

# inote

[ Irish National Organisation  
for Teachers of English ]



MAGAZINE 2019



# EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first INOTE Magazine.

Over a year ago the INOTE Committee got together to discuss ideas, ideas that might positively impact our profession. One of those ideas was a magazine.

Conor Murphy is an English teacher in Skibbereen Community School. A colleague recently called him a 'very senior staff member'. Conor feels that the use of the word 'very' was unnecessary.

There's something reassuring about the tangible aspects of a printed magazine, something you can hold, throw, spill coffee on (or at least make those lovely coffee cup rings).

We wanted something to promote INOTE, to discuss changes, to discuss new texts, to have a bit of fiction, to have interesting articles related to our subject. Something constructive, something free of politics.



Kate teaches English and French at Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy. She writes a blog at [www.ellenkmetcalf.wordpress.com](http://www.ellenkmetcalf.wordpress.com) and is currently the ASTI subject representative for English

You will find an article by Carl Hendrick discussing the new Junior Cycle but, as far as we could, we tried to remain encouraging in our approach.

The magazine committee is made up of a wide spectrum of teachers in terms of how we view classroom teaching but one thing we all have in common is a love of our subject and we hope that this is what comes through most over the following pages.

A special thank you to William Wall for judging our short story competition. Wall (writer of the recently released *Suzy, Suzy* as well as the poem *Ghost Estate*) was kind enough to give us a short comment on the three finalists, which you'll find before Robert McDermott's winning entry, *On The Beach* at Coronado.

Also included are the winning Junior and Senior poetry entries. Once again we are reminded of the power of poetry to both inspire and help us explore those tricky themes that some find difficult to articulate.



Elaine Dobbyn is a teacher at St. Joseph's Patrician College, 'The Bish', in Galway. She is a former Membership Secretary for INOTE and has worked in the professional development of English teachers. She is also a regular contributor to the *Written Word* Leaving Cert supplement in the *Irish Independent*.

But we are always open to suggestions and contributions. If you have any ideas, any articles, any issues you want to discuss, or have discussed, just email us. Contact details are on page 10. But try and keep within the ethos of the magazine.

And, of course, remember to spread the word about INOTE as you pass the magazine around the staffroom table, as you wipe the biscuit crumbs from between the pages. You too can get involved through here or through organising events in your local Education Centre. Just contact us through our website.

Now, where is that coffee...

Conor Murphy, Editor





Claire O'Brien is a Laois woman. She teaches English and German at St Mary's Academy CBS, Carlow, where she is also a debating/public speaking mentor. She moonlights as a journalist and broadcaster, producing and presenting a weekly arts show on Midlands 103 radio. The book she wishes she'd written is Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.



Conor Enright is an English and History teacher in St. Brogan's, Bandon. In recent years he has taught himself IT and is now compelled to fix computers and fulfill technological needs, like formatting Subject Association Magazines.

Cover by John Nolan:

John Nolan makes a habit of always carrying a camera. Thankfully, modern smartphones have made this easier and John used his phone to capture this image of sunset at an abandoned school in East Mayo.



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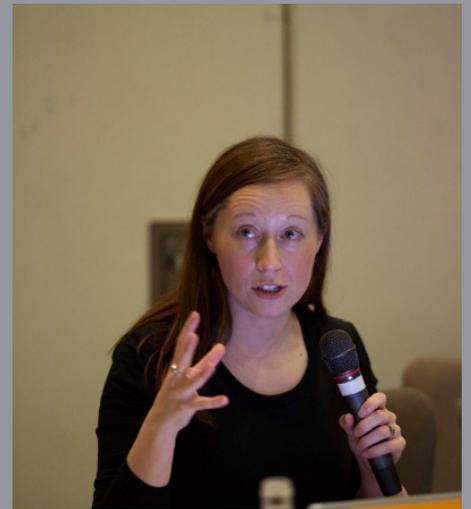
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# NCCA

# INTERVIEW

Evelyn O'Connor is the outgoing Education Officer for Post Primary English, and the current Acting Director (Post Primary) for Curriculum and Assessment. We thought it would be interesting to find out a little about her, her job and the mechanics of the NCCA.



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Interview questions by Conor Murphy

Can you tell us a little bit about your teaching background?

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I did an Arts degree in English and French followed by my H.Dip in Education in NUIG. I've taught in a couple of different schools. In my alma mater, Ballyhaunis Community School, I did my teaching practice and one of my students was my little sister, which may have traumatised her for life. I next taught for a year in St Aloysius College in Athlone. After completing an MA in Film Studies in UCD, I taught in St Flannan's College in Ennis for five years. I joined an incredible staff in Mount Saint Michael Secondary School in Claremorris. Over the years, as well as teaching English, French, History to Junior Cycle and media studies, I've run school concerts, an annual short story competition with the Clare Champion; directed plays for Arts Week; made short films with students;

## You left the classroom to work for JCT and then the NCCA. Could you talk about the motivations behind those decisions?

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I was asked this question at interview for both positions. With JCT, I said I wanted to go through the looking glass and NCCA interview, to go further down the rabbit hole! I'd been having rich conversations about teaching English for years, both with friends on staff and through blogging, twitter and INOTE. Through conferences and #edchatie, I got to know a wide circle of English teachers, many of whom became and remain real-life friends. I relished having more opportunities for ongoing dialogue about the joys and tribulations of teaching, and teaching English specifically. Joining JCT felt like a chance to deepen my own knowledge and understanding, whilst having more of those dialogic conversations with other teachers that I was already having frequently online and in my school. I wanted to really understand from the inside out how education policy decisions are made, which was a strong motivator in my move to the NCCA. All that being said, I genuinely loved teaching, even with all of the challenges it brings, and it's surprised me both how long I've been out of the classroom and also that I've been able to find a job that I like just as much, even though it's so different from teaching.

## What does your job entail and what doesn't your job entail (that some may think it does)? Could you give us a day-to-day or week-to-week outline of your job? How far does your position lean and interact across the subjects or is each subject rep contained within their subject?

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It's a bit like school, you have a specific area of expertise that you mostly work in and you contribute to other areas as needed, broadening and deepening your expertise over time. The job of an NCCA education officer can depend on when you join but usually involves convening a development group to work on creating a curriculum specification, over a period of a couple of years. These groups are representative, usually consist of about 12 people and include subject teachers representing our two teacher unions, an inspector and an SEC representative who previously taught the subject, a representative from the subject association and if it's a senior cycle specification, from the university sector, plus a Chairperson and an NCCA education officer. There are also two spaces reserved on each development group that anyone can apply to fill. The NCCA education officer's job is to organise meetings and follow up on decisions and feedback from the group. Once Council approves of the draft specification the group comes up with, the next step is to consult more widely with teachers and also with students, parents, third level colleagues and the general public on the draft specification and then to make changes to the draft specification before sending it to the Minister for approval and ultimately publication. All of this is overseen by the relevant board and by Council, a 25 strong representative group who consider, give feedback on and ultimately approve or request further clarification and/or amendments before advice goes to the Minister. However, because I joined the NCCA after the junior cycle English specification was published, I worked on the next part of the process, which is assessment guidelines; working with teachers to gather examples of student work; organising quality assurance meetings (they're a version of SLAR meetings) where four English teachers and a colleague each from DES, SEC and JCT discuss the examples and the level of achievement before publication; revising text lists for LC and JC with working groups; liaising with others in my subject areas in INOTE, DES, SEC and JCT; editing websites as needed. I also organise meetings with English teachers and students and write reports as required. At least half my time is spent specifically on English but I've also worked on short courses, reporting, Modern Foreign Languages and currently I'm part of the team reviewing senior cycle. As well as these ongoing conversations with teachers who are taking the specification and breathing life into it in their classrooms, I read a lot, books on teaching English, on the relationship between English as a subject and curriculum policy; on curriculum policy and development more broadly, on teacher agency and the relationship between policy and practice. Every week is different so giving you a week to week outline of the job is pretty impossible. In terms of what my job doesn't entail, NCCA advises on but doesn't design and facilitate CPD, we don't inspect schools and we advise on assessment arrangements but don't design examinations (this is the SEC's remit). It's fundamentally a democratic process.

