

## Lord of the Flies by William Golding

### Review by Cameron Donaldson - Year 11

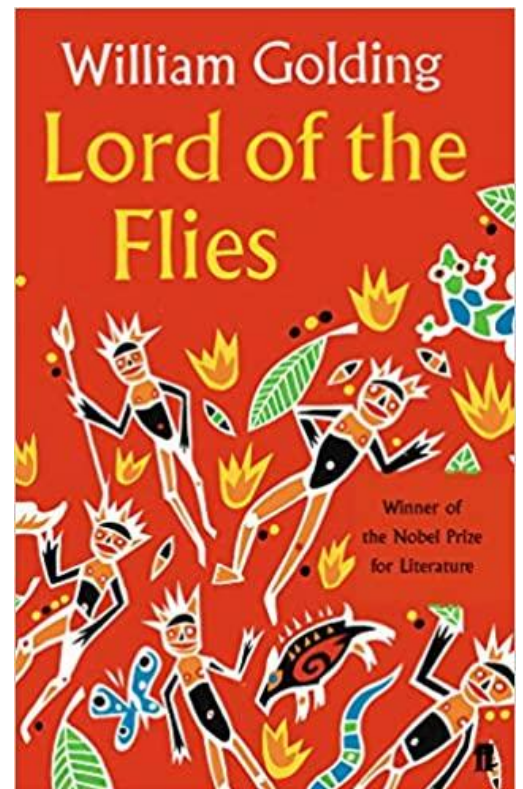
For my book review, I decided to look at Lord of the Flies and the interesting ways that different boys reacted to and tackled any problems that they encountered on the island. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and was fascinated by Golding's take on the children and what they are like when they break away from the rules of society.

The book was interesting from the start as straight away we get an idea of the character of the boys from the way they try and restore law and order on the island. As we delve deeper into the novel, we see that it contains a wide range and variation of characters which leads to a lot of drama and action which increases the pace of the novel, thus increasing the interest of the reader. The variation in characters also added to the tension as we did not know what could happen next, I liked seeing how Ralph tried to install democratic law and order on the island and how that was countered by Jack and his desire to hunt for food and his opposition to democratic ways of thinking.

Normally, allegories aren't my genre of choice, however, I found this allegory very interesting and gripping. It has inspired me to look into other similar books relating to this genre (e.g. The Hunger Games etc.) and to compare the different authors' outlooks on life and morality. I found it an enjoyable book to read that challenged me in various ways whilst also retaining my interest in the plot. The plot was quite easy to understand which I found very good and which is why it retained my interest more than some other novels that I have read.

The message and moral lesson of this book was quite prominent throughout and that was that human beings need law, authority and government to remain disciplined and sane in life. I liked how Golding conveyed this in different ways in the novel (eg. Jack turned insane very quickly without law and order and Ralph eventually succumbed to peer pressure around him and slowly turned less sane near the end.)

I would recommend this book for any young adults that enjoy English and would like to look into issues relating to society, politics and nature and how that affects people over a prolonged period of time.



## Lord of the Rings, by J. R. R. Tolkien

At the moment I'm reading (or technically re-reading) the Lord of the Rings trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien. This series has been one of my favourites since I first read it a few years ago and I have a habit of picking it back up every six months or so – it's just that good!

The plot: The future of middle earth will be decided in the fate of the One Ring, which has been lost for centuries. Powerful forces are unrelenting in their search for it. But fate has placed it in the hands of a young Hobbit named Frodo Baggins, who inherits the Ring and steps into legend. A daunting task lies ahead for Frodo when he becomes the Ringbearer - to destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom where it was forged.

Although I find that occasionally the pacing of these books can be a little too slow for my liking, Tolkien completely makes up for it with multiple epic battle scenes that have you so completely drawn in that you won't be able to put the books down. The characters all have very deep issues and motives and even the typical heroes of the story have their own flaws and imperfections, but getting to witness them overcome their issues while they fight a battle much bigger than themselves is incredibly rewarding. Even Gollum, one of the main villains that even people who haven't read the books will know about, still has enough dimensions that you can't help but pity him by the end of the books.

The detailing in these books is absolutely phenomenal. Tolkien even created several languages that follow their own rules and can be learnt as well as writing a separate book called the Silmarillion which covers the lore of the Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit. The economies and cultures of the different races in these books (Humans, Hobbits, Elves, Dwarfs, Orcs, Goblins and Orekai) are so in depth that you can't help but to believe it.

At first I did find it quite challenging to read, mainly because It is quite a chunky series and when the pacing slows, it really slows. But if you can push through the payoff is amazing. I fell in love with certain characters and they were what really made the books for me.

These books explore multiple issues, but defiantly focuses on the psychological struggle that Frodo goes through, having to avoid the temptation of the Ring while travelling across the world, loosing friends and battling many enemies along the way.

The main message that Tolkien was trying to send with not only this trilogy but also The Hobbit, was that even the smallest, most seemingly insignificant people can be the ones that have the greatest impact.

I would recommend these books to absolutely everyone, the Lord of the Rings is a classic piece of literature that I feel everyone should read at least once in their lifetime. The fantasy world that Tolkien creates can draw anyone in and is a great escape from the stresses and pressures of everyday life.



## Monster By Walter Dean Myers

### Review by Luis Burkin – Year 11

It is a young adult drama novel. Walter Dean Myers book is about Steve Harmon a 16-year-old black man on trial for murder. The prosecutor promises to prove Steve is a monster by the end of the trial. Steve doesn't feel like a monster and understands the role he played in a Harlem drugstore owner's death but he also feels trapped by a system that hasn't provided him with enough support. To understand himself and convince others that he is not a monster, he writes what happens in court into a movie script. Steve is in turmoil about who he wishes he was, who he is, who others think he is and who he knows he will become if he is found guilty. Basically how he got to be where he is, a self discovery and a lesson learnt the hard way.

#### What you enjoyed about the book

I enjoyed the book as it was like a movie and diary, therefore an easy read but interesting at the same time. The book was like reading an intense court room drama which built up suspense making you want to continue to read.

The book gives the facts and evidence so the ending was left for us to decide if Steve was a victim or criminal.

