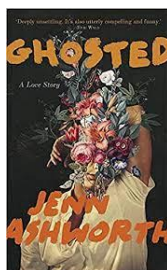


Reading list for English Reading Groups, 2022-2023



Note: this sign (📖) refers to the difficulty of the book. There are three levels: one booklet being the easiest, three the hardest. On page 1-5 you will find the newly added titles with brief descriptions of 2022-2023. Reader's Guides of these books will be published mid 2022. Pages 5-14 display older titles with descriptions, of which Reader's Guides were published previously.

New Titles of 2022-2023



Jenn Ashworth – *Ghosted*
E22-01, 2021, 304 pages 📖📖

One morning, Laurie's husband, Mark, just disappears. She doesn't tell anyone, not even Mark's mother who lives in Portugal. Finally, after five weeks, she calls the police, who find her behaviour rather suspicious. Laurie addresses the reader directly, seemingly taking us into her confidence. We learn about her complicated relationship with her father, who suffers from dementia and accuses his late wife of having had numerous affairs, and with Olenka, his cleaner-cum-housekeeper. We also see how Laurie drinks too much and doesn't sleep well, having nightmares in which she is being accused of something very bad. And, together with Laurie, we also discover the secrets Mark kept from his wife. Gradually the events are revealed that caused the couple to drift apart.

'Ghosted' is a moving story about love, sadness and anger, but also about new beginnings, told in a darkly humorous way.



T.C. Boyle - *Talk to me*
E22-02, 2021, 292 pages 📖

Guy Schermerhorn is a professor of psychology involved in researching language acquisition in primates. Thanks to Guy's careful training, the chimp Sam has learned to communicate through sign

language. Sam lives in Guy's apartment, but this is wreaking havoc on Guy's personal life. Guy is lucky to find the undergraduate student Aimee Villard, who volunteers to babysit. Aimee and Sam have an immediate connection, and before Guy knows it, she's moved in, proudly devoting herself to Sam's care and Guy's project. Dr Moncrieff, the head of the department, is not so optimistic about the project and decides that it has to stop. However, Aimee is not willing to give Sam up and so runs away with him.

This book is about Aimee's love for Sam. How far will she go, while also managing to hide from Dr Moncrieff?

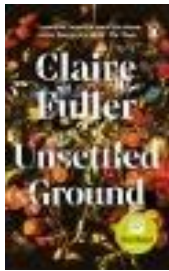


Jonathan Franzen - *Crossroads*
E22-03, 2021, 580 pages 📖📖

It is 1971 and almost Christmas in New Prospect, USA. Russ Hildebrandt is the second pastor of the First Reform Church. Marion, his wife, has a past that Russ does not know about. Both are struggling to prevent their marriage from collapsing. Their children, in turn, have problems of their own. Clem, the eldest son, is coming home from college, having taken a difficult decision. Becky, their daughter, is very popular, attractive and falling in love. Fifteen-year-old Perry is bright, but addicted and selling drugs to eighth-graders. Meanwhile, Judson, the youngest child, is loved by everyone. Events from the past and present come to a head on a single winter day, described from intertwined perspectives and with sustained suspense.

Franzen's long-anticipated book about a "normal" American family offers a fascinating insight into their searching for identity and

wrestling with morality. This first volume of a trilogy stands on its own, but may well leave you longing for the next.



Claire Fuller - *Unsettled Ground*

E22-04, 2021, 289 pages

The 51-year-old twins Jeanie and Julius live with their mother in a small cottage. The three of them lead an isolated life, growing everything they need for sustenance in the garden and making music together inside the house. But when their mother, Dot, suddenly dies, the only way of life they've ever known comes tumbling down. How did Dot keep the family afloat financially? How will Jeanie and Julius adapt to their new world?

'Unsettled Ground' author Claire Fuller has written a captivating novel giving an intriguing insight into poverty in present-day England.

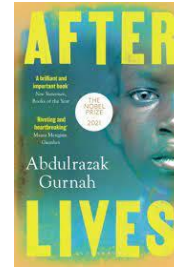


Damon Galgut - *The Promise*

E22-05, 2021, 293 pages

The story is about a white South African family, living on a farm outside Pretoria. Mother Rachel on her deathbed, extracts the promise from her husband Manie that Salome, the family's black maid, will be given a house and a plot of land of her own. The youngest daughter, Amor, overhearing her mother's request, chooses her own way in life. When she meets up with her family at funeral gatherings, she reminds them of the promise. In the end she herself can fulfil the promise, but by then the political situation in South Africa has changed considerably and the promise has taken on a different dimension.

As the story unfolds, the narrator takes the reader into the depths of the various characters' hearts. The novel contains beautiful metaphors that are a treat to the imagination. Damon Galgut won the Booker Prize 2021.

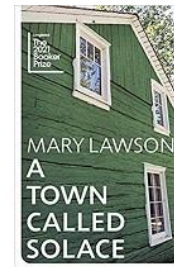


Abdulrazak Gurnah – *Afterlives*

E22-06, 2020, 275 pages

In a town on the Tanzanian coast, against the background of German colonial rule in East Africa (Deutsch-Ostafrika) in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, Hamza, Afiya and Ilyas try to cope with everything life throws at them. After working as a servant for a German officer, Hamza returns to his home village, where he falls in love with Afiya. She was raised by an “uncle” and “aunt” who treated her badly and is finally offered the chance of a better life by her brother Ilyas, who ran away from home as a child before his sister was born. The man who connects them all is Khalifa, sometimes grumpy but who loves to gossip.