## How does your job impact the teacher in the classroom?

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Changes to a subject specification impact on teachers in the classroom; the text lists impact on teachers in the classroom; the examples of student work inform teacher judgements when deciding the level of achievement in CBAs. I'm very conscious that the groups we convene to tease these things out and the decisions these groups make and that Council make have a significant impact on the teacher in the classroom. All of these decisions are made in a collaborative, consultative way, informed by research and within the context of wider national decisions about curriculum and assessment. I'm also acutely aware of other factors that impact on how we as teachers mediate and enact curriculum policy in our classrooms. The school context and culture(s) you work in as a teacher have a huge impact; your beliefs about teaching and learning have an impact; your experience and expertise have an impact. As teachers we also need opportunities to talk to each other and share experiences and expertise. That's something I relished when I was in the classroom, whether through team-teaching with my friend and colleague Nora; through CPD when I was involved in INOTE and later when I worked for JCT; and through online interactions with other English teachers via my blog and twitter and through TESEO on facebook. I'm a big believer in having the chats to make sense of and critically engage with the complex job that is teaching.

## Could you go through the process of choosing the texts for both the JC and the LC? What is the rationale behind the choices?

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We have a set of criteria informing our choices and it's all about balance. Balance between classic and more modern novels, drama and films; balance to ensure the list caters for the entire spectrum of abilities; balance in authorship and representation; balance across different themes and genres; the comparative potential of texts etc. We look across an entire list for balance and we fight the individual merits of every single text, always coming back to what the experience of exploring this text with students might offer to further their knowledge, learning, understanding and enjoyment of the subject (bearing the specification in mind) and of the world. Sometimes you might love a text whilst acknowledging that it's not for the list, that it won't necessarily work well in a classroom setting. The process for poetry is slightly different but many of the same considerations apply. We have two open surveys online which gather suggestions for the lists on an ongoing basis and these suggestions inform our work when we're creating our longlist at the start of the process each time. A group of 5 to six people meet about five times a year. The groups are made up almost exclusively of English teachers, although we also have poetry experts on the poetry group. We create a longlist of novels, plays and films at the beginning of the year and work our way through it. We regularly seek outside input from representative groups. For example, in recent years we've sought advice and submissions from the Irish Theatre Institute; Youth Theatre Ireland; Poetry Ireland; The Irish Film Classification Office; The Irish Film Institute; Women in Film and Television; and from Arts reviewers such as Sinéad Gleeson. INOTE are represented on all of the text list working groups and in 2017 we worked closely with INOTE to gather English teachers' views of the lists. For example, as a result of the survey, we placed greater emphasis on modernising the drama options on the LC text list and took a long hard look at the issue of gender balance. The process of deciding which texts make the cut is fascinating and sometimes contested, particularly where you feel so passionately that a particular text should make the list, and someone else on the group feels equally passionately that it shouldn't.

## What do you do in your free time to get away from all of the above

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I read. I go to the theatre and the cinema. I like creating things with my daughter, making tiny doll furniture or Harry Potter wands. I'm sporadically a singer/songwriter, mostly in private. I'm the chairperson of Ballyhaunis outdoor swimming pool which opens during the summer months. I help out with Ballyhaunis Inclusion Project when I can. Ballyhaunis is the most ethnically diverse small town in Ireland. I'm a great believer in sleep as 'the balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, chief nourisher in life's feast' and when the mood hits, I also write poems, poems that I sometimes think are awful and sometimes think aren't half bad.







# Junior Cert Drama

By Claire O'Brien

## "Alone It Stands"

by John Breen 1999,

Features 6 actors (one female) playing 62 parts, from rugby icon Tony Ward to a yappy dog, Bunratty singers and a woman giving birth to twins. In one of the great underdog victories of all time, Munster beat the All Blacks at Thomond Park in 1978 and history was made. This is breathtakingly pacy theatre as actors slip from role to role and scene to scene. There's nail-biting tension in the game (even if we know the score) and in the relationships and side-splittingly funny scenes with rugby snobs and arrogant Kiwis getting their come-uppance. There are great moments for classroom performance. Themes of ambition, loyalty, identity, graft and reward, class and more are dealt with in some depth but with a light touch.



## "A Christmas Carol"

by Charles Dickens (radio play adapted by Orson Welles and Lionel Barrymore), 1939, is a familiar story brought vividly to life by two of the last century's great interpreters of theatre. A radio play offers a rare opportunity to study an actual production as text in the classroom, with lots of scope for discussion of interpretation, performance style, effects and theatrical storytelling. Themes of both financial and moral wealth and poverty, redemption,

class and the world of work are explored. "The Fourteenth Tale" by Inua Ellams, 2008. "I come from a long line of trouble-makers," says the teenage, Nigerian hero at the start of this short, energetic, poetic and prize-winning single-hander. Set in a hospital at a key moment the writer's life and dipping into seminal life moments in Dublin, London and Nigeria, it tells of a messy but moving coming-of-age. Race, identity, self-actualisation, family and belonging are key themes delivered with humour, empathy and a thoroughly modern sensibility and turn of phrase.



## "Lovers" (Winners and Losers)

by Brian Friel, 1967

is a pair of plays dealing with issues that were controversial at the time of writing and what it means to win and lose in relationships. In "Winners" Mag and Joe are teenagers in love, due to get married – and pregnant. The action is in their consideration of their future and the reactions of others to their predicament, and their bleak fate, when it's revealed, is also a subject of controversy. In "Losers" Andy and Hanna try in vain (and at times hilariously) to continue their later-in-life romance under the eye of Hanna's bedridden mother, who is a stickler for religious and social compliance. The plays are very different in tone, treatment and ending but are delicately woven domestic tales of ordinary people trying to find happiness in a world that seems dead-set against it.

## "The Woman in Black"

by Susan Hill (adapted for stage by Stephen Mallatrat) 1987,

has been running in the West End since 1989 and is the second-longest running show there (after Agatha Christie's "The Mousetrap"). It's a creepy thriller. Arthur Kipps is a young solicitor, tasked with sorting through the documents of a deceased client at her sinister home, Eel Marsh House. The script is snappily written and exploits the gothic horror of the novel and all that the genre entails. Themes of isolation, fear, revenge, the impact of the past, secrecy and, of course, the supernatural are central to the plot. There is a film version of the novel (starring Daniel Radcliffe) but the ending is markedly different to the play.

## "Stones in His Pockets"

by Marie Jones, 1996,

sees two actors play fifteen roles. A film is being made in a Kerry town. The townspeople are naturally star-struck and the professionals are bored and disinterested in the impact their arrival has on the community. This dismissiveness culminates in a tragic incident (a suicide by drowning, as hinted at in the title), which the community - and the two main characters - have to come to terms with. Themes of identity, ambition, power, friendship and community, self-esteem and self-actualisation are important in a play that is equally tragic and funny, sad and life-affirming.



## “War Horse”

by Michael Morpurgo (adapted for stage by Nick Stafford) 2007

is a triumph of stagecraft and has won golden opinions for its innovative use of life-size horse puppets. Morpurgo thought Stafford was “mad” when he proposed adapting it. There’s a trailer and stunning photographs from the performance available online to give a sense of the majesty of the production and provoke discussion about realism and imagination in production. At heart it’s a love story – one boy and his horse, set during World War 1. War, loyalty, relationships, coming-of-age and loss are key themes. As a UK National Theatre production there are great resources to supplement the script – including a DVD about the making of the show, which was staged in Dublin in 2019. The original performance was professionally filmed and is occasionally reprised as part of the National Theatre Live programme – so it’s worth subscribing to their mailing list just in case.