#### What you would have changed or done differently

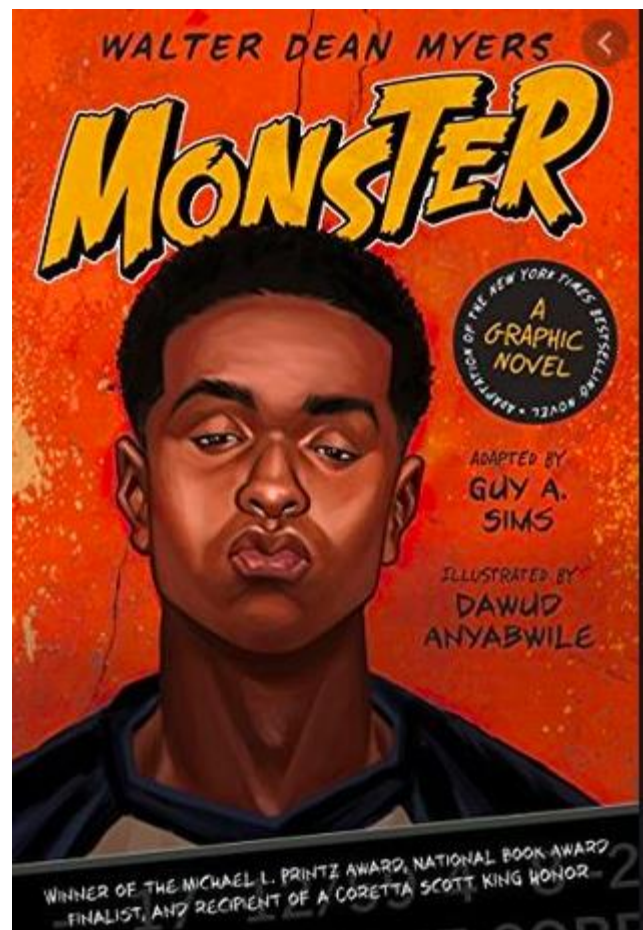
I wouldn't have changed anything as it was an easy read about Steve in prison and on trial for murder. He's young, black and scared as he doesn't know if anyone will believe him and he has to learn to cope with what may be the outcome of the trial.

#### What you learned from it

The story makes you ask questions about guilt, peer pressure, racial stereotyping, and flaws and fairness of our court system. It also makes you realise how some people do automatically assume if you are black you are guilty and how there are people out there that don't get the support especially if growing up in poverty, crime with no positive role models. It's a sad reality.

#### Three things you noticed that were interesting or individual about this writer's style.

It's written like a movie drama and the dialogue is true to the characters. The font size changes in paragraphs, and sometimes in sentences. Some words are bold, some are underlined, and sometimes there are multiple exclamation marks which help the reader feel the emotions. Some sentences are short and jump from one thought to the next and there are repeated words and ideas showing he's stuck in his situation not knowing what to do.



## **Mud, Sweat and Tears – Bear Grylls**

### **Review by Jack Harvey – Year 11**

Mud sweat and tears is the autobiography of adventurer Bear Grylls which takes us from his boyhood all the way to fame along with background information which tells us not just what he has experienced in his life of adventure but how he has become the well-known man he is today.

The autobiography is gripping to read as it covers the exciting and intense events of Grylls' life including climbing Mount Everest and a parachute free fall gone wrong leaving him close to paralysis making my life feel extremely boring when compared to his.

Along with the exciting experiences that Bear Grylls covers in Mud sweat and tears, he also covers his family life and some controversy with claims that his work on his TV was fake.

I rarely read but I enjoyed mud sweat and tears more than I thought that I would. It is an inspiring and thrilling autobiography that shows Bear Grylls' highest and lowest points in life.

It was an easy book to read so it is a good book for a wide range of people who are looking for an exciting read.

This book sends a message to the reader to live life to the fullest and to always follow your dream as Bear Grylls did. Also this novel help tell everyday people of the story is Bear Grylls and how he came from nothing to a famous TV personality.

Therefore I would definitely recommend this book to read as is not like the basic autobiography as it is exiting to read due to Bears adventurous life experiences.





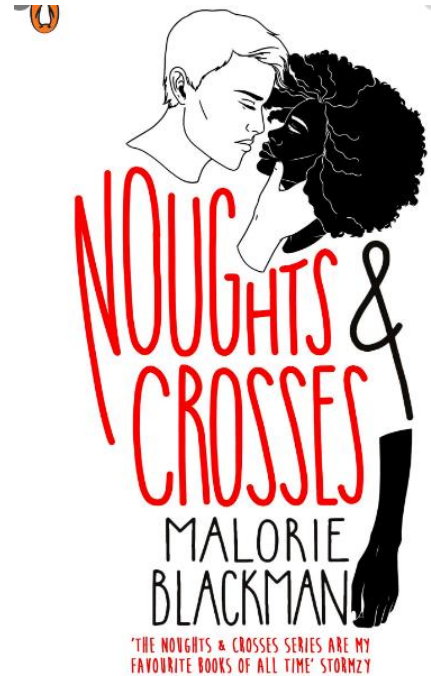
## Noughts and Crosses, by Malorie Blackman

### Review by Isaac Wong – Year 11

Noughts and Crosses explores the challenging problems we face as society. Set in a world where noughts ( "colourless" members of society) are suppressed under the ruling of the superior Crosses (the dark-skinned upper class), we explore powerful themes of Racism and prejudice. Throughout the novel we follow Callum , a Nought and Stephy, a Cross who are separated by not only their families but a hate-filled society where the line distinguishing rights and wrong is not as clear as it seems. This novel provokes a deep sense of thought and reflection on yourself as it leads you down its dark path. If I had to use one quote "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" would definitely describe this novel the best.

The use of switching perspectives and plot twists creates an original and unpredictable story for the reader. The characters also bring a sense of originality with their flawed and unpredictable behaviour. No one's perfect , and no one is equally always in the right bringing a new and slightly chilling atmosphere when reading.

From my experience it is not too difficult to read , however there is quite a few time skips and flash backs which can make it difficult to understand everything that is happening. With its complex and thought provoking messages about quite a few dark themes I would recommend it for teenagers who have a reasonable understanding of how the world works.



## **The Bell Jar, by Sylvia Plath**

### **Review by Ellen Jones – Year 11**

#### Plot:

The Bell Jar is the only novel by the poet Sylvia Plath and is a semi-autobiographical novel depicting her early life spent in New York City.

Plath's alter-ego of Esther Greenwood seems to have a bright future ahead of her after winning a competition to help edit a magazine along with 11 other girls. However after many bad experiences in New York we witness the beginning of her mental break in which she loses all hope and interest for the future.

After returning home and dropping out of college her mother decides that something is wrong with her daughter ultimately taking Esther to see a psychiatrist who refers her to a unit specialising in shock- therapy. This method however does not seem to cure the declining writer who continues to spiral as the novel continues.

#### Character:

The main character Esther is somewhat unlikeable in the beginning of the novel due to her cynical outlook and harsh judgements of others in her life, however as the plot continues the audience develops sympathy towards her. The entire novel is from a first-persons perspective allowing the audience to truly understand Esther as she develops.