Gurnah, the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature, has very successfully combined big world events such as colonialism and war with the small pleasures and setbacks in private lives.

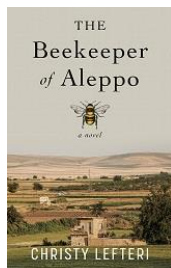


Mary Lawson - *A Town called Solace*

E22-07, 2021, 288 pages

The story is set in the fictional town of Solace in Northern Ontario (Canada) in 1972. Three people are at the heart of the novel. Seven-year-old Clara, whose rebellious sister Rose has run away from home. Mrs Orchard, a widowed elderly neighbour, who asks Clara to feed the cat while she is in hospital. Liam, a recently divorced man in his late thirties who comes to live in Mrs Orchard's house. And there is Moses, Mrs Orchard's cat, unaware of how he connects the three characters. From three different points of view the story unfolds and tells the reader how the characters come to terms with the past and find possibilities for a new beginning.

Mary Lawson tells a quiet, timeless story about people whose characters are drawn with great empathy. All storylines centre on loss, longing and love. The book was longlisted for the Booker Prize 2021.



Christy Lefteri - *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*

E22-08, 2019, 317 pages 📖

Nuri tends his bees as they tend him. His organised bee colonies seem like paradise, just like the world of Nuri, his wife Afra and their son Sami. Then war destroys both paradises and Nuri and Afra are torn between staying in Syria, waiting for death, and trying to join his cousin Mustafa in England. They embark on a journey full of agony and anxiety, during which they meet many other refugees from very different backgrounds.

A story of lost dreams, lots of suffering and anxiety against a background of enduring love between a husband and wife.



Jon McGregor - *Lean Fall Stand*

E22-09, 2021, 288 pages 📖

Robert "Doc" Wright is a General Technical Assistant, leading two young assistants on a geographical research expedition in Antarctica. During the trip, unnecessary risks are taken, and when a sudden storm strengthens and the radios fail, the three become isolated. The story continues with Doc's return home to the UK, seen through the eyes of his wife, Anna. Having been at opposite ends of the globe for 30 years, the two have become estranged. Anna struggled to find a balance between raising their children and her career as a climate expert, and now suddenly has to take on a new role as Doc's full-time carer. An investigation into the Antarctic tragedy is launched and Doc, who suffers from aphasia following a stroke, has to find a way to account for his actions.

McGregor has written an emotional novel about a relationship and communications after a stroke that is both captivating and sad.

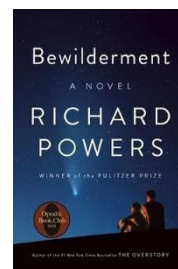


Louise Nealon - *Snowflake*

E22-10, 2021, 304 pages 📖

When Debbie goes to university, she stands out because of living on a farm with her family, who can best be described as weird and extremely uncomfortable with their existence. The struggle to cope with life is what makes them loveable. Her mother is plagued by dreams, and Debbie is scared to end up the same way. Her saviour is her Uncle Billy. Together, they gaze at stars from the roof of his caravan and tell each other stories. And all the while Debbie must find a way through life, both as a country girl and a bright student. Luckily she finds a true friend at university.

There are many coming-of-age books on the passage into adulthood and this one hurts as much as it entertains. The story makes you love Debbie and her crazy family and friends. Somehow you know she will find peace with herself, some day.

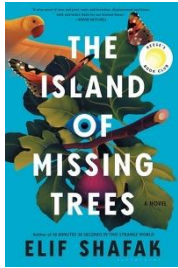


Richard Powers - *Bewilderment*



E22-11, 2021, 288 pages 📖📖

Young Robin is brilliant, but cannot cope with day-to-day life. He is diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and scared to go to school. Doctors demand that he should take medication. The loss of his mother is running deep and drives him to extremes. His father's stories about other exoplanets calm him down. When he finds a way into his mother's mind, he changes dramatically, and is able to explore his original creativity. But he does not expect good things to last. His father, Theo Byrne, cannot change that as he himself is dealing with the dramatic consequences of his wife's death, which make him feel helpless and fill him with sorrow and guilt.

Imagine a story with many layers: the love of a man for his deceased wife, and his difficult and original son. This book will leave a deep impression.



Elif Shafak - *The Island of Missing Trees*

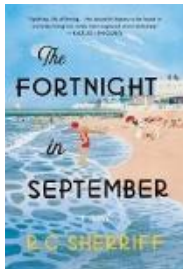
E22-12, 2021, 320 pages  

It is 1974 and the island of Cyprus and its capital Nicosia are divided into a Turkish and a Greek part. The situation is tense. And in these circumstances a Greek Christian boy and a Turkish, Muslim girl meet and fall in love. Romeo and Juliet revisited? It is an impossible situation, people watch each other all the


time. But there is one place in Nicosia which is an oasis in this hostile environment. In the Happy Fig inn they find stolen moments of sanctuary, guarded by its owners and by the fig tree in the centre of the restaurant which has stood there for over 80 years. It is a place where they can share their dreams of a better world, until war breaks out, causing them to flee.

Decades later, in London, their teenage daughter struggles to find out where she belongs. And gradually we learn what happened all those years ago.

A story of infinite tenderness between lovers and towards their daughter.



