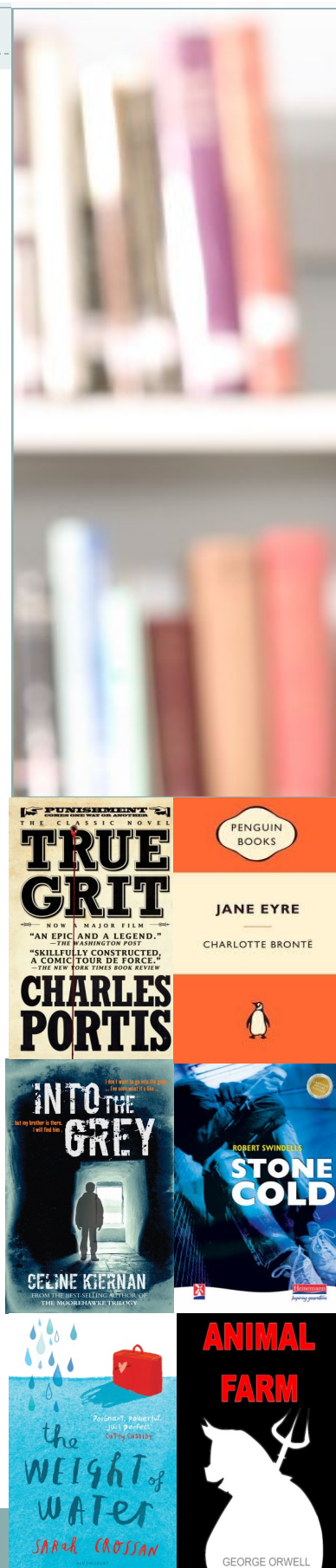
True Grit – Charles Portis

The Knife of Never Letting Go – Patrick Ness

Into the Grey – Celine Kiernan

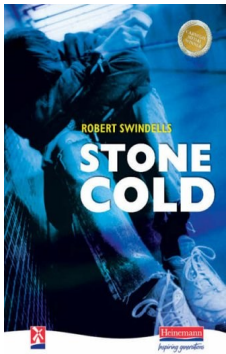
My Ántonia– Willa Cather

The Wind Singer – William Nicholson



## STONE COLD - ROBERT SWINDELLS

**Stone Cold** by Robert Swindells. Current publisher: Puffin Books, 1995. Pages: 135.



Homeless on the streets of London, 16 year old 'Link' feels he has become an invisible outcast. When he meets streetwise Ginger life becomes more bearable and he learns the

tricks of survival. However, when Ginger goes missing Link feels a sickening sense of foreboding....

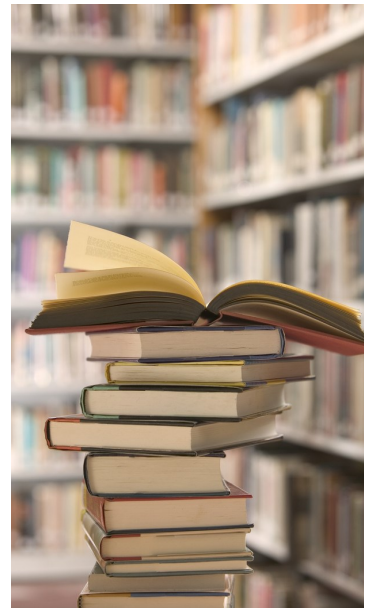
The first person narrative of the novel switches between Link as he adjusts to

life on the streets and 'Shelter', an ex army officer scorned after being dismissed from his job and now determined to rid society of 'street people'.

While set in 1993, *Stone Cold* still has relevance for young people today particularly around the topic of homelessness.

Themes: Homelessness, loneliness/isolation, friendship, growing up.

Suitability: *Stone Cold* is a novel that will appeal to all readers of all ability levels. The novel also offers cross-curricular opportunities with R.E and C.S.P.E.



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***“It's like parachuting. Get the first jump over and it becomes routine, but you mustn't get complacent. Check your parachute every time.”***

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## THE DARE — JOHN BOYNE

**The Dare** by John Boyne. Publisher: Transworld Publishers, 2009. Pages: 103.



At the start of the school holidays, Danny Delaney is looking forward to a trouble-free summer. But he knows that something terrible has happened when his mother returns home one afternoon with two policemen....