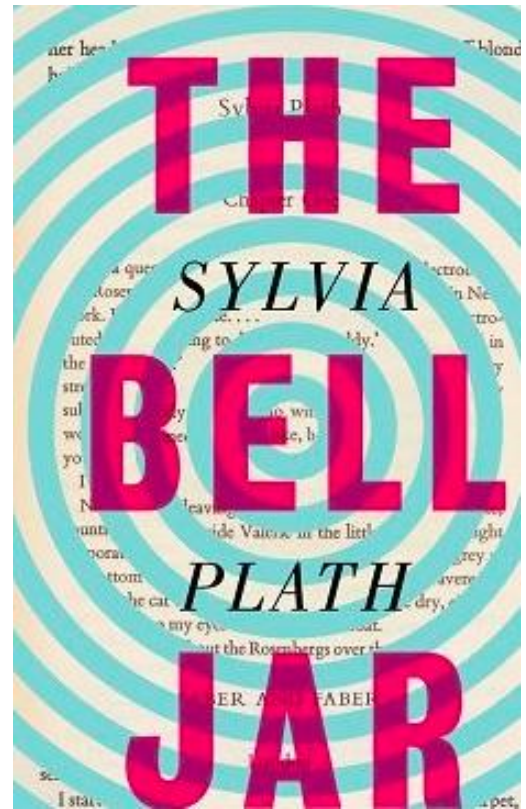
Under closer inspection it is not only the main character that holds great relevance but fleeting people within the narrative such as Joan (Esther's childhood friend) who resurfaces frequently. She initially appears as a well accomplished young woman with bright prospects, much like Esther must seem to others in her earlier years, however she re-appears later in the novel in the same psych ward as the protagonist. This scenario may possibly be exploring the way in which we do not often take notice of certain health issues or accept them ourselves until it is too late.

#### Style:

The way in which the book was written is relatively easy to read as it flows in chronological order, following the main character Esther Greenwood through her life. The point that might make this novel hard to read however the content that is discussed and the large use of metaphors which Sylvia Plath uses to express her thought and emotions.

#### Message:

Though maybe not the best book to read at this current point considering it is relatively depressing, I think this book presents a message of self-doubt and uncertainty which is important for people of my age group in particular and many others to read. It may not be appropriate however for younger years due to the fact that it deals with quite harsh themes such as clinical depression and suicide.



Though being published over half a century ago the message within the novel is still highly relevant today. It depicts a highly intelligent woman in the academic sense but she lacks a clear vision with what she wants to do with her life.

#### Issues:

The Bell Jar explores a large amount of issues. However, the most prominent is arguably psychological, especially considering that a large amount of the novel takes place in numerous psychiatric hospitals (referred to as asylums within the book and during the time period). The title itself is also a primary metaphor for the main characters feelings of self-confinement and entrapment – she feels like she is stuck inside her own head, repeating the same thoughts and experiences over and over again with no means of escape.

Another important issue is that of social, as the plot explores the way in which society reacts to mental health issues and how they were dealt with in the past. This further causes the reader to question whether our modern society is substantially evolved from this state, as even though we are obviously more accepting there is still somewhat of a stigma surrounding such topics.

#### Author:

Sylvia Plath was an American poet and novelist who is credited with helping advance the genre of confessional poetry.

Shortly after the publication of the Bell Jar in 1963 Plath committed suicide at age 30. At this point she was in a failing marriage with Ted Hughes who was also a well-known poet. It is widely believed that he mistreated the late Plath even destroying her suicide note, unfinished novel and last journal after her death.

Sylvia Plath originally published The Bell Jar under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in order to avoid critics from linking her work to the story of her own life. It was only in 1966 (three years after her suicide) that the true author was revealed, giving the audience further context to the tragic events.

#### Extract from the Novel

“I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet.”

Above is one of the most well-known and relevant extracts from 'The Bell Jar'. Ultimately the book is about a female attempting to find her way in a society which is both intimidating and which still viewed women as inferior – and how under so much pressure one must either choose a path or watch everyone move on without them.

**The Book Thief, by Markus Zusak**  
**Review by Jacob Stidwill- Year 11**

This book is set during Nazi Germany and follows a young girl who is being raised by foster parents. Her foster father teaches her how to read and she steals books from lots of different locations. It follows her life and what I find interesting is that it is narrated by Death, and so has a unique viewing point for the girl's life.

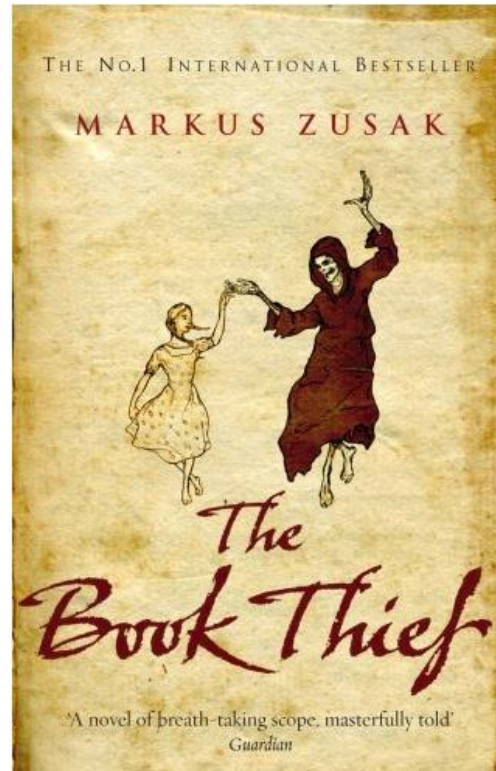
It is very original and hard to predict what was going to happen next. The characters are very interesting especially Liesel, the main character; Rudy, a young boy who idolises Jesse Owens and Max, a Jewish German who is living in the basement of their house. They are all likeable and have good chemistry in their scenes together.

It wasn't a genre I would normally read which I think is a bildungsroman and so was a nice change.

The book could be hard to follow at times: I found the start to be confusing but after that I was very invested in the characters and where the story was going.

It asks questions about the nature of humanity, especially of children. This is emphasised by the time period it was set in and the evil influences that could corrupt now only Liesel but her foster parents and friends.

I would recommend it as it is very interesting and addictive to read, mostly it can take your mind off other things. It explores social and psychological issues and how the social ones affect the psychological ones.