R.C. Sherriff - *The Fortnight in September*

E22-13, 1931, 326 pages 



Every year a suburban family goes to Bognor in West Sussex for their fortnight's holiday. This offers Mr Stevens, a chief invoice clerk disappointed to have been passed over for promotion, an opportunity to dream about a future in which something would happen to reward his striving in

the past. Mrs Stevens dreads the train journey and does her utmost to hide her fear of the sea. Most of all she enjoys the quiet hour after supper when Ernie, their youngest, is in bed, and the others have gone out. Their seventeen-year-old son Dick tries to understand why he is unhappy in his job as a clerk and comes to an important decision on his future, while his sister Mary, who is nearly twenty, finds romance.

This story, written in 1931, about hard-working people doing normal things draws you in and makes you wish there was a sequel showing how their plans and dreams worked out.



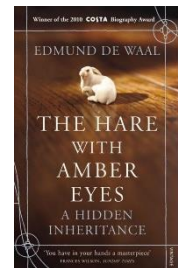
Maggie Shipstead - *Great Circle*

E22-14, 2021, 589 pages  


After the baby twins Marian and Jamie Graves have been rescued from a burning ship, their Uncle Wallace, a painter who drinks too much and has no idea how to raise children, takes them in. Marian has always wanted to be a pilot, but when Barclay Macqueen, a shady businessman, makes her dream

come true, she has to pay a very high price. Jamie leads a very different kind of life and becomes a well-known artist. In 1950, Marian disappears while flying around the world from north to south. At regular intervals, the story switches to Hadley Baxter, a disgraced Hollywood movie star, who, more than 50 years later, is preparing for her role as Marian in a movie about the latter's life.

The novel is set against the background of Prohibition, the Great Depression and the Second World War and includes the histories of various real-life women pilots. This results in a very interesting read.



Edmund de Waal - *The Hare with Amber Eyes*

E22-15, 2011, 351 pages 

During a stay in Japan, Edmund de Waal, the author of the book, admires the netsuke (miniature ivory sculptures from Japan) of his great-uncle Ignace von Ephrussi, who lives in Tokyo. The inheritance of the 264 netsuke arouses Edmund's curiosity about the collection's origins. He discovers that they were


bought by Edmund's great-grandfather, Charles Ephrussi, in Paris in the 1870s. The story of the netsuke is related to the history of the Ephrussi family, a Jewish family of wheat traders, originally from Odessa and who, over time, became bankers, with offices in all the major European capitals. Edmund's quest leads him through the

Paris of Proust and Monet, and a time of growing anti-Semitism and the Dreyfus affair, right up to the present day.

This book gives insight into the lives of a rich Jewish family around 1900 and beyond, at both a personal and broader level.



Readers' Guides 2011 – 2021

Ayòbámi Adébáyò - *Stay With Me*

E19-01, 2017, 298 pages 

Yejide and her husband Akin met and fell in love at university. After a few years of marriage, the couple have not yet been able to conceive the child they want so much. Although both of them are opposed to polygamy, Akin feels forced by the absence of a baby to consider another wife. And while Yejide decides to try everything in her power to get pregnant and not to lose her husband, the drastic risks she's willing to take may prove too high a cost.



Molly Aitken - *The Island Child*

E21-01, 2020, 310 pages  

Oona grew up on the island of Inis. An island that was a gift for some, but for others, like Oona, a prison. Barely more than a child, she flees the island. *The Island Child* goes back and forth between Oona's youth on the island and her adult life in Canada. Will she ever be fully able to escape the island?

This is a gripping tale with identity, motherhood and freedom as its main themes.

Pat Barker - *The Silence of the Girls*


E20-01, 2018, 291 pages  

This book comprises a retelling of the Trojan War, this time from the point of view of a young woman. A Greek army led by Achilles attacks a small city, killing the men and abducting the women, including Briseis, the childless wife of the king. When the women

are given to the leaders, Briseis is awarded to the nearly-invincible Achilles. Serving unveiled at Achilles' table, Briseis eventually realises why he wants her to be seen by his comrades.


The following events – Achilles' refusal to join the fighting and the deaths of Patroclus, Hector and, finally, Achilles himself – lead to the fall of Troy and are told from the perspective of a woman's experience of war and its lack of glamour.

Julian Barnes – *The Only Story*

E18-02, 2018, 213 pages 


This is a novel about a complicated love story. It is narrated by Paul, who is looking back at his life. Paul was 19 when he first met Susan, a woman more than twice his age. They met at a tennis club and fell in love. The setting is in the London suburbs in the 1960s. The novel is divided into three parts, written in three different narrative voices: the first, second and third person. With each change, Paul moves on to a new phase in their affair, describing the demands that are placed on him by the lifelong consequences of his first love.

Chloe Benjamin - *The Immortalists*

E20-02, 2018, 352 pages 



The book is set in New York in 1969, when four siblings in the Jewish Gold family are given a fortune teller's predictions of their dates of death. The next forty years of each of the children's lives are consecutively followed as "the day" comes nearer. They all lead full lives: Simon escapes, searching for love, to the West Coast, while Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, Daniel seeks security as an army doctor, and Varya dedicates herself to science. Do the predictions come true for one or all of them? How did the predictions work out? Did the fortune teller have a special gift? Was it just coincidence? Or were the outcomes caused by the children themselves?