In *The Dare*, John Boyne, (author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*) tells the story from the point of view of a twelve-year-old boy. *The Dare* is about how one moment can change a family for ever.

Themes: Family, guilt, trust, growing up.

Suitability: *The Dare* belongs to the 'Quick Reads' series of books and the story is complete in just over 100 pages. A novel that will appeal to all readers of all reading abilities.

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***“No one was in when I got home, which was strange.”***

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## SHADOWS ON OUR SKIN — JENNIFER JOHNSON

***Shadows on our Skin* by Jennifer Johnson. Publisher: Headline Review, 2002. Pages: 214.**



Set in Derry in the 1970s, *Shadows on Our Skin*, tells the story of Joe Logan, a young Catholic boy growing up in the midst of the Troubles. Joe's life is not an easy one. He finds school tough. His home is not a happy one, with embittered parents and his brother Brendan, who has been away and has now returned home with money and a gun in his pocket. There is also the constant awareness of the military presence in the background.

However things change for Joe with the arrival of a new young school-teacher Kathleen Doherty, who brings a fresh perspective to Joe's familiar world.

However, Joe's brother Brendan is also interested in Kathleen.

Shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the late 1970s, *Shadows on Our Skin* is the story of an unlikely friendship between a Catholic schoolboy and a young female Protestant teacher in Derry during the height of the Troubles.

Themes: Coming of age/growing up, war – the Troubles, relationships, religion in politics.

Suitability: *Shadows on our Skin* is a novel accessible to all readers which captures a real sense of Northern Ireland during “the Troubles”.

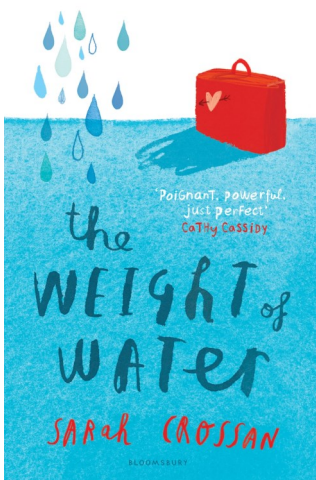
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***“Now we’ve got time to kill,  
Kill the shadows on our skin.”***

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## THE WEIGHT OF WATER — SARAH CROSSAN

***The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan. Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2012. Pages: 228.**



Armed with a suitcase and an old laundry bag filled with clothes, Kasienka and her mother head for England. Life is lonely for Kasienka. At home her mother's heart is breaking and at school friends are scarce. But when someone special swims into her life, Kasienka learns that there might be more than one way for her to stay afloat.

*The Weight of Water* is a very original piece of fiction; most simply a brilliant coming of age story, it also tackles the alienation experienced by many young immigrants. Moving, unsentimental and utterly page-turning, we meet and share the experiences of a remarkable girl who shows us how quiet courage prevails.

Themes: Bullying, racism, friendship, family, isolation, young love.

Suitability: *The Weight of Water* is a novel written in poetic form which will appeal to all young readers.

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***“My body moves like a wave:  
There is a violence to it  
And a beauty.”***

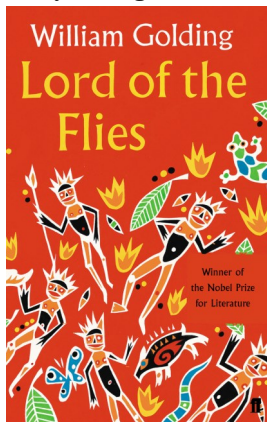
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## LORD OF THE FLIES — WILLIAM GOLDING

***Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Publisher: faber & faber, 1958. Pages: 225**

*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical tale about the conflict between “civilization” and “savagery”. In the midst of a nuclear war, a group of school boys become abandoned on an island when their plane goes down. Separated at first, but through the use of a conch (shell), Ralph, a twelve year old summons the boys together and we soon learn that they are of various age groups, toddlers and adolescents. They learn that there are no adults on the island and initially this gives cause for some general enjoyment.



Without adult supervision they must work together to survive and they elect a leader, the boy Ralph: ‘the being that had blown that (conch), had sat waiting for them on the platform with the delicate thing balanced on his knees, and was set apart.’