## The Cellar, by Natasha Preston

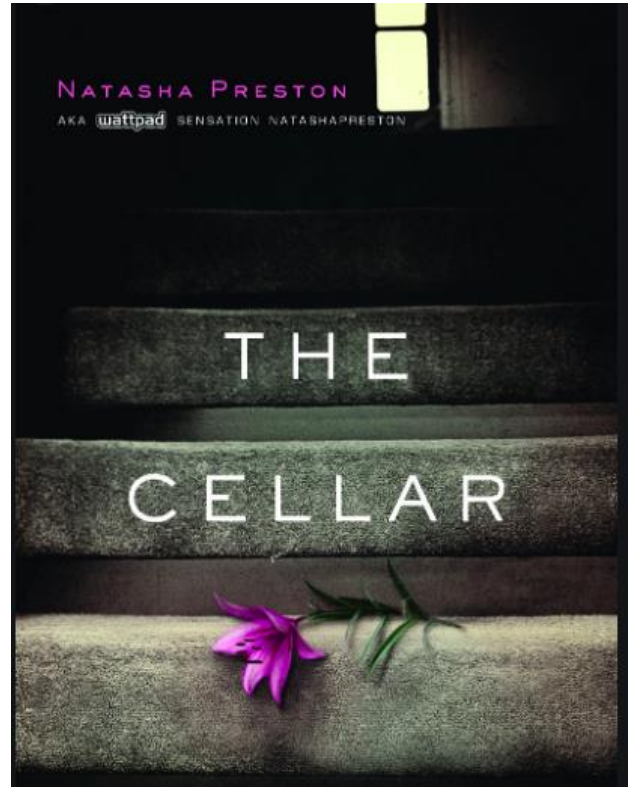
Reviewed by Amelie Diaz

One of my favourite books that got me into reading again is called 'The Cellar' by Natasha Preston. The book itself doesn't contain very complex vocabulary or structure but the plot and adventure itself was very addicting that I had to force myself to stop reading it a couple of times so I could get on with schoolwork. It is about a girl who gets abducted by this creepy man and her mindset becomes distorted as she begins to forget what it was like outside in the real world.

My favourite thing about this book is that we hear from a lot of different characters' perspectives. I think this is significant because it made me question who I should be feeling sympathy for. This is because the writer digs deep into each character's past, their true emotions and feelings throughout each small event. This means that the reader gets an insight as to why some characters act in a certain way.

Since this book is about kidnapping and mental health, I think the writer was trying to show how quickly our minds and perspective of life can change through the manipulation of others. As the story goes on, you can see that the main character's mind gets distorted dramatically as she begins to forget who she is. Preston presents Lily's (the main character) psychological issues ambiguously at the start meaning the reader doesn't catch this at first since the writer wants to portray how easily our minds can be manipulated.

I am happy to say that this book did meet my expectations. Normally I enjoy reading about journeys/adventures a character would want to go on (a dream or passion), but this book was about an unwanted journey (someone who ended up going on an adventure mentally and physically). I found myself very hooked to the storyline, completing the book in just under 2 days! I highly recommend this book for someone who wants an easy but interesting read.



**The Enemy, by Charlie Higson**  
**Book review by Charlotte Hiscocks – Year 11**

**Plot:**

The story of this book is that all people over the age of 15 known as (“grown ups”) have been caught with a deadly disease. The lucky ones died, the unlucky ones were left starving, crazed like a zombie wandering the streets eating anything they could get their hands on. Even children. The remaining children created groups and gangs inside rivalry supermarkets, morrisons and Waitrose creating their own methods to survival. Now it is up to a group leading their way across London to find a safe place before they're all picked off...

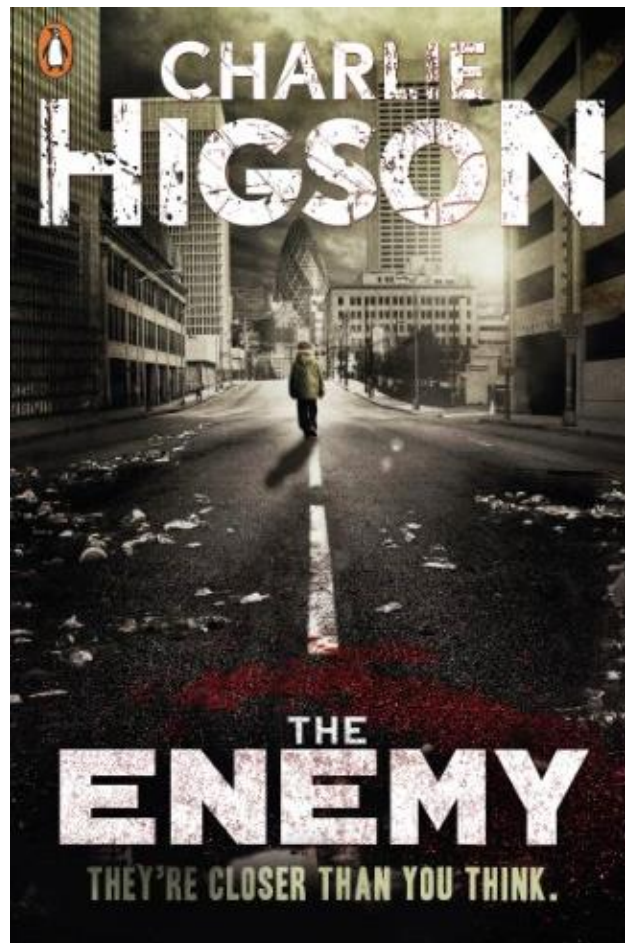
Genre: thriller, horror, dystopian.

It is also a gothic book because even though there are loads of killings and death it doesn't really focus on the gore but more the emotional trauma suffered after leading to bad mental states.

This is the genre I normally go for because I find it really exciting and engaging.

I think the book is a really interesting dive into what the future could lead to, especially with the current pandemic of the coronavirus which is most deadly to the elderly. It also made me re-think how well I would cope if I was thrown into such extreme circumstances fighting for my survival and faced with constant fear and challenges.

I would recommend this book to any teenager that loves an action dramatic book or a different take on how the future will unfold.



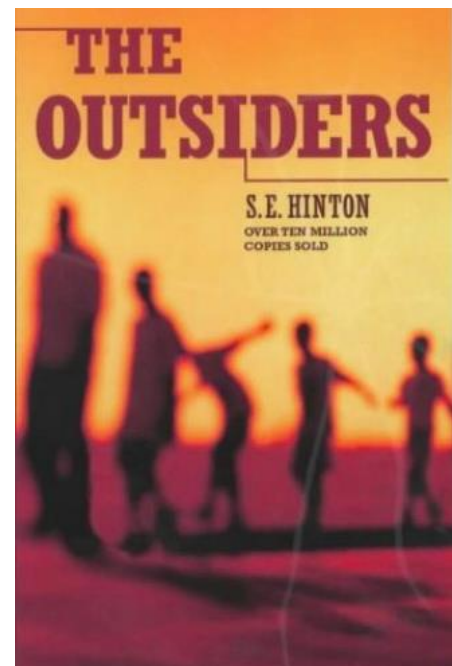
## The Outsiders- Book Review

Review by Ella Robinson – Year 11

**Plot:** This book is a book about a 14 year old gang member (or 'Greaser') Ponyboy Curtis and his coming of age in mid-1960's America. Ponyboy is an orphan from the poorest side of town, and was born and raised into the gang without ever truly questioning why. The plot mainly revolves around his family and friendships and where his loyalties lie and where they should lie according to society and the rest of the world. The Greasers are opposed by gangs of rich teenagers from the West Side, nicknamed 'Socs' as slang for their upper-class place in society. After the brutal murder of a gang member, Ponyboy is forced to call everything he ever thought he knew into question as he suddenly becomes aware of what really divides the poor from the rich, and the Greasers from the rest of society.