Britt Bennett - *The Vanishing Half*

E21-02, 2020, 343 pages 

The Vanishing Half follows the lives of two twin girls Desiree and Stella, both light-skinned, who run away from home at the age of sixteen. They live in Mallard, a fictional small town in Louisiana in the 1950s and are remote descendants of a slave owner and a slave. They want to create opportunities for a better life for themselves. Desiree marries a dark-skinned man and gives birth to a very dark-skinned girl named Jude. Stella takes on a new identity, that of a white woman. She marries a well-to-do white man and gives birth to a white girl named Kennedy. Stella's husband and child will never know that she is from a black family. One day the nieces happen to meet each other and start a friendship where secrets are gradually revealed and family ties prove to be unbreakable.



Sarah Blake - *Naamah*

E21-03, 2019, 298 pages  

Only one family is spared the coming of the Great Flood: Noah's family. Noah built his Ark with his sons and, of course, his wife. This is the story as told by Noah's wife, Naamah, who tells what it is like being trapped on a big boat with lots of restless animals. At the same time Naamah struggles with her beliefs. Why was her family spared?

This is a unique retelling of an ancient story in fresh, modern language. A story that sometimes shifts between reality and myth with the help of Sarah Blake's poetical writing style. There is quite a lot of attention for sexuality and some scenes are quite graphic, but it never becomes vulgar.


Alain de Botton - *The Course of Love*

E17-03, 2016, 240 pages  

The long-awaited follow-on from Alain de Botton's first novel "On Love" finds the Lebanese-German Rabih Khan grown into a young


man of thirty-one. In his capacity as an architect, he meets a client Kirsten McClelland and they fall deeply in love. What follows is a captivating description of the relationship over a period of thirteen years where marriage and the birth of a son and daughter set the back-drop for an in-depth examination of the emotions and behaviours that draw the couple together and nearly drive them apart. Ideals are put to the test by the pressures of an average existence with humdrum routines.

John Boyne - *A Ladder to the Sky*

E21-04, 2018, 434 pages 

Maurice Swift's ambition is to become a writer. He has already written six short novels, none of which attracted many readers, when he meets the celebrated author Erich Ackermann. Despite his success as a writer, Ackermann is lonely and immediately feels a bond with the young, handsome Maurice and makes him his personal assistant. Maurice's problem is that he is technically a good writer, but lacks the creativity to come up with good stories. But when he finds out that Ackermann has a story to tell, he steals this story and uses it for his own novel. This then becomes his first great success as an author.

Geraldine Brooks - *Caleb's Crossing*


E17-04, 2011, 311 pages 

In this novel the author takes her readers to a fledgling community of English Puritan settlers on America's North East coast in the 1660s. What features is that these early settlers seek peaceful cohabitation with the local tribes.

Main character Bethia Mayfield's future is determined by the orthodox views of her father, brother and grandfather. But she possesses a free roaming mind and finds a kindred spirit in Caleb, son of the chieftain of the local Wampanoag. They are brave openhearted characters in search of knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance. What follows is Bethia's struggle to maintain a position between the strict rules of Puritan society and

the ways of the native Americans. Her endeavours culminate in two Wampanoag students being allowed to enter Harvard University.



Tracy Chevalier - *A Single Thread*

E21-05, 2019, 346 pages 

Violet Speedwell suffered the loss of her fiancé and beloved brother in the First World War. In 1932, now in her late thirties, she is deemed a “surplus woman”, single and without prospects in marriage, expected to care for her aging, impossible mother. Her job as a typist at an insurance firm is poorly paid and she struggles to cover the bare necessities of her sober existence.


A Single Thread takes the reader through Violet’s trials, tribulations and successes in establishing her independence through striking out on her own, learning to embroider in a group dedicated to producing kneelers for her beloved Winchester Cathedral. The friendships she forms along the way broaden Violet’s horizons, opening her heart and giving unexpected turns to her life story.

Jonathan Coe - *Middle England*

E20-03, 2018, 432 pages  

In this State of the Nation novel we meet characters from Coe's earlier books *The Rotters' Club* and *The Closed Circle*. Working around main character Benjamin Trotter Coe presents the reader with a sometimes harsh, sometimes kind description of people from various classes during the period in which the British had to cope with the outcome of the referendum on leaving, or staying in the EU, causing deep rifts between all kinds of Britons, also between families. Nostalgic memories of what England once was and will never be again, along with downright racism, opportunism and ruthless politicians rushing forward to a break from Europe of which no one really understands the political and especially the economic impact.

Christina Dalcher - *Master Class*

E21-06, 2020, 319 pages 



Elena Fairchild has two daughters, sixteen-year-old Anne, who is bright and does very well at school, and Freddie, aged nine, an anxious child who struggles to keep her grades up. Elena’s husband Malcolm is partly responsible for an education system where everyone is given a Q score, based on monthly testing. This determines a person’s place in society: the higher the Q score, the more privileges are available. When Freddie fails her test and is sent to a state boarding school where parents can only visit once every three months, Elena, who is slowly starting to realise something sinister is going on, decides to give up her job as a teacher at an elite school to try to save her daughter.

Bernardine Evaristo - *Girl, Woman, Other*

E20-04, 2019, 452 pages  

It is the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, a play written by Amma, a black woman in her fifties, who is a free spirit, a lesbian and a feminist. In the audience is Shirley, Amma’s oldest friend, a school teacher who has become disappointed in a school system that no longer takes children’s fluctuating needs into account. Shirley is surprised to see Carole again, one of her former pupils, who is now an investment banker and whose mother, Bummi, feels that her daughter has rejected her Nigerian culture by marrying a white English man. Meanwhile, Morgan, who used to be Megan, is there to review the play for the one million followers on her Twitter account, which was initially set up to describe her journey to a gender-free identity.