## “Girl from the North Country”

by Conor McPherson (featuring the songs of Bob Dylan), 2017,

is set in Minnesota in the winter of 1934, during the Great Depression and performance features nineteen Dylan songs. It’s a world of downtrodden people trying to get by in the most challenging of financial, personal and social circumstances. Two strangers, an evangelist and a down-at-heel boxer, arrive at the home of the struggling Laine family on a winter’s night. There’s a storm and in McPherson’s usual style, lives are changed. Themes of poverty, struggle and survival, ambition, family, race, hope and love are developed. There’s a soundtrack album featuring some of the Nobel laureate’s greats such as “Forever Young”, “Like a Rolling Stone”, “Hurricane” and the title track. There are some good online resources – including clips of interviews with McPherson, and an interesting contrast in how the show was received on both sides of the Atlantic.

## “The Shadow of a Gunman”

by Sean O’Casey, 1923,

is set during the Irish War of Independence and is the first part of the Dublin Trilogy (followed by “Juno and the Paycock” and “The Plough and the Stars”). Minnie Powell is tragically smitten with an enigmatic poet, Donal Davoren who, Playboy-like, may or may not be an IRA assassin. Donal is sharing the flat of his bolshie friend Seumas Shields in a Dublin tenement and the set is typically claustrophobic and tense. The looming presence of British soldiers adds to tension and the ending is inevitably bleak – as it often is for innocent but lovelorn O’Casey heroines. The War of Independence comes under scrutiny and the play examines themes of politics, nationalism, what we’ll do for love, the collateral damage of war, the haves and have-nots and the play is peopled with typical O’Casey characters – the Protestant, the inactive but vocal nationalist and is peppered with typical O’Casey humour.

## “Twelve Angry Men”

by Reginald Rose (first stage performance 1964 but adapted by the author from a 1954 CBS TV series)

“The death sentence is mandatory in this case. I don’t envy you your job. You are faced with grave responsibility,” intones the judge as the jury leave the courtroom. A guilty verdict seems assured but Juror Number 8 wants to know more. Juror Number 3 doesn’t. What should be weighed in balancing of the guilt or innocence of a 16 year old accused of killing his father? Themes of nature/nurture, gender (there are significant female characters), the possibility of redemption, prejudice, integrity, justice maintain suspense until the very last minute.



## “Blood Brothers”

by Willy Russell, 1983,

“What teenager doesn’t understand the friendship of the boys, the mother’s plight, the first kiss, the temptation of crime, the unexpected pregnancy, the young woman trapped in a marriage and the lure of romantic love even though it threatens a relationship?” Such are the musings, in the Methuen Student Edition, 1995, of Andrew Schofield who first played the narrator.

It opens Mrs Johnstone, whose poverty forces her to separate her twins, Russell says the story came to him first and sent shivers up his spine – as it does for the reader/viewer. It took almost a decade more to flesh out the characters, whose experiences are cathartic to the nth degree. “Blood Brothers” examines themes of class, nature/nurture, identity, gender, parenting/the filial relationship and cultural context using gutsy dialogue and innovative stagecraft.



## “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

by William Shakespeare, 1605.

Why have one plot when you can have four? And then, why not mix them up with midsummer magic and confusion? The Duke of Athens and Queen of the Amazons are to marry, there are four unsettled and unhappy young lovers (Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Hermia), the mechanicals (ordinary craftsmen turned amateur actors who want to perform a play at the wedding), the king and queen of the fairies – Oberon and Titania, and the impish Puck, source of chaos, confusion and a liberally dispensed love-potion. It’s comedy in the truest Shakespearean sense – what could go wrong with four sets of characters in an enchanted forest when the king and queen of the fairies are having a row? Of course the main theme is love, but it also deals with acting, relationships in general, magic and power.

## “As You Like It”

by William Shakespeare, 1603,

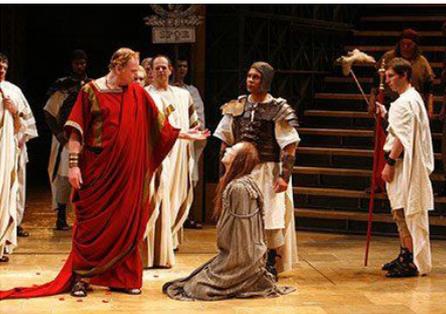
is a comedy set mostly in the Forest of Arden, to which Orlando has escaped and Rosalind has been banished. She disguises herself as a young man, Ganymede. Cue a tricky love triangle which ends up – eventually, in the reasonably happy marriages of four sets of characters. Guardian theatre critic Susannah Clapp says the play has “Shakespeare’s most perfectly concentric love circles” and the theme is love, especially love at first sight in the case of Orlando, who has a lot of growing up to do during the play. The play also contains the famous “All the world’s a stage” monologue.

## “Julius Caesar”

by William Shakespeare, 1600/01?

“Our production of JULIUS CAESAR in no way advocated violence towards anyone. Shakespeare’s play, and our production, made the opposite point: those who attempt to defend democracy by undemocratic means pay a terrible price and destroy the very thing they are fighting to save.” New York Public Theatre’s recent production featured a Julius Caesar with a striking resemblance to Donald Trump.

Four hundred years before Aaron Sorokin, Shakespeare was pitting great ideals and great characters against each other. There are heroes, villains, good men negotiating unenviable, existential crises and small men acting out their petty jealousies while the fate of a nation is at stake. Themes of honour, loyalty, ambition and power, fate and destiny are played out with some of Shakespeare’s most haunting characters and memorable speeches.



## “Much Ado About Nothing” by

William Shakespeare, 1598/99?

Though set in Sicily, Eastenders meets Love Island meets Catfish isn’t an entirely unreasonable summary of this comedy – where characters connive, deceive, are rarely what they seem to be and fall in and out of love for the most spurious of reasons. Yet they (mostly) live happily ever after. Deception, honour, wit, love and relationships are important. There’s a strong woman at the heart of it, and at heart it’s a light and entertaining romp with some strong dramatic moments and mostly likable cast of characters.

The RSC says it’s Shakespeare’s most staged comedy and has a really useful set of resources on the text in its Shakespeare Learning Zone. Beatrice and Benedick’s is one of the great stage romances and a famous comic partnership. Beatrice has been played by actors as varied as Judi Dench, Sinéad Cusack and Catherine Tate – which gives an insight into the possibilities her character offers in performance.

## “Romeo and Juliet”

by William Shakespeare 1597?

A timeless story of star-crossed lovers whose tragic fate has been interpreted and reinterpreted for the stage, page and screen, for ballet, musical theatre, animated gnome tales and pop songs.

For a story more honoured in the breach than in the observance, teaching the ur-text is a chance to get behind the mythology and investigate the themes of love, family, politics, youth and impetuosity, naivety and life ‘without’ true love. And fate, because, as Mark Knopfler wrote, “Juliet, the dice was loaded from the start...”



## “The Importance of Being Earnest”

by Oscar Wilde,

1895, saw the first performance of this trivial comedy for serious people and introduced us to the imperious Lady Bracknell, the feckless Algernon and the unfortunately fortunate (or fortunately unfortunate) Jack ‘Ernest’ Worthing. It is a comedy of manners and errors arising from the gap between reality and appearance, expectation and actuality.

Set in 1895 it plays with words and with social convention in typically Wildean style and has some of his most memorable lines.



# Do you want to contribute to the magazine?



We are looking for ideas and contributions from fellow English Teachers.

If you want to write for the magazine, or if you want to suggest some topics for discussion within the magazine’s pages, just email us at

[inotewritingcomp@gmail.com](mailto:inotewritingcomp@gmail.com)

with the subject heading **INOTE MAGAZINE.**

Please don’t send any articles, just pitches, we can’t guarantee that your piece will be published and we don’t want you wasting your time!

We look forward to hearing from you.