**Characters:** There are many characters in The Outsiders, but they are easily distinguishable as they all represent different aspects of society and life. As the story is told from a first-person perspective, the characters all appear to the protagonist as one sided and almost stereotypical, as Ponyboy deliberately labels people as the tropes that he reads about constantly. However, they become more believable and three-dimensional as the story develops and they have to cope with unprecedented circumstances, and the reader learns the different sides to them at the same time as Ponyboy himself. Some of the characters include the Greasers, such as the Curtis Brothers (Darry, Sodapop and Ponyboy himself), as well as Johnny Cade, Two-Bit Matthews, Dallas Winston and Steve Randle. The Socs include Cherry Valance, Marcia, Randy Adderson and Bob Sheldon. As the story is told from Ponyboy's perspective, it is told with a heavy bias, and so most the characters at the beginning are either presented as likeable and heroic or the complete opposite. It is towards the end of the novel when the lines between the heroes and villains of the book begin to blur, and it appears that everyone is outside of those distinguishable tropes.

**Genre:** this book is predominantly a bildungsroman as it tells the story of Ponyboy maturing and developing a greater understanding of the world and how it works. However, it also takes place over a very short period of time, which gives an insight into how teenagers exposed to such horrors are forced to grow up far too quickly for their age. However, it is also a valuable insight into society. At the beginning, the Greasers are heroes for Ponyboy and the antagonists of society, whilst the Socs are the enemies of Greasers and hailed as a great asset to society. It shows the constraints that are placed upon them from the moment they are born into a lower-class family with a lower standard of living, and tells a story about growing up from a different perspective than its contemporary readers were used to.



**Style:** Overall, I found this book very easy to read. I read it at fourteen, the same age as the protagonist and I felt that it accurately presented the naivety and arrogance of being a teenager, and thinking that you know everything whilst beginning to question why certain things happen and why there is always a pressure to do things a certain way. However, one downside is that the slang and some of the language used is quite outdated, but overall not too difficult to pick up once you get accustomed to the way that they speak.

**Recommendations:** I would recommend this book to those aged 12 and above as there are some mature themes such as gang violence and death. It is also quite sad in some places so I would recommend it to someone who is not opposed to getting emotionally involved in a book. It is not exhausting to read as the majority of language used is not too complex and the message is not too difficult to comprehend- in addition it is also quite a short story that can easily be read in a day.

**Message:** As previously stated, this book is about growing up and discovering how the world and society functions. However, it presents this perspective from a different place than its original 1967 audience was used to- from a poor and unprivileged perspective, someone usually at the receiving end of the hatred that was given by its readers. All the characters are vastly different in personality, disproving the assumption that all gang members are the exact same and that they are all hardened criminals. Although this book overall lacks diversity, with the vast majority of the characters being white and male, this reflects its time period where prejudices existed as well as portraying a concept of mob mentality, and how outsiders see gang members- as one and the same. This book tackles issues such as class, gender, innocence and divisions as Ponyboy realises exactly how society views he and his family and realises what he can do to change that. This story carries an important message; that everyone in the city, regardless of class, gender or any other dividing circumstances sees the same sunset.



## **This Mortal Coil, by Emily Suvada**

### **Review by Sophie Jones – Year 11**

This is the one book that I would recommend to anybody and everybody. It is a science fiction novel, with elements of romance and dystopia all blended into page-turning and adrenaline surging book.

The book starts; the main protagonist Catarina describing how a global pandemic (unnervingly ironic considering our current situation) that occurred two years ago has still left massive cracks in their society where they had significant issues with cannibalism due to food shortages. The book is based around the idea of DNA; and how it can be manipulated and modified. It plays against the idea of evolution and 'God's plan', where characteristics can be controlled by science – a fresh new take on the idea of man vs nature.

The novel opens with Catarina describing the beauty of her estranged surroundings, but it isn't long before unnatural elements and details of their dystopian reality began to infiltrate her peaceful depiction of nature.

Suvada blends these two inverses to show how this reality has become routine. The book is fast paced – I read this book in a couple of hours and didn't even realise it. Often when one hears about a book that is 'dystopian themed', they think of books like 'The Hunger Games' or 'Divergent', and this is a much newer, fresher approach to dystopian fiction, and in my opinion, a much better one. What I think makes it so indescribable is that their dystopia isn't THAT far from our society today; we currently do have the resources to attempt what the book warns against. Is it only a matter of time before we follow the route that 'This Mortal Coil' does?

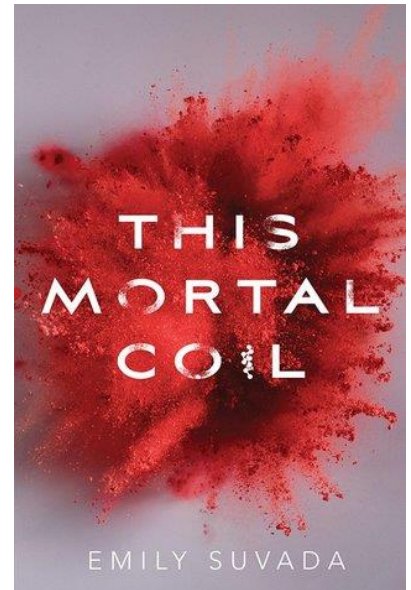
Catarina is one of the most well developed and well thought out characters that I have ever met. It is hard to say why without giving away the major plot twist of the book, but she has so many layers. Her relationships with people are also well thought out and mirror realistic tensions. The characters are relatable; with many parallels that we would find in our society today which only aids the reader in becoming more invested in the book. You can tell that Suvada is extremely invested in her characters. I first read this book when I was 13, and I can still remember every detail of every character three years later. The characters genuinely help make the book as good as it is.

Genuinely, this is the piece of literature that made me fall in love with the science fiction genre. Prior, I tended to stick to classic novels, as I didn't really know what I liked to read. As a child I struggled to find books that were appropriate for my age but still satisfied the well thought out plot and vocabulary that I craved, and this book did just that. The genre makes it feel almost educational, I walked away from this book with my mind reeling; and I learned information that has continued to aid me in biology exams since!