Jane Gardam - *Old Filth*

E18-06, 2006, 289 pages  

Sir Edward Feathers, also called Old Filth (FILTH is an acronym for "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong) finds himself bereft of his beloved Betty in a beautiful house in Dorset at the age of 82. His next door neighbour is a widower as well and a former colleague.

There was no love lost between them. But compelled by need they get in touch again and this seems the beginning of an 'opening of shutters on the past that he (Edward) had kept clamped down.' He was a Raj orphan brought up by foster parents in Wales. This period in particular left scars on his soul and had a huge impact on the rest of his life.


Anne Griffin - *When All is Said*

E21-07, 2019, 326 pages 

Maurice Hannigan was a poor young farmhand working for a bullying boss, Hugh Dollard, and his sadistic son, Thomas, in County Meath, Ireland. One day Maurice picked up a precious gold sovereign that had been thrown out of a window during an argument between Thomas and his father and hid it. From then onwards, Maurice's fortunes started rising while those of the Dollards began to dwindle.


The story starts in a hotel bar, with 84-year-old Maurice looking back on his life. He thinks about the five people who have been most important to him during his long and eventful life and proposes a toast to each of them in turn while reminiscing about what they meant to him.

Emma Healey - *Elizabeth is missing*

E20-05, 2014, 275 pages 

Maud, in her eighties and the narrator of this novel, suffers from dementia. She asks the same questions over and over again and no longer likes reading because she can never remember where she left off. Sometimes she doesn't even recognize her daughter and granddaughter. All over her house are bits of paper telling her what she should or shouldn't do. One of these notes says that her friend Elizabeth is missing. Maud is determined to find out what happened to her. Maud's search triggers memories about the time Sukey, her older sister, disappeared, just after the Second World War, and was never found.


Gail Honeyman - *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*

E18-08, 2017, 327 pages 

Eleanor Oliphant's life is built around routine and she does not live up to social expectations. She works as a finance clerk and keeps mostly to herself. When she coincidentally gets involved with Raymond, an IT guy at the office, she gradually discovers friendship and compassion.

The book is divided into three parts: Good Days, Bad Days and Better Days. The first part depicts Eleanor's weekly routine, providing an overview of who she is. Later on, it is revealed how things from the past have shaped her.


Kazuo Ishiguro - *Never Let Me Go*

E18-09, 2006, 276 pages 

Never Let Me Go is the story of Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, and of the love-triangle they begin at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School. Ruth is the controlling one, Tommy is the one who used to find it hard to keep his temper, and Kathy is a carer by nature as well as profession. They have heard that love - or art, or both - will get you a deferral. Kathy, now 31, is the narrator of the story, in which she tries to come to terms with her childhood, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends.

Ishiguro, winner of the Nobel prize in literature 2017, was praised by the Swedish Academy for novels which were driven by 'great emotional force'.


Laila Lalami - *The Other Americans*

E21-08, 2019, 301 pages 

Moroccan immigrant Driss Guerraoui is killed in a hit and run accident. The subsequent investigation turns the lives of several characters, divided by race, religion and class, upside down: Nora, the daughter, who is in an unhappy relationship and is trying to make a career as a composer; Salma, Nora's sister, who is frustrated by always having had to do her duty; Maryam, Driss's wife, who still longs for her homeland; Jeremy Gorecki, the sheriff's deputy and an Iraq veteran, who is in a difficult relationship with



Nora; Erica Coleman, the detective, who is worried about her thirteen-year-old son; Anderson Baker and his son A.J., who own the bowling alley next to Driss's restaurant, and Efraín Acaves, who witnessed the accident but doesn't want to come forward for fear of deportation.

John Lanchester – *The Wall*

E20-07, 2019, 276 pages 



After a climatic development called “the Change”, an island very similar to Great Britain has built the Wall – a massive defence structure around its entire coastline. Joseph Kavanagh, the story's narrator, has to serve two years on the Wall as a Defender, staring out to sea, keeping watch and making sure the Others don't get in. For every Other who makes it across the Wall, a Defender will be banished from the country and is put out to sea on a boat. Just as Joseph is growing closer to Hifa, one of the other defenders, something happens that changes everything.

Penelope Lively - *Moon Tiger*

E19-05, 1987, 208 pages  

Claudia Hampton, historian and author, lies in a hospital bed, recalling a life full of adventure and relationships, while making a last attempt at writing a world history as seen through her eyes and connected to events that have happened in her life. Focusing especially on the Second World War, when she was stationed in Egypt as a newspaper correspondent, she tells the story of the tragic romance that has influenced her life ever since.


Valeria Luiselli - *Lost Children Archive*

E20-08, 2019, 350 pages  

A woman and her husband, both audio documentary makers, are driving from New York to Arizona with her five-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son. The man is interested in the Apache leaders who were the last to surrender and wants to make “an inventory of echoes”, while the woman is planning to work on an



audio project about the many refugee children who go missing when trying to enter America. During the road trip, presented through the eyes of the woman and the boy, it becomes clear the family is slowly drifting apart. The two children then decide to run away in the hope of making things better for them all because “If we too were lost children, we would have to be found again.”