# LIGHTBULB MOMENT



Teachers share some methods that have worked in their classrooms

## Microsoft Teams in the English Classroom

by Elaine Dobbyn

**Useful for:** Research Tasks, Prep for Oral Language CBAs etc

**Required:** Your school needs to be using Office 365 with all students assigned their own log in and email account.

**Method:** Of all the Office 365 apps I've been finding Teams the most practical and useful in the classroom. A little time is required to do the initial set up of creating class groups and adding students to them but, once that's done, the day-to-day usage is very quick and easy.

To set a task you click on the relevant class group go to 'Assignments' and hit 'Create'. You need to decide on a title for the assignment, due date/time and can then give details in the Instructions box and, if necessary, attach a document.

I used this with my first-year group this year to prepare for an Oral Language task. They each had to deliver a 2-minute TED talk on their passion in life (mostly Premiership teams it seems). The document I attached gave clear guidelines for the talk they would have to deliver and how to research it.

Once they were all logged in (no mean feat- some students really struggle with remembering passwords!) and had opened the assignment, I could just float around the Computer room answering questions and checking everyone was on topic while they worked away.

If you attach a document, students can edit it with answers to questions and then hit 'Turn In' which returns it to you. It makes it very easy to see who is doing the work and to give quick feedback.

# JUNIOR POETRY COMPETITION

2<sup>ND PLACE</sup>  
**Ellie Caroll, Colaiste Dun an Ri,  
Kingscourt, Cavan**

## Powerful Weather

A windy breeze falls down on me,  
I see the leaves float off the trees.  
The sky is clear and oh, so bright,  
I might stay here until it's night.

Dragon flies light up the dark  
And leaping frogs leave a mark.  
I open up a great big book,  
But feel the ground being shook.

Suddenly a hurricane erupts  
And does nothing but disrupt.  
The clouds swiftly veil o'er the sky,  
Sadly I have to say goodbye.

I run inside to my home,  
Where I feel so all alone,  
I stare out to damage done,  
And wish once more for hovering sun.



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ST PLACE

Nicole McFadden,  
Pipers Hill College,  
Naas

Roar

I am the voice  
Of the African teen  
Trapped in a marriage  
Before the age of sixteen

I am the voice  
Of the bullied girl  
Using long sleeves to hide her pain  
From the rest of the world

I am the voice  
Of the woman alone  
Sailing aimlessly on a sea of doubt  
An orange dinghy for a home

I am the voice  
Of the girl who's "too fat"  
She skips meals until the mirror shows  
A 'model' looking back

I am the voice  
Of the mother in black  
Whose burqua hides her silent tears  
Whose home is her trap

I may not look "nerdy"  
But who says I'm not smart  
Who says I'm not beautiful  
Because I don't look "the part"  
I may not be a soldier  
But I'm fighting a woman's war  
I may be no lion  
But my lioness' voice can Roar.

# JUNIOR CERT REFORMS AND THE PROBLEMS WITH '21ST CENTURY SKILLS

By Dr. Carl Hendrick

**T**HERE IS A strange cognitive dissonance upon returning home after living abroad for many years. Places are at once both familiar and alien, recognisable and unrecognisable. I did my leaving certificate in 1993 and then left Dublin for London 7 years later. Five years after that I became an English teacher and have lived in the UK ever since.

My earliest memories of school are learning Keats' 'Ode To Autumn' off by heart in Primary school and while I don't remember an awful lot about my Inter Cert, I can remember studying Shakespeare, Joyce and Yeats with a particularly strict teacher reading every line in class, and explaining it clearly as we went. I don't remember doing any group work or 'hot-seating activities' and technology in the classroom was a blackboard, chalk and a rusty overhead projector that was rarely used. That kind of teaching would quickly become anathema in education but it furnished me with a lifelong love of the written word.

When I started teaching English A-Level literature, I can remember thinking that the Leaving Certificate was more like a degree course in comparison. It seemed far more exacting in its scope and breath and demand and was a far better preparation for university, for a literature degree at any rate. However, when I look at recent changes in the Irish syllabus now, it's unrecognisable to me and in many ways, the English and Irish syllabi have swapped roles.

Looking at the new Junior cycle {}, several aspects of it sound alarm bells. Firstly, there is the emphasis on a utilitarian view of schooling with the repeated calls for preparing students for the workplace. In an article in the



Irish Times, one leading academic was quoted as saying "We need to do down the route of future-proofing children's skills. Look at the jobs being created nowadays. They couldn't have been conceived of 20 years ago." This kind of rhetoric is de rigeur in education today (ironically with countries that have adopted failing models) and is, I would argue, a debased view of education. Firstly, it seems a big gamble to suggest that jobs in the future will not require the skills they have always done such as numeracy, literacy and an ability to think critically about problems using a broad depth of knowledge. Secondly, there is something inherently noble about a broad and rich education as an end in itself and not merely a stepping-stone towards a future career. (The recent emphasis on STEM subjects has sadly seen a decline of English literature A-levels and other humanities in the UK).

The second and more pressing central problem with the Junior Cycle reforms is illuminated by one major lesson from cognitive science, namely that skills are largely domain-specific. Nebulous talk about general critical thinking skills in English, Maths and Science without a strong focus on specific knowledge within those disciplines is a bit like focusing on recipes without any ingredients. Critical thinking is something we would all agree is a desired outcome, but what are you going to think with? It is impossible to think critically about something you know very little about. Even where the domains are relatively similar, the skills don't always transfer. Try sending a cricket player onto a GAA pitch and tell them to rely on their 'team-work' and 'independent learning' skills.

Take Shakespeare. Without a deep and rich body of knowledge to discuss the play, you end up falling back on nebulous talk about feelings and vague, impressionistic interpretations of character motivation. The question of why Macbeth took the path he did is greatly illuminated by an understanding of the divine right of Kings and the wider curious obsession with witches fuelled by James I. Focusing on activities such as making a storyboard of a scene in pairs to enhance 'collaborative and creative' skills might well 'engage' students but it's a missed opportunity to understand the fascinating context in which the play was written and ultimately and often represents a shallow engagement with the play. And as Graham Nuthall reminds us, just because students are engaged it doesn't mean they are learning anything. His research showed that students are often most industrious with tasks they already know how to do. In other words, they aren't learning, they're just being busy.

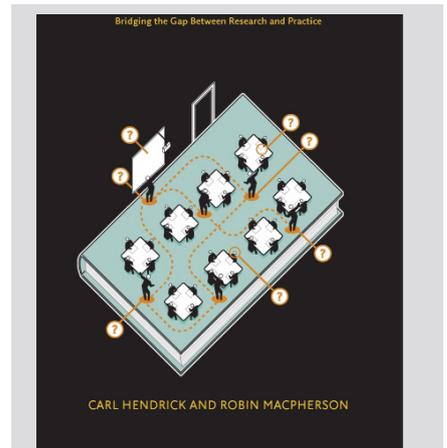
Critical thinking is an essential part of any serious student's repertoire. However, it cannot be detached from context. As Daniel Willingham puts it:

[I]f you remind a student to 'look at an issue from multiple perspectives' often enough, he will learn that he ought to do so, but if he doesn't know much about an issue, he can't think about it from multiple perspectives ... critical thinking (as well as scientific thinking and other domain-based thinking) is not a skill. There is not a set of critical thinking skills that can be acquired and deployed regardless of context.

The Junior Cycle reforms are at risk of ignoring the basic architecture of how the brain learns in favour of nebulous Silicon Valley utilitarianism. The inanity of repeated calls for '21st Century skills' are laid bare by the fact that we are a fifth of the way into the 21st Century and nobody can say what they actually are yet. Similar skills-focused approaches have been adopted in other countries such as Scotland with alarming results, something which appears to have been largely ignored. Undoubtedly, what and how we teach in our schools need updating and reviewing but it seems that in an effort to prepare students for the future, we are failing to learn from the mistakes of the past.

**BOTTOM LEFT**  
Junior Certificate reform plan 2014-2022

**CENTRE**  
English teachers and their students were the first that saw their subject reformed



Carl Hendrick is author of 'What Does This Look Like in the Classroom?' and the head of learning and research at Wellington College where he teaches English. He is also completing a PhD in education at King's College London. He has taught for several years in both the state and independent sectors where he has worked on several cross sectoral collaborations and he is a co-director of the Telegraph Festival of Education.