However, seeds of rivalry are sown early in the novel as this election disheartens the more ambitious Jack who gradually builds his own team and rebels against Ralph. Piggy, a fat boy who is a sharp thinker but is physically weaker than the others, is a central character in the novel. He is shown as the voice of reason, someone who counsels Ralph and possesses a strong revulsion for Jack. As the novel progresses, we soon learn what can happen when reason is replaced by ambition and greed.

Themes: Civilisation vs. savagery, evil, violence, power, relationships, fear, rules and order, the loss of innocence.

Suitability: While challenging to some readers *Lord of the Flies* will yield very good rewards in the exploration of its themes.



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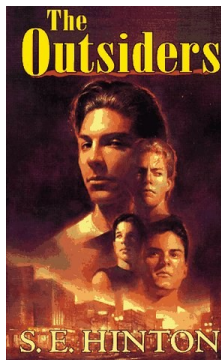
***“We did everything adults would do. What went wrong?”***

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## THE OUTSIDERS — S.E. HINTON

***The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. Publisher: Puffin Books, 1967. Pages: 218.**

*The Outsiders* is a classic American novel set in the city of Oklahoma in the 1960s. It tells the tale of a group of boys whose social status makes them targets to be terrorised on a daily basis. It is the story of two gangs:



the Greasers (the poor and underprivileged section of the city) and the Socs (the high society rich kids) and their constant war with each other. The Socs go around looking for trouble and Greasers to beat up, and then the Greasers get the blame for this, because they are poor and cannot influence the authorities. Ponyboy Curtis, a 14 year old Greaser, tells the story as he brings us into a world where belonging and survival are the twin desires for all the boys.

Themes: Society and class, violence, isolation (as linked to the title of the novel), friendship/loyalty, family.

Suitability: The novel has 218 pages and will be enjoyed by all readers.

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***“...the hand at the back of my neck was strong. I’m drowning, I thought...”***

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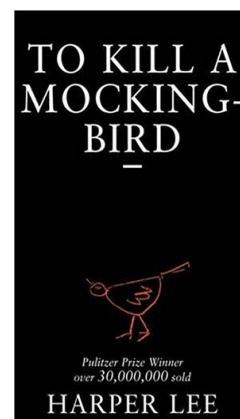
## TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD — HARPER LEE

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Publisher: Arrow Books, 1960 Pages: 309.**

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee uses memorable characters to explore civil rights and racism in the segregated Southern United States of the 1930s. Told through the eyes of Scout Finch, you learn about her father Atticus Finch, an attorney who hopelessly strives to prove the innocence of a black man, Tom Robinson, unjustly accused of rape; and about Boo Radley, a mysterious neighbour who saves Scout and her brother Jem from being killed.

Themes: Racism/prejudice, justice, childhood/growing up, life in a small town community, integrity.

Suitability: While challenging in parts; students will benefit greatly from an exploration of the themes in the novel.



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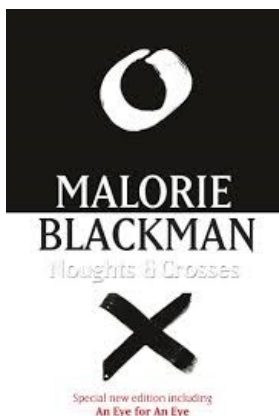
***“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”***

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## NOUGHTS AND CROSSES - MALORIE BLACKMAN

***Noughts And Crosses* by Malorie Blackman. Publisher: Corgi, 2008. Pages: 440.**

In this novel by Malorie Blackman, the population is divided into two main groups; the white Noughts, seen as inferior and as second-class citizens, and the black Crosses who are highly respected and seen as the superior race.



15-year-old Callum is a Nought, and his best friend, Sephy, as well as being a Cross, is also the daughter of one of the most powerful and ruthless politicians in the country. In their hostile world noughts and crosses do not mix. When Callum and Sephy's childhood friendship grows into a

deeper love, they are determined to find a way to be together. The story focuses on their relationship, which is frowned upon by society, and explores the discrimination they meet as a result.

By reversing traditional racial stereotypes and presenting the white population as the oppressed race, the novel depicts racial prejudice from a different perspective. As well as being a story of love and friendship, this is a thought-provoking look at the futility of prejudice.