Bernard MacLaverty - *Midwinter Break*



E18-11, 2017, 243 pages 

Gerry and Stella, a retired Irish couple in their late sixties, set out for a holiday weekend in Amsterdam. They have an adult son living in Canada and one grandchild. The Troubles in Ireland were the reason they moved to Glasgow. Gerry used to be an architect and Stella was a school teacher. Initially we meet a couple whose relationship seems safe, easy and familiar. Soon though the reader learns about their secret thoughts and behaviour; about their traumatic experience of a bomb attack in Belfast and the impact it has had on their lives up to the present day. Gerry makes fun of her being a devout catholic. Stella knows that he drinks too much whisky. The couple are experts in avoiding talking about subjects that really bother them until it is bound to explode.


Ian McEwan - *The Children Act*

E15-10, 2014, 242 pages  



Fiona Maye, a respected High Court judge in the Family Division, is 59 and has no children of her own. To her surprise, her husband Jack expresses discontent with their sex life and decides to have an affair. While her private life is in crisis, Fiona has to make daily decisions on other people's lives in her work, sometimes even on questions of life or death. One of these cases involves a 17-year-old Jehovah's Witness with leukaemia. He and his parents are refusing treatment because of their religious beliefs. That case and the judge's ruling on it make for very gripping reading.

David Mitchell - Utopia AvenueE21-09, 2020, 561 pages  

It is 1967 and the world of pop music is in turmoil. Bands are emerging and rising to fame fast. The recently formed Utopia Avenue is working hard to find an audience for their music, travelling to the ends of the UK, bonding as a band so their music grows in intensity and creating their own original sound. Famous popstars such as David Bowie, Jimmy Hendrix and Brian Jones make an appearance. And through all the troubles the band members experience getting into the Top 10. They share their stories. Dean Moss needs to free himself of his drunk father, Elf Holloway from a lost love and the death of her little nephew, and Jasper de Zoet from the curse of his ancestor Jacob. This harks back to *The Thousand Autumns* and the creation of Mitchell's Über-novel, with many cross-references to his previous books.

Benjamin Myers - The OffingE21-10, 2019, 260 pages 

In wonderful prose *The Offing* tells the story of a young man venturing out into the Big Wide World, shortly after the Second World War. Tired of the gloomy mining town where he was raised, he arrives at the North Sea coast, where he is invited to spend some of his young days with a mysterious woman with a poetic secret. While he does odd jobs, she cooks, using the harvest from the garden to create the most wonderful dishes. Such delicacies were previously unknown to him. There is more for the reader to experience, the secret of the sea and this song of summer. And, in this coming-of-age novel, the body of a boy is growing into a man just as his mind learns about literature and the power of words.

Celeste Ng - Little Fires EverywhereE19-06, 2017, 338 pages  



Shaker Heights is a model town with beautiful houses, wide lawns shorn to perfection and inhabited by perfect families. The perfect family featuring the story are the Richardsons, father and mother

with successful careers and 4 teenage children getting fantastic grades in High School. Only Izzy, the youngest, is rather out of tune with the rest of the family.

The appearance on this idyllic scene of a shabby looking family means quite a change in the orderly lives of the Richardsons. Mia is an artist/photographer. She has decided it is time for her and her 15-year old daughter Pearl to settle somewhere after their hitherto itinerant lives and hopes to achieve this by renting a cheap "half a house" from Mrs Richardson. Lots of unexpected developments occur. In the end we find the Richardsons on their now not so perfect lawn, watching the fire brigade trying to extinguish the last flames of their burnt down house.

Edna O'Brien - The Little Red ChairsE17-09, 2016, 299 pages  


This story is set in an Irish village, where one day a mysterious foreigner walks into town and opens an alternative healing clinic. He manipulates the local women by providing hot stone massages and poetry. The beautiful Fidelma, who is unhappy about being childless, falls under his spell and becomes pregnant. When his true identity as a Balkan war criminal is revealed, shocking and harrowing events follow. To come to terms with the past Fidelma moves to London, where she lives among the homeless and hears stories told by refugees and victims of horrors. After attending the war criminal's trial in The Hague, Fidelma finds a way to give her life a new direction.

Michael Ondaatje - WarlightE19-07, 2018, 304 pages  

In 1945, fourteen-year-old Nathaniel and his older sister Rachel are unexpectedly abandoned by their parents, who are moving from London to Singapore for a year. Nathaniel and Rachel are left in the care of two strangers, an enigmatic figure called the Moth, and Pimlico Darter, a former boxer and dog-racing fixer. Shortly after their parents leave, the children find out that their mother has left her trunk of clothes in the basement. So something mysterious must have happened.


The novel, set in post-Second World War London, is Nathaniel's reconstruction of what happened in the past and also a quest to find his parents. It contains a number of layers, including Nathaniel's coming of age and the work of the secret services after the end of the war.

Ann Patchett - *The Dutch House*

E20-09, 2019, 336 pages 


In this novel a mansion provides the basis for the Conroys. It's called The Dutch House by locals because the first owners were of Dutch origin: the Van Hoebeek dynasty. Self-made property magnate, Cyril Conroy buys the mansion from the bank including the furnishings and personal belongings from the former owners. Cyril's wife Elna doesn't feel comfortable in the house and leaves her husband and their two children, Maeve and Danny. Cyril then marries Andrea, a young widow with two daughters. When Cyril dies Andrea disinherits Maeve and Danny. It's touching to read about the unconditional love between brother and sister; how they park their car in front of the mansion time and again and talk about the life they had together in the Dutch House.