I found the book relatively easy to read; the vocabulary was figurative yet comprehensible, but what made the book so good was the constant plot twist and use of equivocation, dramatic irony and reveals. I almost wish that I had found the book when I was younger so I could have explored the genre more.

Every time I read this book; I find a new message unveiled to me that leaves me pondering on it for days. Family, science, destiny and the true nature of humanity to name a few. The book has a strong link to the Mandela theory – the idea that you believe something so strongly that you begin to believe that it really happened, and you form images in your head of the experience. I cannot say much more about this without giving away another major plot twist, but this book is a serious mind game to read, unpick and analyse.

Psychological issues plague the protagonist, and I found that the book left me questioning the true intentions of everyone around me. Sometimes I find dystopian stories too far fetched for me to believe, but the issues in this really link into everyday life. Geographical issues are involved; the protagonist has to



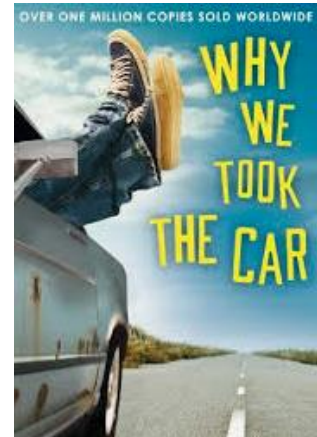
deal with harsh surroundings coupled with the devastating fragments of physical health that the country has been torn apart by.

I love to read; I am the type of person that once I have read a book, I never want to read it again for I do not get the same feeling of suspense and trepidation. However, every time I read this book (I must have read it over 30 times), I find a new detail to scrutinise and analyse, a new bit of information revealed, or more parallels that I can find from the novel and our society today. It is a must read for anyone and everyone.

## Why We Took the Car (originally called Tschick), by Wolfgang Herrndorf

### Review by Isabella Osso – Year 11

'Why We Took the Car' by Wolfgang Herrndorf is a contemporary young adult novel translated from German and originally called 'Tschick', which is the name of one of the protagonists. It won the German Teen Literature Award and focuses on the unlikely friendship between 14-year-old middle-class Mike Klingenberg and Tschick, a taciturn new classmate from Russia involved in petty crime. When Mike is left alone in the house for the summer, Tschick shows up at his house with a blue stolen Lada and convinces him to take a road trip to Wallachia. In the hopes that this adventure may prevent him from being "the most boring person on the planet and the biggest coward", Mike agrees, and their journey around the backstreets of Berlin in the 'borrowed' car begins.



Although the blurb of this novel sounded cliché and predictable to me, this book was refreshingly original. It was in fact the first page of the book, where Mike sarcastically calls himself a hero as he bleeds all over floor of a police station, that convinced me to read it. The novel starts at the end of their journey, before flashing back to Mike's summary of his life before Tschick arrived, and then the events after.

I like contemporary novels, but I often find some either too unoriginal or completely unbelievable. But this novel was neither of these things. The pace was never too slow, despite the lack of really fast paced chase scenes some readers like, and the story manages to perfectly mix seeming realistic in some moments with a dreamlike, almost surreal, feel in others that combines to create a 'larger than life' feeling. The narration perfectly fits with the voice of a 14-year-old boy, and is funny and insightful without being forced, and touching and painful at points without becoming overly sentimental. Furthermore, there are some beautiful descriptions of lazy suburbs and scenery, and I really enjoyed learning more about Germany.

The characters may have been my favourite part of this novel. Both Mike and Tschick are very well-developed characters, and Mike's tone is refreshing and straightforward. I found Tschick a fascinating character as I gradually got to know more about him and found out how he is much wiser than should be possible at his age, despite his bad decisions. He seems to understand people in a way that Mike doesn't, despite being untalkative and rude at times. Herrndorf does not shy away from making the characters they meet along the way charmingly odd, and even if they are only in the novel for a short while, they are still skilfully written.

Lastly, I really enjoyed the issues and messages explored throughout. It was never glaringly obvious that Herrndorf was trying to force a message or meaning, it just fitted seamlessly into the storyline. He explores the contrast between different types of dysfunctional parent-child relationships, and one of my favourite things is Mike's love towards his alcoholic mother, even though she is both emotionally and physically unavailable at times. On the other hand, Mike's relationship with his father may be painful for some to read. Perhaps the biggest message though, is the one about friendship and growing up. Tschick and Mike's friendship only grows stronger throughout the novel, despite their differences, and I really enjoyed watching their quiet solidarity forming. The end of the novel is bittersweet, but also hopeful, as Mike comes to

terms with the fact that maybe 99% of people are bad, like the news and 'stranger-danger' would have him believe, but during his travels, he has managed to meet the 1% of people who are nice.

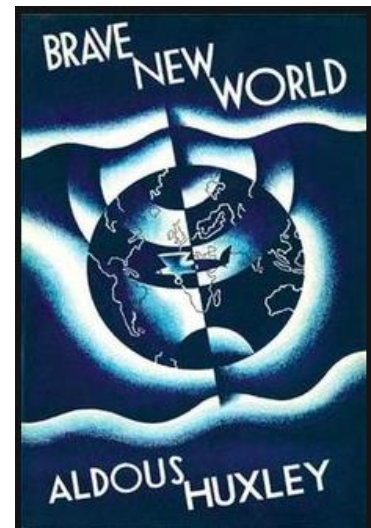


## **Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley**

### **Review by Miles Hitchens- Year 11**

History is more or less bunk.” – Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company

‘Brave New World’ is not a thriller. It isn’t comedic, nor is it the sort of book where ultimately ‘good’ prevails. I’ll tell you now, if you’re looking for a light read or relatable characters, or for a comprehensive plot, this book won’t be for you. What Aldous Huxley does offer in his 1932 novel is cynicism, subversion and speculation. As I came to close the book after the final 229th page of my Vintage Classics edition of the text, I was frankly left disturbed. I was confused. But most importantly my mind was clacking with consideration – little-by-little the dystopia scribed into those pages seemed to confess itself to me in several aspects of the world we find ourselves in. Or should I say utopia?



You see, the London we’re dropped into in chapter one is a joyous place loaded with happy, stable citizens – without any freedom for independent thought. Babies are grown in bottles, infants are mentally conditioned with “repetitions” (recorded messages hammered into their sub-consciences). There is no challenge in Huxley’s future: everybody is employed and everybody loves their work. With the folk chartered into different classes (at the top, the tall quick-witted alpha plus; at the bottom, the less vertically inclined epsilon’s who are entirely dim), humanity in the year 2540ce has been streamlined into the biological equivalent of an assembly line: the alpha plus are given just enough mental stimulation to prevent them from becoming apathetic, but not enough to become fatigued and inefficient at running this society.