# LIGHTBULB MOMENT



**Useful for:** Active listening, personal and functional writing, character analysis etc.

**Required:** Internet access although episodes can be downloaded and then used in class

By Claire O'Brien

Dr John Cooper Clarke is witty and profound on what poetry is, Marian Keyes' description of living with depression is a game-changing companion to studying Plath. The programme format is a superb character analysis (and cultural context) tool - what are the eight tracks, book and luxury item Ponyboy or Daisy Buchanan or Hamlet would take to a desert island? Students can create and justify their choices via a Spotify playlist, create the interviewer's questions, present the programme as an oral communication task.

As a teacher, design your own a Spotify playlist for a text and ask students to explain which character would choose which song and why – tie the choice to a key moment. (Eg, The Black Keys' "Lonely Boy", "I Fought The Law" from The Clash on a "Merchant of Venice" Desert Island Discs playlist.) Then give them the chance to explain why their choices would be so, so much better than yours and you've made a comparative moment.





# Prescribed Junior

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## THINGS FALL APART BY CHINUA ACHEBE

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A simple style belies a depth that only great literature can achieve. Told like a fairy tale or a Greek myth Achebe tells the story of a 'strong man' filled with fear, fear that manifests itself in violent ways. The novel questions our understanding of culture, of education, of wealth, of religion. What is 'progress', who has the right to declare themselves 'better'? But, at its core, it is about humanity. CM

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## THE SAVAGE BY DAVID ALMOND

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A beautifully illustrated short story about bullying. The writing and images are striking by themselves but also complement each other perfectly. An effecting story that will speak to many students. This quick read is perfect for the 'school set', where you can pass it around from class to class. CM



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## SENSE AND SENSIBILITY BY JANE AUSTEN

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Austen's classic novel about societal expectations is still as relevant as ever. What is important in life? What sacrifices must we make? What is love? Austen explore these questions and more in a style that can still raise a smile. It's a classic for a reason. CM

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## NOUGHTS AND CROSSES BY MALORIE BLACKMAN

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The first in a series of novels (the latest has recently been published) where whites are the working class and blacks

are the middle class. The story revolves around a classic Romeo and Juliet story with Sephy, a Cross, falling in love with Callum, a Nought. Within that framework themes such as racism, love, and growing up are explored. CM

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## THE BOOK OF LOST THINGS BY JOHN CONNOLLY

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David, a 12-year-old boy, trying to cope with the death of his mother and the traumas of teenage life, is catapulted into a dark fantasy world through which he can work through his problems. John Connolly's book is a dark retelling of various fairy tales. Elements of horror are juxtaposed with moments of broad comedy in this classic bildungsroman. CM

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## THE WEIGHT OF WATER BY SARAH CROSSAN

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Kasienka is new to England and new to English schools. The book explores the immigrant experience but also the experience of any person that feels alienated. This particular coming of age story is told through a series of poems, some touching, some humorous, but always carefully constructed.

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## BOG CHILD BY SIOBHAN DOWD

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Set during the troubles the story tells us about Fergus, who finds the body of a child whilst digging for peat with his Uncle Tally. The violent, confrontational, reality of the setting makes this coming of age story all the more poignant. Moral questions are posed to a likable central character and, through that conceit, to us the readers. CM

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## ONCE BY MORRIS GLEITZMAN

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This is the first in a series of books set during World War Two where Felix, a Jewish orphan, must try to keep himself and his sister safe from the Nazis. Each chapter starts with the word 'once'

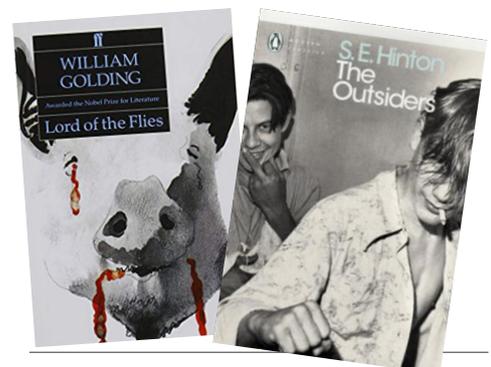
hinting at a fairy tale, but the reality is very different. Another novel about growing up and the dark realities of the adult world. CM

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## LORD OF THE FLIES BY WILLIAM GOLDING

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A book about friendship, loyalty, survival, tyranny and the darkness that lies at the centre of humanity. A plane full of school boys crash lands on a desert island. All the adults die. Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon and the rest must try to hold onto their sense of morals, their civilised ways, in the face of Hobbesian world. The possibility of an idyllic existence is glimpsed before one of the more aggressive, divisive, boys comes to power. CM



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## THE OUTSIDERS BY S.E. HINTON

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The Greasers and the Socs are two rival gangs in Tulsa Oklahoma. As the violence escalates so does the realisation that the gangs aren't as different as everyone had thought. The novel centres around Ponyboy and his brothers as the try to take care of each other in the absence of any parents. Family, toxic masculinity, loyalty and sacrifice are all explored. CM

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## INTO THE GREY BY CELINE KIERNAN

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Set in Dublin in 1974 this horror tells the story of two brothers, Patrick and Dominick who must come to terms with their Nan burning down the family home. Confusion descends when it seems that one

# or Cert Texts

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## TRASH BY ANDY MULLIGAN

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This thriller follows Raphael, a dumpsite boy, who while rummaging through the trash of an unnamed Third World country, comes across a much sought item. He and his friends Gardo and Rat must work out how to solve the mystery before their pursuers catch them. A straight forward narrative high on drama and tension the book explores the relationships we develop, challenges our preconceptions around education and intelligence, all within a world of extreme poverty. CM

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## ANIMAL FARM BY GEORGE ORWELL

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The classic tale of the animals taking over the means of production and the rise of tyrants. An allegorical tale that works for both higher and ordinary level (depending on how you pitch it) this slight novel still packs a punch. Orwell is always good for a metaphor or a simile, always has a nice adjective to turn your head and smile. cm

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## ENDER'S GAME BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

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Card's sci-fi classic is all about Andrew 'Ender'Wiggins, a young boy who may be the answer to Earth's military needs. The novel is mainly set in a military training facility where the children are trained in tactics and the quiet violence of martial logic. As this logic unfolds Card opens up the novel to a number of themes; growing up, humanity, war, communication, and the unknowingness at the centre of human existence (or any existence).

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## BETWEEN SHADES OF GREY BY RUTA SEPETYS

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One of the most powerful novels on the new list. Beautifully, but precisely, written story about Lina, a fifteen-year-old Lithuanian girl, in 1941. She, with her mother and younger brother, are sent to Siberia to dig for beets.

There's always at least one book on these lists that you thank god you discovered, for which all those clichés were created, this is one of two such books on the new list. Just read it.

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## OF MICE AND MEN BY JOHN STEINBECK.

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George and Lennie must find work on a ranch to save up the money to buy their own farm and then live off "the fat o' the land". Things are never that simple in Steinbeck's clear recreation of post-crash dust-bowl America. Steinbeck called the novella a cross between a novel and a play. We get poetic flourishes followed by relatively straight dialogue as the author discusses friendship, masculinity, poverty, hope and the realities of a world unable to cope with the essence of pure humanity. cm



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## THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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If Of Mice and Men looks at a particular type of humanity than this novel looks at the darkest elements within us all. Dr. Jekyll takes his experiments too far thus allowing Stevenson to delve into that most gothic of themes, the inner workings of our consciousness. The multi-narrator structure, the mystery at its centre, are also common tropes of the gothic novel. cm

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## STONE COLD BY ROBERT SWINDELLS

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This simple and short novella follows homeless 16-year-old Link as he sets off to find out what happened to his friend

Ginger. The mystery slowly unfolds as we follow the protagonist through the streets that capitalism has excreted. cm

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## THIS ONE SUMMER BY MARIKO TAMAKI, JILLIAN TAMAKI

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This is the other book that should be savoured, another gem. Rose goes with her parents to their summer lake house in Awago Beach where she meets up with her friend Wendy. Thats about it.