Themes: Racial injustice, conflict/violence, relationships, family, courage, class in society.

Suitability: *Noughts and Crosses* is a novel that will appeal to most young readers and is suitable for intermediate to advanced readers. Possible cross-curricular areas include C.S.P.E and R.E.

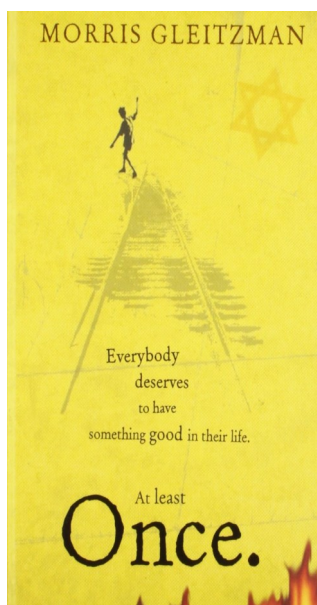
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***“You're a Nought and I'm a Cross and there's nowhere for us to be, nowhere for us to go where we'd be left in peace...”***

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## ONCE — MORRIS GLEITZMAN

**Once by Morris Gleitzman. Publisher: Puffin, 2006. Pages: 150.**



*Once* is the first in a series of children's novels about Felix, a Jewish orphan caught in the middle of the Holocaust.

Morris Gleitzman is one of Australia's bestselling authors. *Once* is the story of a young Jewish boy who is determined to escape the orphanage he lives in to save his Jewish parents from the Nazis in the occu-

pied Poland of the Second World War.

"Once I escaped from an orphanage to find Mum and Dad. Once I saved a girl called Zelda from a burning house.

Once I made a Nazi with a toothache laugh. My name is Felix. This is my story."

Themes: The Holocaust/anti-Semitism, war, family, childhood.

Suitability: *Once* is a novel which will appeal to all readers and abilities. It is a similar novel to John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Students will find the story funny in parts but the novel does deal with how Felix experiences the unspeakable horrors of war, and what was really going on in Poland in 1942.

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***"Everybody deserves to have something good in their life. At least Once."***

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## JANE EYRE — CHARLOTTE BRONTË

**Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë. Publisher: Vintage, 1847. Pages: 545.**



Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), is the famous tale of an orphan, who must overcome seemingly overwhelming odds to survive. This Gothic novel ventures into the nature of love, religion, an awakening, an exploration of the place and treatment of women and children, and much more--all in the form of a vivid adventure as Jane Eyre finds her way.

Themes: Social class, gender, relationships, love, the supernatural/the gothic .

Suitability: *Jane Eyre* is a classic novel suitable to more advanced readers .



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***"It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it."***

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## ANIMAL FARM — GEORGE ORWELL

***Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Publisher: Penguin Books, 1945, Pages: 95.**



The drunken farm owner of Manor Farm, Mr Jones, arrives home and forgets to feed his animals. Old Major, the eldest of the pigs, gathers the animals together into the barn and tells them of a dream he has had about what the earth will be like when man has vanished. He outlines how man is the only creature that consumes without producing and encourages the neglected animals to rebel and run the farm themselves, with one important qualification: everyone should be equal. The rebellion takes place with the pigs being the smartest animals, naturally taking the leadership role. The animals succeed and the initial excitement of their actions has a unifying effect on them and a set of rules is drawn up which seem to offer equality for all animals. All too soon, the unity begins to break up and two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, vie for control. As time passes, the rules begin to change and the newly named *Animal Farm* becomes a place of fear and terror.

Themes: Civilisation vs. savagery, rules and order, violence, pride.

Suitability: This is a short novel that young people will enjoy, as it seems, on the surface, to tell a simple imaginative story that will arrest their interest and pose many questions. On a deeper reading, it will allow them to explore the idea of satire and the corrupting influence of power.

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***“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”***

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## THE BOOK OF LOST THINGS — JOHN CONNOLLY

***The Book of Lost Things* by John Connolly. Publisher: Hodder, 2006. Pages: 502.**



High in his attic bedroom, twelve-year-old David mourns the death of his mother, with only the books on his shelf for company. But those books have begun to whisper to him in the darkness. Angry and alone, he takes refuge in his imagination and soon finds that reality and

fantasy have begun to blend together. While his family falls apart around him, David is violently propelled into a world that is a strange reflection of

his own -- populated by heroes and monsters and ruled by a faded king who keeps his secrets in a mysterious book, *The Book of Lost Things*.