Kiley Reid - *Such a Fun Age*

E21-11, 2019, 305 pages 



Emira Tucker, a young black woman, works as a babysitter for Alix Chamberlain, a rich social media celebrity. When Emira takes her three-year-old charge Briar to the supermarket, she is accused of having kidnapped a white child. Although Emira is not all that bothered and more concerned about having little money and no proper job, Alix is horrified by the incident. She realises that she doesn't know Emira very well and decides that is going to change. Finding out more about her babysitter confronts her with events from her own past that turn her world upside down and at the same time change the direction of Emira's future.

Sally Rooney - *Normal People*

E19-09, 2018, 266 pages 

This novel follows the lives of Marianne and Connell, who grow up in a small town in Ireland. Marianne lives with her mother and brother in a large mansion, where Connell's single mother works as a cleaner. Marianne is a social outcast, while Connell is popular at school. They begin a secret relationship that stops during their final year at high school when Connell treats her badly. A year later, they are both studying at Trinity College in Dublin and now it is the other way around: Marianne feels comfortable at university, and Connell doesn't seem to fit in. Over the following years, they repeatedly find themselves drawn to each other, on and off.


Philip Roth – *The Plot against America*

E21-12, 2004, 391 pages  

What if the well-known pilot Charles Lindbergh, instead of F.D. Roosevelt, had won the American elections in 1940? In what way would his anti-Semitic ideas have influenced American citizens and their way of life?


Philip Roth rewrites a few years in American history and their impact on his own Jewish family and the Jewish community in Newark, where he grew up. What is it like to be a seven-year-old boy, to see and hear things you do not understand, to feel your safe daily life being threatened? How do large political issues affect the small family world?

Nicholas Searle - *The Good Liar*

E17-10, 2016, 360 pages 


Roy Courtney is in his eighties and cons people for a living. For his final grand scam he has his eye on Betty, a wealthy widow whom he met through an online dating site. Flashbacks show us the stunts Roy has had to pull in the past in order to save his own skin, but this time things end very differently from what he – and the reader – expects. It turns out that Betty is not the dithering scatterbrain that she seems and that she has her own reasons for getting involved with this swindler.

Kamila Shamsie - *Home Fire*

E18-13, 2017, 260 pages 


The story is told by the five main characters, all of whom are from a British-Pakistani Muslim background. Isma who, after the death of their mother, took care of her younger twin siblings and is now finally able to pursue an academic career in Massachusetts; Aneeka, the beautiful younger sister, who stays behind in London; Parvaiz, Aneeka's twin brother, whose decision to follow in the footsteps of a father he has never known and join the Caliphate turns all their lives upside down; Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary, who becomes involved with Aneeka, and Karamat Lone, Eamonn's father, who has a point to prove.

Elif Shafak – *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*

E20-10, 2019, 312 pages 


After Tequila Leila's death her mind continues working: for 10 minutes and 38 seconds to be precise, during which time she remembers the important events in her life that shaped her into the woman she became. In these memories, the reader is introduced, in turn, to Leila's five best friends, all of whom are desperately trying to find her.

Graeme Simsion - *The Rosie Project*

E14-12, 2013, 327 pages 

Don Tillman, a professor in genetics, does not understand jokes and takes everything literally. He is also very organised. Aged 39, he has decided it is time to marry. Unfortunately Don is not very good at dating. He therefore designs a questionnaire consisting of sixteen double-sided pages to help him find the perfect wife. Rosie Jarman is clearly totally unsuitable, but while Don is waiting for someone who does fit the criteria of the Wife Project, he agrees to help Rosie find her biological father. As Don and Rosie use rather unconventional methods to collect DNA samples from the various candidates, they frequently end up in awkward, but extremely funny situations.

Ali Smith – *Summer*

E21-13, 2020, 378 pages 

At centre stage in this novel is Sacha Greenlaw, a 16-year-old girl living with her brother and divorced mother, a former actress. Together the three of them lead us through the summer months, sharing stories of the past and future. Words tumble out on top of each other, not always leading to the three living together better. But there are also new friends to meet. These new friends come from Smith's earlier work because *Summer* is the closing part of the Four Seasons project that she has been working on over the past four years. Making a statement on the world today, but also spinning a fine thread through the lives of her main characters, running from the outbreak of the Second World War and how foreigners were expelled from society and locked away in camps to a refugee seeking asylum today and also touching on Covid 19 and other recent events.


Douglas Stewart - *Shuggie Bain*

E21-14, 2020, 430 pages  

This novel is about a young boy and his mother Agnes, who live together with Catherine and Leek, his siblings, in a tenement building in a former mining district in Glasgow in the 1980s. Agnes's partner, Hugh, is Shuggie's father. Agnes's life is dominated by alcohol. However little money there is, she spends it all on cheap beer and vodka.


At the start of the novel Shuggie is five years old and not so aware of the struggles in the family. As he grows older he notices more and is increasingly concerned about his mother, whom he loves dearly. He doesn't give up hoping that one day she will stop drinking. On top of all this, Shuggie is not like most boys. He behaves differently and is being bullied because of it.