Parents bicker, friends talk, older teenagers come on the scene, horror movies are watched on old VHS player.

A graphic novel that communicates through carefully composed panels and stunning double page spreads, the book allows the characters to breathe and grow as we reluctantly turn those pages. Once you finish the book you'll wish you had never started just so that 'first read' feeling could wash over you again. cm



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## TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD BY HARPER LEE

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Scout and Jem are two children growing up in the Deep South in the 1930s. Bigotry, prejudice and racism of every colour is ever present in their world, if not in their home. Harper Lee's classic novel has long been a favourite of teachers as the writing, plot, character and themes are perfectly balanced and perfectly nuanced. cm

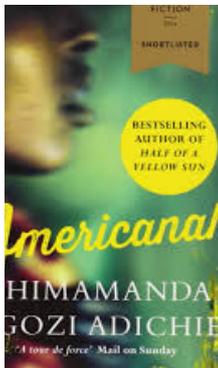
# PRESCRIBED

## A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE NOVELS ON THE LEAVING CERT IN 2021

### Americanah

ADICHIE, Ngozi Chimi-manda

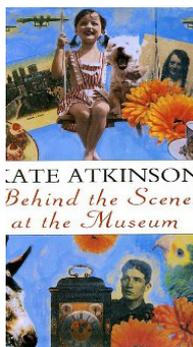
Americanah is partly set in contemporary Nigeria but also in the United States. It explores the experiences of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who emigrates to the US to attend university. She experiences racism for the first time in America and negotiates her place there as a non-American black person. The novel explores themes of love, identity, racism, sexism and migration. Relationships are depicted as complex and challenging, even the loving ones. Ifemelu eventually gives in to the draw of home. When she returns, she is called 'Americanah', a term which is used by Nigerians to refer to returning migrants who have developed American affectations; American accents or ways of doing things. Adichie poses many interesting questions about the experience of migration for people and the position of the returned migrant in society, something very relevant to the experience of 21st century Irish people. ED



### Behind the Scenes at the Museum

ATKINSON, Kate

Atkinson's award-winning debut novel centres around the character of Ruby Lennox, following her throughout her life as well as exploring the lives of other women in her family. By interspersing flashbacks with the narrative of Ruby's own life, the book chronicles the lives of six generations of women from Ruby's great-grandmother Alice to Ruby's mother's failed dreams. Ruby grows up in a working-class setting and all the women in the narrative face challenges relating to their poverty and powerlessness in society. Marriages are frequently loveless and those that do

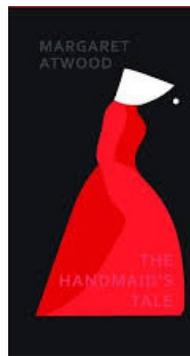


choose to pursue love lose everything else in their lives. The timespan of the novel encompasses the two world wars and the horrors of war are also explored. Despite the bleak subject matter the novel is actually quite humorous thanks to Ruby's ruthlessly unsentimental narration. ED

### The Handmaid's Tale

ATWOOD, Margaret

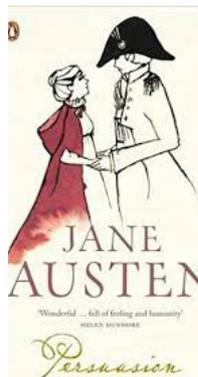
This iconic work of science fiction, depicting the oppression of women in the Republic of Gilead, was first published in 1985 but has enjoyed a huge resurgence in sales over the past few years due to the successful TV adaptation currently in its third series. The story follows Offred, so named to indicate her subservience to her master, a 'handmaid' in the military dictatorship of Gilead which resulted from a rebellion by religious fanatics in the US. Infertility blights the world of Gilead so fertile women are placed in the homes of the ruling class of men 'Commanders' in order to bear their children. The novel explores themes of sexism, violence, the abuse of power, feminism and morality and has been a popular choice since its introduction to the Comparative Study course. Atwood's long-awaited sequel 'The Testaments' is due to be published before the end of 2019. ED



### Persuasion

AUSTEN, Jane

As with all Austen novels Persuasion explores the precarious economic position of women of the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Anne Elliot is attractive and accomplished but at the ancient age of 27 she is unmarried – horror of horrors! At 19 she had been engaged to a handsome young naval officer but was persuaded away from

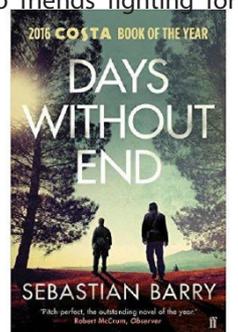


what was seen as an 'imprudent' match due to his lack of status. Eight years later the Elliot's are in financial trouble and the novel follows Anne as she navigates the choppy waters of early 19th century British society. Themes include female powerlessness in a society that denies them formal education or vocation, financial pressure to marry and the nature of persuasion or the manipulation of the decisions of others. ED

### Days Without End

BARRY, Sebastian

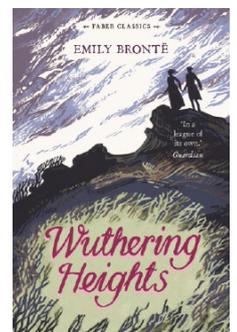
A western about two friends fighting for the American army in the 1850's. The two protagonists, Thomas McNulty and John Cole, commit acts of savagery as their relationship develops and solidifies. Written in the first person with a lyricism that swims around the page as it reveals the nuanced growth of the central character. A book about many things, race, loss, violence, the birth of a nation (the destruction of a nation) but it is the love at its centre that holds it all together. CM



### Wuthering Heights

BRONTË, Emily

A story of love or one of revenge? The classic romance novel set in the wild Yorkshire moors remains perennially popular among English teachers and students alike. Cathy and Heathcliff are the passionate, unhinged lovers kept apart by pressures of social class and financial status. The consequences of their blighted love affair impact the following generations for many years to come: "If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger." ED



# NOVELS 2021

BY ELAINE DOBBYN & CONOR MURPHY

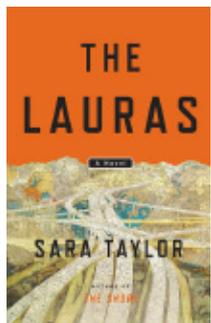
**Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood and The Story of a Return**  
(Graphic Memoir)

**SATRAPI, Marjane**  
Satrapi's memoir about growing up in Iran is more than a simple Graphic Novel. Don't let the fact that it has 'drawings' fool you, this is a weighty tome that does more than simply tell us about a girl's love of denim and rock and roll. Satrapi carefully traces the loss of liberty, of choice, of religious freedom, of sexual freedom, with deceptively simple black and white images. Nothing is black and white in this novel. Stark full page panels are juxtaposed with more formal panelling as the themes are explored. Satrapi nods towards Iranian art and European art as her novel tries to bridge the chasm between those two cultures, cultures that were once much closer. CM



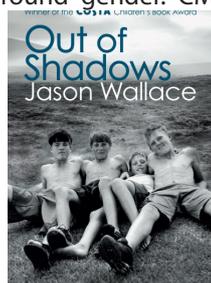
**The Lauras**

**TAYLOR, Sara**  
Ma has had enough of her husband and takes Alex, their child, on what becomes a road trip as she tries to work through issues from her past. Alex has to come to terms with the family breakup, always looking back to a father that has been left behind. A bildungsroman with the added nuance of questions around gender. CM