Taking readers on a vivid journey through the loss of innocence into adulthood and beyond, *New York Times* bestselling author John Connolly tells a dark and compelling tale that reminds us of the enduring power of stories in our lives.

Themes: Childhood, loss of innocence, death, family, the role of the imagination.

Suitability: A challenging but rewarding read for more advanced and independent student readers.

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***“For in every adult there dwells the child that was, and in every child there lies the adult that will be.”***

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## OF MICE AND MEN — JOHN STEINBECK

***Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck. Publisher: Penguin, 1937. Pages: 102**



*Of Mice and Men* is a touching tale of the friendship between two men set against the backdrop of the United States during the depression of the 1930s. Subtle in its characterisation, the book addresses the real hopes and dreams of working-class America. This short novel raises the lives of the poor and dispossessed to a higher, symbolic level.

Its powerful ending is climactic and shocking in the extreme but, we also come to an understanding of the tragedy of life. Regardless of the sufferings of those who live it, life goes on.

Themes: Loneliness, friendship, strength and weakness, the impossibility of the American dream, fate and destiny, nature, the corruptible power of women.

Suitability: *Of Mice and Men* is a novel to be enjoyed by all students.

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**“Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's all the time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy.”**

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## CHALKLINE — JANE MITCHELL

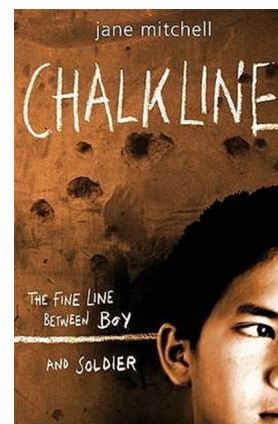
***Chalkline* by Jane Mitchell. Publisher: Walker Books Ltd, 2009. Pages: 231.**

Soldiers of the Kashmir Freedom Fighters are in search of new recruits at nine-year-old Rafiq's school in rural Kashmir. They scrawl a line in chalk on the schoolroom wall. Any boy whose height reaches the line will be taken to fight. Rafiq is tall for his age and becomes the first boy to cross into a life of brutality and terrorism. So begins Rafiq's transformation from child to boy soldier, indoctrinated into a cause of fanatical belief. But even when he no longer recognises himself, his family remembers the boy he was and hopes he will return.

While Rafiq's story does not shy away from the horrors of his new life, Mitchell ensures that the novel is not too graphic for its intended audience. Endorsed by Amnesty International, this book will give readers an understanding of human rights issues while experiencing Rafiq and Jameelas' world.

Themes: Conflict, death and loss, human rights, education, gender equality, family and friendship.

Suitability: *Chalkline* is a novel which will hold the interest of all readers. The novel has very clear cross-curricular links which include C.S.P.E and R.E.



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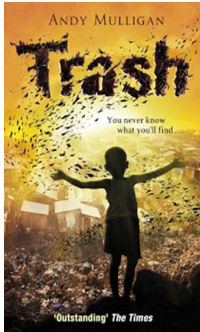
**“Rafiq's turn came and he stepped up to the chalk line. It reached the top of his ear. “This one is big enough. He goes to the truck. He's our first.”**

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## TRASH— ANDY MULLIGAN

**Trash** by Andy Mulligan. Publisher: Ember, 2011. Pages: 210



The book is told from the perspective of various characters, but our first narrator is Raphael, who is at the heart of the story. Raphael lives with his aunt and various family members on the Behala dump in an unspecified city and country. Mulligan said he was inspired by the dump he saw when he visited Manila in the Philippines. Raphael has always lived on the dump and makes his living by finding and selling paper, plastic and other materials that can be sold on. The story begins when Raphael finds something out of the ordinary amidst the rubbish, a bag with a wallet and letter inside. When the police visit the dump later to ask if anyone found anything, Raphael realises he has discovered something important and with his friends Gardo and Rat, sets out to find out what he has found.

Given the subject matter, this book has some disturbing scenes. It is plot driven.