But how has mankind so readily given up its freedom, its ability to express itself? The answer: soma, an opiate. “And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there’s always soma to give you a holiday from the facts.” The citizens of the novel have an unsettling reliance on the drug; a controlled delusion, it offers pacification, consolidation and control. It is instant gratification as a hallucinogenic. Huxley’s cynicism is evident in this inclusion, and as readers we are challenged by his proposition: is this all it takes to reduce a population to mindless pawns? I dare you to consider this yourself – what would it take to unwrap you, for yourself to lose individual thought? Is it less than what you might expect?

Huxley’s future, similar to Ray Bradbury’s ‘Fahrenheit 451’, is deprived of books and the literary arts. More than this, and similar to George Orwell’s ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’, history has been censored. ‘Brave New World’ predates these other two pivotal works of dystopian fiction by a matter of decades. It goes not only to show how prominent Huxley’s work was in shaping the genre he writes for – dystopian fiction – but also how

influential the writer was in shaping the superstitions of his era, the 20th century.

Exempt from this rigorous system is John the savage. Raised in a primitive civilisation, the "savage Reservation", John represents the antithesis of the London society central to the novel. Made literate through a diet of Shakespeare (significant here as an emblem of art and humanity, the writer of many famous Histories) and a devout believer of tribalistic religion he juxtaposes the 'Fordism' followed by his contemporaries as he's swallowed into the dystopia. Fordism follows the principals of efficiency, at times sacrificing a vision of 'humanity'; in the words of Henry Ford, regarding the actions and art of our ancestors: "History is more or less bunk".

Intriguingly, I was no more compelled by the philosophy of John the savage than the bleaker alternative. His religious desire for sobriety and abhorrence for the inconsequential brain-trips of his peers lends to a self-destructive sense of morality (occasionally, and disturbingly, expressed with physical punishment).

'Brave New World' is, of course, a challenging read. However, in trying to unravel the truth behind this anti-utopian vision, in building your understanding of it page-by-page, perhaps you will witness what are in my opinion the remarkable parallels between itself and our modern Britain.

And so, Huxley presents the perfect anti-utopia, 'idyllic' and free of struggle. Will you reject it? Will you accept it? Or will you notice something familiar about this Brave New World?

## Good Omens, by Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman

Review by Katie Addis – Year 11

### Why I think you should read Good Omens:

Let's be real here, many of you reading this probably aren't the book type. Or perhaps you are which may explain why you're reading this book recommendation. I myself was never the book type either, until last year, when I discovered my favourite Genre (or rather writer); Terry Pratchett, one of the co-authors of this novel (and famous for his Discworld series). The other writer being Neil Gaiman (who also wrote Coraline). Regardless, Good Omens has a brilliant cast of characters and a light-hearted tone (despite the heavy plot) and furthermore, is simply a joy to read.

### Synopsis:

For those who didn't pick up on this, Good Omens is almost a direct parody of the Horror Film "The Omen" with even the title being a play on this. The synopsis for The Omen, as Wikipedia puts it goes as follows:

"a young child replaced at birth by an American diplomat unbeknownst to his wife, after their biological child dies shortly after birth; as a series of mysterious events and violent deaths occur around the family as Damien enters childhood, they come to learn he is in fact the [Antichrist](#)."

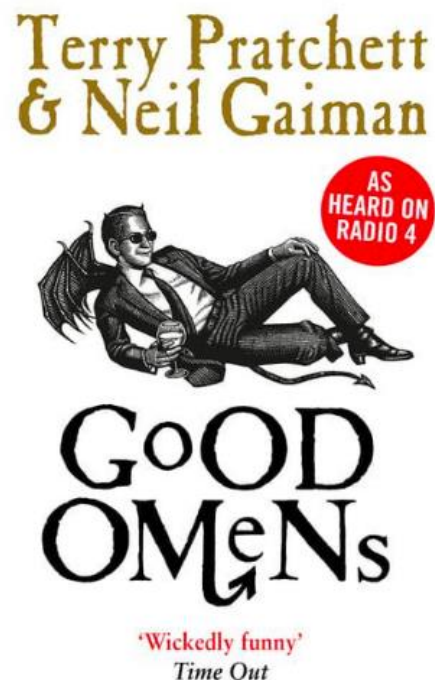
Well this is the basis for the novel Good Omens. Except we mostly follow the Charismatic Demon tasked with planting the Antichrist, Crowley with his Endearing 'opponent' Aziraphale, tasked to stop the Antichrist. In the end, both Heaven and Hell has the shared goal to bring about the end of the Earth and start the last war between the two sides, and for personal reasons (but mostly because they enjoy Earth too much) both Crowley and Aziraphale plot to thwart Armageddon.

But that's just the vague overview, besides Religion there is of course witches, witch-finders and horsemen. After all what is an apocalypse without the four, War, Famine, Pestilence (though they go by many names) and Death?

### Genre/Tone:

Now that the plot is out of the way, it makes more sense when I say that the genre and tone is a bit unusual. I can't quite place the genre but from here on I'll label it as a Religious Parody as there are plenty of references to the Bible throughout and our main cast is of course, occult and ethereal.

As mentioned previously, the tone is excellent, it's light hearted and the novel doesn't take itself too seriously which is ideal for a parody. Although when the stakes are high the tone switches to match the



action. (If you, like myself, are a fan of comedic parodies, I would highly recommend the Discworld series; a collection of around 40 novels written by Pratchett, mostly all parody fantasy cliques, genres, archetypes or plots.)

### Characters:

Besides the plot and the phenomenal writing, the characters is what really sold the book to me, so, I'll try and do them justice in this segment:

#### Crowley, the Demon:

His dress sense and actions implies that he's a typical demon; red and black, mean for no reason and all round a bit of a jerk. But he worries a lot throughout the book and deeply cares for Aziraphale (his companion). Crowley drives a black Bentley at 90mph down Oxford Street whilst blasting Queen. He's also highly proud of creating the monstrosity that is the M25 (oh, and Manchester!).

As Crowley puts it himself, he didn't so much fall from heaven but more so "Sauntered vaguely downwards"

#### Aziraphale, the Angel:

At first inspection, this angel seems to be Crowley's opposite although, in the same way that Crowley acts tough but really can do good, Aziraphale can do bad, (including swearing). In the Duo, Aziraphale is the polite and endearing "Southern Pansy" who owns an old book shop in Soho although refuses to sell any books. He and Crowley are tasked to stop Armageddon and thwart both Heaven and Hell.

Aziraphale used to have a flaming sword but as he puts it he "had it here a moment ago" and he "must have put it down somewhere".