**Out of Shadows**

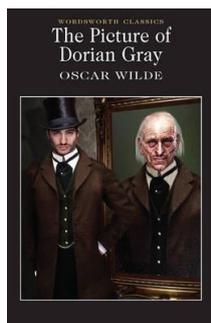
**WALLACE, Jason**  
Set in a, once white, boarding school in Zimbabwe during the rise of Mugabe Wallace's book looks hard at some big themes. Racism is there, obviously, but so is the idea of tyranny. How do we fight tyranny? Does one tyrant beget another?



er? How do tyrants develop? How are they created? The book supplies no answers just asks increasingly nuanced questions. CM

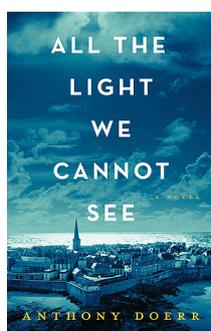
**The Picture of Dorian Gray**

**WILDE, Oscar**  
"The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world own shame." The iconic tale of a man selling his soul to stay eternally young and beautiful. Written in Oscar Wilde's distinctive sparkling style, Dorian Gray's vanity remains relevant in a world obsessed with make-up, cosmetic surgery and filtered selfies on Instagram. The book also explores the effect of a hedonistic lifestyle on a person, as Gray indulges his every debauched whim. In every way a classic of English literature. ED



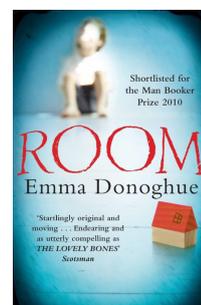
**All the Light We Cannot See**

**DOERR, Anthony**  
Winner of the Pulitzer prize for fiction in 2015 All the Light We Cannot See is recent addition to the Comparative list. Set in the 1930s and 40s in France and Germany it follows the lives of Marie-Laure, fully blind from the age of 6, and Werner Pfennig, a boy with a talent for repairing radios. Their lives converge in the horror of World War 2 in France. The novel is beautifully written, rich in sensual imagery and affecting depictions of war: "What mazes there are in this world. The branches of trees, the filigree of roots, the matrix of crystals, the streets her father recreated in his models... None more complicated than the human brain, Etienne would say, what may be the most complex object in existence; one wet kilogram within which spin universes." ED



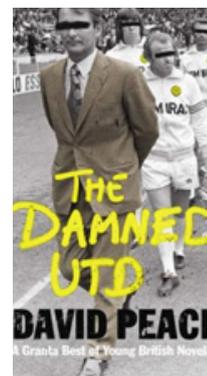
**Room**

**DONOGHUE, Emma**  
It's hard to believe Room is less than ten years old – it already feels like a modern classic and works so well in the English classroom. Narrated by 5-year-old Jack, Room tells what should be a grim, depressing tale with warmth and hope. His mother was kidnapped as a teenager and kept prisoner in a single room by the mysterious character of Old Nick who abuses her sexually. By some miracle of fortitude, she manages to raise Jack in these beyond challenging circumstances and eventually masterminds their escape. Their escape is not the end of the story, however, as the adaptation to the outside world proves much more difficult than expected. The novel explores themes of violence, sexual abuse, powerlessness, mental illness and the impact of outside forces on relationships. ED



**The Damned**

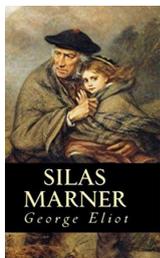
**Utd.**  
**PEACE, David**  
"But there are tears in my eyes and then I can't stop crying, stood there on that practice pitch in the dark, the tears rolling down my bloody cheeks, for once in my fucking life glad that I'm alone." This hilarious biographical novel delivers a brilliant depiction of hubris and self-destruction. Set during Brian Clough's chaotic 44-day reign as manager of Leeds United, the novel flashes back periodically to his successful time as manager of Derby County. Clough is portrayed as a deeply flawed hero, haunted by alcoholism and past regrets. He is paranoid, self-obsessed, eccentric and wants nothing less than to be the best - shades of a Shakespearean tragic hero. Peace's novel is extremely compelling and works well with students who love the beautiful game. ED.



## Silas Marner

ELIOT, George

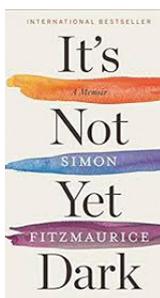
A fable set in the early 19th century in England Eliot's *Silas Marner* tells the tale of an outcast redeemed by the love of a child. Marner is exiled from his religious community after being falsely accused of a theft. He moves to Raveloe and retreats into his work of weaving and the comfort he gets from his slowly growing pile of gold. He is shocked out of his isolation by the theft of his gold and the arrival of an infant girl in need of care. ED



## It's Not Yet Dark

FITZMAURICE, Simon

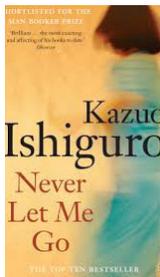
This is the moving memoir of Simon Fitzmaurice, an Irish filmmaker, who documented his life before and after being diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease. From one perspective it's an unbearably tragic story of a young father and creative soul having his faculties stripped away from him and winding up relying on a ventilator to live. Simon's own viewpoint, however, is relentlessly hopeful, his determination to live keeps him alive over twice as long as doctors initially predicted. The memoir is told in a fragmented timeline, skipping forward and back as it dips into different moments of Simon's life. He often uses short, pithy sentences that make his story feel incredibly immediate and the text is rich with description. Compelling and memorable. ED



## Never Let Me Go

ISHIGURO, Kazuo

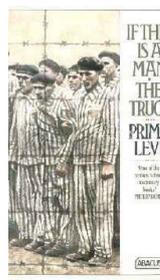
Part dystopian science-fiction, part gothic romance and ultimately a tragedy, *Never Let Me Go* is a stunning meditation on mortality, love, friendship, identity and memory. Kathy H looks back on her childhood at an unusual boarding school called Hailsham, her relationships with two other students, Ruth and Tommy, and their lives after they leave the school. The mystery behind the school and their strange existence is eventually revealed and, while gruesome, the story can be read as a parable for all human lives: "We all complete. Maybe none of us really understand what we've lived through, or feel we've had enough time." ED



## If This Is A Man

LEVI, Primo

This account of life in Auschwitz is a harrowing but insightful reading experience. Levi spent 11 months in the camp at the end of the war, somehow surviving the abysmal living conditions and cruelty of the Nazi guards. He observed the nature of death and survival at the camp, describing two distinct groups: the drowned (*i sommersi*), who never adapted to the harsh regime and died quickly, and the saved (*i salvati*), who did whatever was necessary to survive. Levi's key focus is how people live when all logic and morality disappear from the world around them:

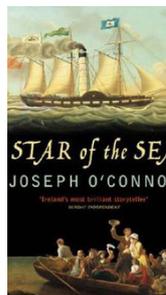


*Meditate that this came about:  
I commend these words to you.  
Carve them in your hearts  
At home, in the street,  
Going to bed, rising;  
Repeat them to your children.*  
ED

## Star of the Sea

O'CONNOR, Joseph

A story of refugees risking everything for a better life in a new world, this historical novel is urgently contemporary. In the notorious winter of 1847, as famine and poverty lay waste to Ireland, the *Star of the Sea* ship sets sail for New York filled with a microcosm of Irish and British society at the time. The story is told by American journalist, Grantley Dixon, who compiles the narrative from diaries, letters, conversations and ship's logs echoing the style of Victorian novels. The reader thus gets to hear a range of voices, from the poorest resident of a Workhouse to the recently bankrupted Lord Merridith and his family. The novel develops into an engaging thriller as it progresses, with a killer stalking the ship on its journey. ED



## 1984

ORWELL, George

Still deeply relevant in the era of 'fake news', this satire on totalitarianism was first published in 1949, perhaps inspired by the rise of fascism and



communism in preceding decades. The novel depicts the government of 'Oceania' rewriting history to make it appear infallible and controlling the people through propaganda and terror much as Stalin's regime did in the USSR.