Themes: Poverty, violence, political corruption, childhood, family.

Suitability: *Trash* is a novel which will hold the interest and attention of all readers. It has cross-curricular links with C.S.P.E and R.E.

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***“With the right key you can bust the door wide open.  
Because nobody's going to open it for you.”***

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## TRUE GRIT— CHARLES PORTIS

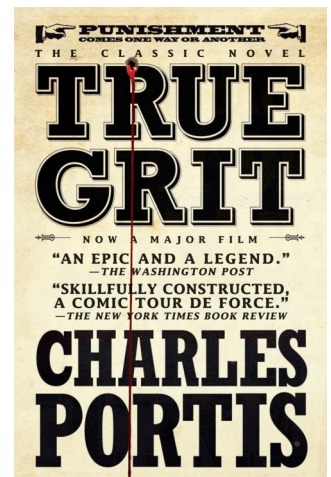
**True Grit** by Charles Portis. Publisher: Bloomsbury, 1968. Pages: 215

*True Grit* is a novel of the old west with a heroine as its narrator. Mattie Ross, 14, from Dardanelle, Arkansas, narrates half a century later, her trip in the winter of 1870s, to avenge the murder of her father. She convinces one-eyed "Rooster" Cogburn, the meanest available U.S. Marshall, to help her, while she encounters a number of unsavoury types in her path.

The novel is the basis of the famous 1969 John Wayne movie and the Coen brothers remake in 2010.

Themes: Revenge, violence, visions of an America past, justice and judgement.

Suitability: *True Grit* is a novel accessible to all readers. The novel does contain a number of setting specific references which may need a little explanation for the student.



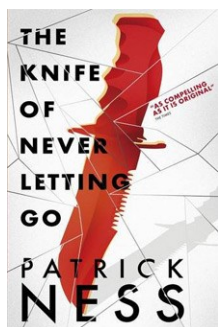
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***“You must pay for everything in this world one way and another. There is nothing free except the Grace of God. You cannot earn that or deserve it.”***

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## THE KNIFE OF NEVER LETTING GO - PATRICK NESS

***The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness. Publisher: Walker Books, 2008. Pages: 479.**



Imagine that every private thought you've ever had was immediately broadcast to everyone in the vicinity. The characters in this novel call it their 'Noise', they have had to accept that all their banal observations, unkind thoughts, intimate reveries, anxious ruminations, and long held

obsessions are out there for public scrutiny. This is the world in which our protagonist Todd Hewitt lives. We meet Todd the month before his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday and join him and his dog on a walk through their strange womanless town. Patrick Ness builds an atmosphere of disquiet; a heartbeat of dark untold secrets that throb through the opening, intriguing the reader as we see Todd's world abruptly descend into vio-

lence, propelling him out into the world alone, pursued by malevolent townspeople.

He is soon joined by a mysterious silent girl called Viola. The menace and urgency of the novel is tempered with moments of humour and humanity. We find ourselves empathising with the teenage Todd's embarrassment as all his thoughts are broadcast to the first girl he's ever met, only to be met by an unnerving silence from her. Their journey is an eye-opener for Todd, shaking many of the beliefs he once saw as certainties and making him question the actions and motives of his guardians back in Prentisstown. This novel is the first of a trilogy and ends on a cliff-hanger.

Themes: Loss of innocence, loss and death, power and oppression, relationships.

Suitability: A challenging but gripping read.

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***“The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking.”***

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## INTO THE GREY — CELINE KIERNAN

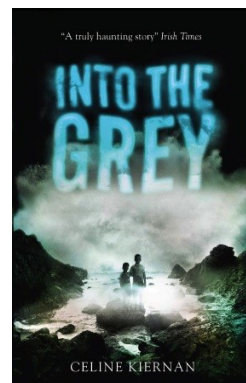
***Into the Grey* by Celine Kiernan. Publisher: The O'Brien Press, 2013. Pages: 296.**

It is 1974. The Finnertys, an ordinary, boisterous family of twin brothers Dom and Pat, baby sister Dee, and their parents and grandma, set off from Dublin to their annual summer getaway by the beach. The family's holiday drive is “vivid with fresh grass, diesel fumes, and the crusty-bright smell of the sea.”