Elizabeth Strout - Olive Kitteridge

E16-11, 2008, 270 pages 

Olive Kitteridge, the Pulitzer prize-winning 'novel in stories' by Elizabeth Strout, describes a small coastal community in Maine. We read about a young man contemplating suicide, a girl who is dumped on her wedding day, an elderly couple who have stayed together despite the husband's infidelity and a girl who has to cope with the fact that her mother ran away to become an actress. All of these people know Olive Kitteridge, a retired maths teacher, who is very outspoken in her opinions and who is the link running through the thirteen stories. Sometimes she is mentioned only briefly, but several stories centre on her and describe her rather complicated relationship with her only son and her life with her quiet and gentle husband.

Graham Swift - Mothering Sunday

E17-11, 2016, 177 pages 

The novella follows Jane Fairchild, a maidservant at Beechwood House, during one day in March 1924. The day was Mothering Sunday, when servants were traditionally given the day off to visit their mother. Jane, being an orphan, spends the morning with Paul, her secret lover, who is the sole remaining son and heir of the neighboring estate. After he leaves her for a lunch date with the girl he is to marry in two weeks' time, Jane wanders through the house trying to memorize everything. As the narrative moves back and forth from 1924 to the end of the century, going back and forth between tragedy and romance, we learn more about Jane's life and how this special day influenced the rest of her life.


Madeleine Thien - Do Not Say We Have Nothing

E17-12, 2016, 463 pages  

Madeleine Thien's epic novel spans seven decades and three generations. The story begins in the present day with Marie, a Chinese-Canadian mathematician trying to unravel the secrets around her father's suicide in 1989 and the unexplained arrival of a young woman from China and her subsequent disappearance. The



story takes the reader back in time through the generations and traces the lives of families and friends forced by members of the communist regime to renounce their past lives and identities, endure hardship and deny their love for Western music and the arts. There is no trust and anybody can be a traitor, even friends and family members.

Anne Tyler - A Spool of Blue Thread

E16-13, 2015, 358 pages 


This novel covers several generations of the Whitshank family. The mother Abby, a social worker, is at the heart of the story. She is married to Red, who works in construction. Red and Abby have two daughters and two sons. They are generally a happy family, although the older boy, Denny, never really seems to fit in. Now in her 70s, Abby is getting forgetful, while Red is going deaf, and there are concerns about whether they can continue to live independently. The family house in Baltimore is a character in itself. It was built by Red's father, Junior, for his wife, Linnie Mae. It is through the house that the reader learns about Abby's youth and the house's early days.

Ocean Vuong – On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

E20-11, 2019, 242 pages  

This novel tells the story of Little Dog, the son of Vietnamese immigrant parents in the US. This is done in the form of a letter addressed to his illiterate mother. 'Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you – even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are.' The writing is a mix of a shared past with his traumatised mother and a schizophrenic grandmother as well as his own thoughts and feelings. He is lonely and discriminated against because of the colour of his skin. He finds a friend in Trevor and growing up they discover their teenage sexual love for each other. The letter to his mother is at the same time a search for his own identity.

Tara Westover - *Educated*


E21-15, 2018, 377 pages 

This is Westover's memoir of her childhood in Idaho, where Washington is far away and God very close.

She was born into a family of Mormon fundamentalists. Her father is the family prophet who lives strictly by the Bible. Dairy products, medicine and hospital treatment are forbidden. Anything official is shunned. Her father does not believe in sending his children to school; the younger ones aren't even officially registered. From a very early age, each child has to help father Gene in his scrap metal business, involving long hours of dangerous work.

It is from this environment that Tara gradually disentangles herself and, without any formal education, struggles her way to college.




Raynor Winn – *The Salt Path*

E20-12, 2018, 288 pages 

The Salt Path is the story of author Raynor Winn's remarkable journey walking the South-West Coast Path with her husband Moth. Just as their home and livelihood are taken away from them, the couple find out that Moth is suffering from an incurable illness.

Against all advice, and with all their belongings in their backpacks, they start their journey from Somerset to Cornwall, trying to survive with barely any money.

Jeanette Winterson – *Frankissstein: A Love Story*

E20-13. 2019, 346 pages   

Frankissstein consists of two stories, told alternately. One is set in present-day Britain and America and tells the story of the young transgender doctor Ry and his lover, Victor Stein. Stein is a professor with great ambitions in the field of artificial intelligence. The other part is set during the life of the author Mary Shelley and tells the story of what led her to write her novel *Frankenstein* and her life after its publication. What will happen when homo sapiens is no longer the most intelligent being on the planet?

The Booklist Explained

The booklist is compiled by Senia's Department of English Literature. The members of the group are Cees van den Akker, Henny de Boer, Christa de Jager, Marc Kalf, Elise Prins-Kleuskens, Hans van der Weide and Els de Wit. The reader's guides on this list are written by members of the group, volunteers and students studying English.

Availability

The booklist is determined at the beginning of the year in which reading groups make their choice for the next season, thus allowing enough time for the production of the reader's guides. It means that books published between February and August do not yet appear on this list but will be included in next year's selection.

The books on the booklist are available at the time of presentation (March 2022). We cannot guarantee that the availability remains the same in future.

Other Booklists

All the booklists from the other departments are to be found on the Senia website. In particular the booklist of Dutch and Translated Literature may be of interest to English Literature Groups as books from the English booklist may be found from time to time in Dutch translation.

The Senia Books Notice Board

We stimulate exchanging books through the notice board on the website www.senia.nl. If you have any questions or comments on the readers' guides, please send a mail to engels@senia.nl.

March 2022