#### Adam Young, the Antichrist:

Adam and his gang (called "the Them") are one of the four main sub plots. During his sections, we mostly follow him and his antics in Tadfield, the location of Armageddon. The Them mostly get up to normal childlike behaviour until Adam starts bending the world around him to fit his newfound belief in conspiracy theories, such as Atlantis.

#### Anathema Device, the witch:

Another fun subplot revolves around Anathema's struggles to stop Armageddon in Tadfield. Her task, based on the prophecies of her long dead relative Agnes Nutter (witch), is to locate The Antichrist and stop the apocalypse. The book "The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter" detail the precise events that will occur up until next Saturday, just after tea, when Armageddon will occur unless Anathema can help it.

#### Seagant Shadwell and Private Pulsifer, the Witchfinder Army:

The last of the four subplots involves Shadwell's incompetence, as well as Newton Pulsifer helping Anathema in Tadfield to stop The Antichrist (Adam). Both the witchfinders are dense in their own way, creating funny and somehow charming characters.



### Conclusion:

Alright, that was probably a bit too detailed for a simple recommendation but if it isn't obvious by now, I am incredibly passionate about the book, the characters and plot especially. Even Pratchett's brilliant foot notes and metaphors, adding funny yet unnecessary information which really creates a love for the characters.

But if you really don't want to read it, or a book seems too daunting (even though it's only 400 pages), then I would still recommend the TV show. Although some interactions are obviously cut out, the characters remain the same and the plot is fairly accurate to the book. So, although I highly recommend the book, the TV show is alright too, I guess.

Regardless of my ramblings, if you choose to read or reread *Good Omens*, or even watch it, do have fun!

## Hound of the Baskervilles, by Arthur Conan Doyle

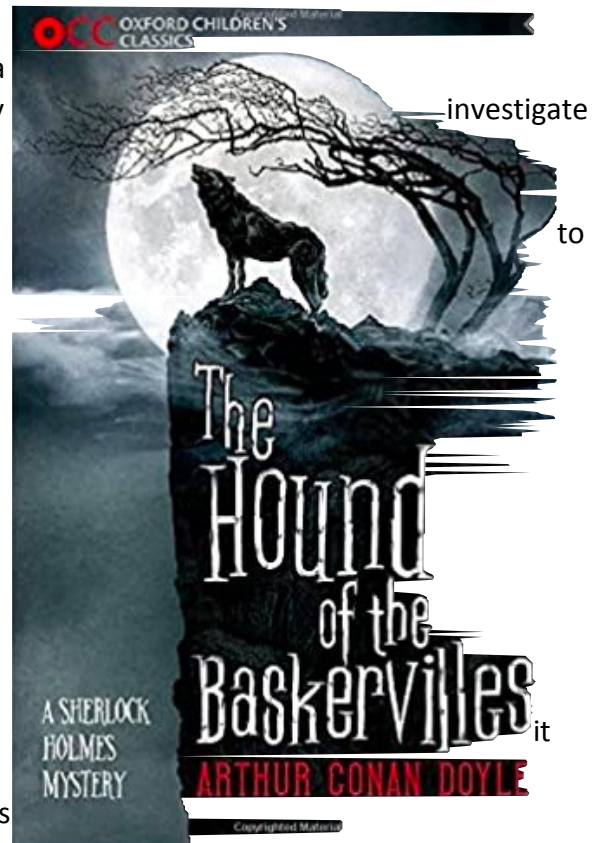
Book review by Sam Osborne- Year 11

### Plot Summary

The book opens with a mysterious case of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson investigating a cane which they found within their office. They investigate into which visitor left this cane and therefore who it belongs to. Holmes predicts that an individual with the name James Mortimer was show up later and claim the cane as it is his. Mortimer then goes to explain the myth of Henry Baskerville and links it to the black hound. Holmes and Watson agree to take on the case to investigate around it. They come across evidence and depict along a journey to discover who the Baskerville is.

### My Personal Review

Throughout the book it held a large amount of tension and mystery which intrigued me as there were lots of twists and reveals. Although was set in the Victorian Era the book was rather old fashioned. The pace of the novel was rather slow moving at some points due to the excessive detail and story telling involved. The language included throughout was very formal which benefitted me as a reader as it has expanded my vocabulary knowledge. By revolving the book about the protagonist 'Sherlock Holmes' the book contains many traits of his such as being unpredictable and also leaves a theme of intelligence running throughout. I normally choose to go for something spine chilling and tense which fits the lines perfectly of what this book is about. The plot followed a basic structure which built 3 quarters of the way through. I would highly recommend this book if you are a fan of thriller and tense atmospheres as I thoroughly enjoyed the book. My favourite section was when the writer describes the sinister events of the Baskerville family as the pace begins to quicken up here.



## **Jamaica Inn, by Daphne Du Maurier**

**By Anum Farooq – Year 11**

Plot summary-Jamaica Inn follows protagonist Mary Yellan, who, after moving to Cornwall to stay with her aunt and uncle, seeks to discover the true purpose of the inn and why it's not open to the public.

I thought that the plot of this novel was unique as I have not read or heard of anything like this. The mixture of genres-romance, mystery, crime-ensures that there is something for everyone.

The novel has plenty of shocking twists and reveals which keeps the audience guessing, and as the novel is written from Yellan's perspective, it helps make the book feel much more realistic and genuine; it allows the readers to feel like they're a part of the book as well.

The character of Mary Yellan is portrayed as a strong, independent woman, however her life is steeped in loss, as she loses her mum, her home and her independence as she is forced to go to her aunt's inn following her mum's death. Yellan's tragic past causes the audience to like and sympathize with her, perhaps even relate to her character.

Daphne du Maurier is known for her gothic novels such as her other well-known novel, Rebecca, a mystery-romance. I occasionally read gothic novels; however, they are not my first choice when it comes to choosing books to read. When I first read Jamaica Inn, it was different but better than what I thought it was going to be like. The plot and characters were more interesting and addictive than what I had anticipated and kept me reading on. Although Jamaica Inn is a gothic novel, it does not use elements of the supernatural like ghosts and does not use old castles and manors as its setting. The novel was inspired by Maurier's stay at the eponymous Jamaica Inn in Cornwall.

I found the style of writing was surprisingly easy to read, considering the time period in which it was written; the descriptions were extremely detailed.

I think that the message of this book is that not everything is as it seems and that not everyone can be trusted, no matter their appearance or their actions.

I would recommend this book for anyone who likes to read gothic novels as Jamaica Inn encompasses many of the conventions of the Gothic genre, while also including a strong female heroine which defies the typical representation of women in this particular genre. In my opinion, I think the best time to read this novel is when it is a bleak, dull day or at winter as I feel Jamaica Inn fits the mood at those times.

Jamaica Inn explores moral, legal and social issues.