Upon arrival, Pat thinks the cozy house seems shabby, dark, and stale; he knows something is wrong. We soon find out what it is; a goblin of sorts is haunting Dom, and Pat is the only one who knows it. We share his mounting horror as he watches his brother go where the ghouls lead him, helpless to do anything about it.

Themes: The supernatural/ fantasy, loss, family.

Suitability: A supernatural thriller, challenging in parts, which will hold the attention of the reader with its imaginative narration.



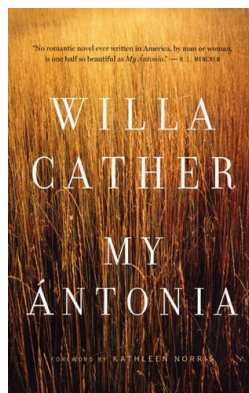
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***“The scream was awful - a horrible desolate cry ... the child led my unresisting brother up the path and further into the tangled garden. Out of my sight.”***

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## MY ÁNTONIA - WILLA CATHER

***My Ántonia* by Willa Cather. Publisher: Dover Publications, 1918. Pages: 191.**



Torn from her Bohemian homeland, Ántonia must embody the traits of endurance and determination, both when her father commits suicide and later when her fiancée abandons her and she must disguise an unplanned pregnancy.

Yet this is no 'lurid melodrama', crafted instead, as

Willa Cather herself observed, out of "the little, everyday happenings and occurrences that form the greatest part of everyone's life and happiness". *My Ántonia* is a

deeply nostalgic coming of age story celebrating the friendship of narrator Jim and his Ántonia and powerfully evoking the terrible beauty of the American prairie landscape. At times tragic, the novel also examines the way our past and our environment shapes us as human beings and celebrates the human capacity to flourish despite the hardships life throws at us all.

Themes: memory and the past; landscape and environment; social class, gender and 'otherness'; endurance in the face of hardship; growing up.

Suitability: While the episodic plot structure and rich prose may present a challenge for reluctant readers, the tapestry of themes it explores have made this a literary classic many students will enjoy.

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***"Just as the lower edge of the red disc rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun."***

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## THE WIND SINGER — WILLIAM NICHOLSON

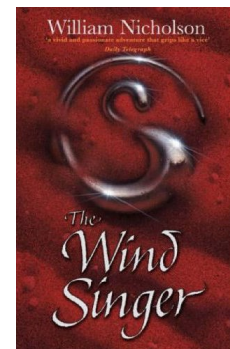
***The Wind Singer* by William Nicholson. Publisher: Egmont, 2000. Pages: 341.**

*The Wind Singer* is the first book in the 'Wind On Fire' trilogy. It is a fantasy novel set in the mythical meritocratic city of Aramanth, where each family is judged entirely on their ability to perform in examinations, and to be unsuccessful in these is seen as a great source of shame. Every citizen must abide by the 'Oath of Dedication', meaning that they must constantly 'strive harder to reach higher.'

The Hath family believe more in ideas and dreams than the system of endless work and grades dictated by the 'Oath of Dedication'. Their daughter Kestrel Hath rebels against the system and as a result, the family are sentenced to the harshest punishment. Desperate to save them, Kestrel and her twin brother Bowman decide to risk everything. Together with their friend Mumpo, they leave their family and embark on a perilous journey in search of the secret talisman that will make the iconic 'Wind Singer' sculpture sing again, thereby restoring normality to their world. Their epic quest is narrated by Nicholson using a perfect balance of drama and tenderness, woven with a touch of humour.

Themes: relationships, family, courage, class in society.

Suitability: *The Wind Singer* is an engaging and enjoyable read for all students.



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***"I hate school! I hate ratings! I won't reach higher! I won't strive harder! I won't make tomorrow better than today!"***

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# THE NOVEL

The 20 prescribed novels for second and third year are for students commencing junior cycle in September 2014, September 2015 and September 2016 only.

You will find information about using the novel to engage with learning outcomes in Section 4 from the CPD Day 1 *Resource Pack for Teachers of English*. Included in this section are possible areas worth exploring such as narrative structure and action; characters; themes, issues and ideas; and language.

(Learning Outcomes - R2, R4, R6, R7, W7, W8)

Page 11 of this section has a checklist of things to consider when teaching the class novel through rich learning experiences.



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