The protagonist and narrator, Winston Smith, actually does the job of rewriting historical documents in line with changed party policy. This work sows the seed of doubt about the regime in his mind leading him to make the decision to join a resistance movement. Terms such as Big Brother, the Thought Police, Doublethink and Newspeak, coined by Orwell, have become part of the English language used to this day, showing the impact the novel has had culturally. ED

## The Spinning Heart

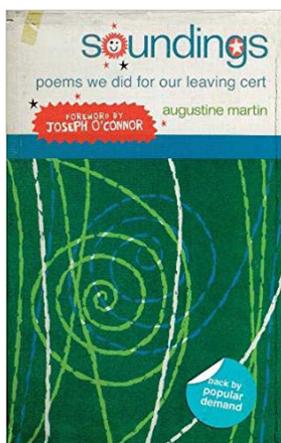
RYAN, Donal

Donal Ryan's stunning debut novel depicts the impact of economic recession on an entire community. 21 narrators tell their story in 21 separate chapters which could be daunting for the reader, but Ryan artfully constructs a complete picture of the community and their intertwined relationships as the novel progresses. The novel examines themes of loss, family, relationships and the challenge of communication.



*"I wish to God I could talk to her the way she wants me to, besides forever making her guess what I'm thinking. Why can't I find the words?"*  
ED

# LIGHTBULB MOMENT



## My method for studying Leaving Cert Poetry

by Conor Murphy

**What you need:** Poetry book, pen and A4 hard back copy.

This is the simple system I use for taking notes with my Leaving Cert English classes. We create all the notes in class, together. We follow the simple headings below

**BIO.** FIRST THE students read the bio of the poet from the book and list five important points about the poet. I gather these on the board making sure they are the points that I feel they need. Loads go up but I narrow them down. I might add a few that aren't included in the book's bio. The students write these in their copies in simple bullet points. No paragraphs. (There are paragraphs in the book and online, why write more?):

**FIRST IMPRESSION.** I read the poem or get an online voice to do it for me. (I never show the videos from YouTube, they only listen to the poem). The students then write down their first impression. This is usually very short and can be anything from 'It's crap' to 'I don't understand it' to 'this is obviously a serious meditation on the futility of existence' etc. **Everyone reads theirs out.** Everyone. I rarely comment, other than a smile and a nod.

**THE STORY** WE THEN read it again for the narrative elements. We do not analyse anything, just try to work out the events. We might only write down a sentence per paragraph. For example, the sentence for Bee Box's first stanza would be: 'She got a box of bees'. Sometimes the

poem has no narrative element and we simply write that down instead. We go through the poem line by line in the time honoured fashion. They can write in their books or in their copies, up to them. But, and this is the key, they must comment, they must interpret the poem. To encourage this, I often give them a stanza each to discuss the next day. I know that some will look at notes (I tell them not to) but I'm just trying to get them to talk in class. By 6th year they will be looking at a poem cold, with me, and contributing without advance notice. .

**THEME.** WE PUT up at least five themes per poem on the board. They must come up with them. Once five from the class are written down I'll add any that I think they have missed. They then pick one theme and write a paragraph on that into their notes. This must be a 'substantial' paragraph. At least four students will read out their finished paragraphs. Others can take notes, copy the ideas etc. (I often use this class to dissect paragraph writing)

**LANGUAGE.** EACH STUDENT lists four poetic techniques the poet has used and why they have used them. Again at least four students read theirs out and the other students take down those notes. These can be anything from similes to word choice to form etc.

**QUOTES:** THEY WRITE DOWN four lines/words/phrases that they think are the most important. (This may change or be added to after they have written their essay)

**OPINION:** THEY WRITE ANOTHER substantial paragraph, this time on their opinion of the poem. At first they struggle with this so I let them start with 'I like/do not like this poem..'

They have to argue their point. Any 'I hated it' without proof is dismissed and they are told to write it again.

**OVERALL:** WHEN WE HAVE all of the poet's poems covered they return to each poem and write a paragraph on where that poem fits in with the rest. Does it have similar themes? Similar techniques? Is it completely different? Is it their favourite? Why?

**ESSAY:** THEN THEY GET to write an essay on the poet.

At first this takes time but by the time they get to December in 6th year we fly through it and I change it to a different style of notes.

# CBA's: What we have learned?

by Kate Barry



## CBA's – what we've learned

Bearing in mind that each of us works in a different environment, with a different cohort and alongside different colleagues. For every teacher we meet who is happy with the process, happy with how their department is working together and how parents and senior management support the changeover, we meet one who is demoralized by a lack of resources, an uninformed/unenthusiastic/unprepared colleague at a SLAR, having to chase students for work or negotiate a pushy parent

- CBA1 is one of the rare opportunities a student has to wax lyrical on a subject of their own choice, in a format of their choice and with their own words - and be assessed on it
- CBA2 text preparation and selection is, for some teachers, vastly increasing the workload
- And the jury is out on whether the collection of texts offers sufficient preparation for senior cycle as it stands
- CBA's are extremely difficult (for the teacher and student) where non-attendance is an issue
- Some teachers value CBA's exceedingly as opportunities to shine and as a stand-alone experience – especially for those who don't do well in exams; others believe they are a waste of time since they don't count for the terminal exam. Students get mixed messages.
- As time goes on, many students are trying much more interesting formats for CBA1 and are developing more innovative and effective ways of managing their portfolio of work (and so are we...)
- CBA's can take a lot of time – the three week blocks require significant planning and in some schools, significant work outside of class from teachers
- And it's not easy to get the balance between being hands-off, a helping-hand and hands-on
- The process works well if your subject department has a solid and coherent system
- And it works even better if your school has a solid set of guidelines and a plan around classroom based assessment – some schools have a policy that 'not reported' isn't allowed, for example. What's the whole-school attitude to submission/completion dates?
- As more subjects come on board, schools need a plan to manage teacher and student time – and resources
- And as more subjects come on board, there's a real tension developing between the need to be in class for a classroom based assessment process and the need and desire to be at matches and musicals and other events (for teachers and students)
- There's (still) misinformation and confusion among some colleagues (as any glance at social media will confirm) – the framework documents are the first, most reliable port of call for knowledge about what to do and how to do it
- But the hive mind is a great resource for ideas and hacks to make the process more interesting and efficient
- The student (and teacher) experience varies greatly depending on the level of support at home for the process
  - some parents are disinterested, some helicopter and do the work for their children. This applies to the AT also, unfortunately.
  - The SLAR facilitator should be different for every meeting – it's not a post or role and it should be shared
  - The guideline for assigning descriptors should be 'if a student I didn't know, in a school down the road, did this piece of work, against these features of quality – would it still be exceptional?' It's the work, not the student that's assessed.
- Many schools and subject departments are still struggling to practically manage the volume of material involved – from audio-visual files to folders and on-line storage and systems
- Students compare their CBA experiences across subjects and with the experience of their friends in other classes and schools
- If CBA's take the place of summer and/or Christmas exams students lose the exam prep experience that seems to be the key tool necessary to manage the terminal exam
- The principles that underpin the CBA's bear no relation to the principles that underlie that terminal exam.

# SHORT STORY COMPETITION

CORK BORN WRITER AND POET WILLIAM WALL CHOOSES THIS YEAR'S SHORT STORY COMPETITION WINNER

Runner Up

Mark Molloy, Moate C.S., Westmeath

## Balmy July Evening

The state of mind of a person attending at the bedside of a her/his dying grandfather is tenderly rendered in this story. The atmosphere of the home/hospital is palpable. The intercultural encounter between the visitor and the Nigerian attendant gives added interest.

Runner up

Joanne Tyrell, Mount Temple, Clontarf, Dublin

## A Painted Day

This is a romantic story of an encounter between two people who are alone in the world. The characters of Grace and Piero are well-drawn and the conversation between them is convincing. The beginnings of a friendship, and maybe more, are outlined delicately, but it ends in rejection when Grace chooses to remain alone.

1st Place

Robert McDermott, St Andrews, Blackrock, Dublin

## On the Beach at Coronado

On the Beach At Coronado The tone of this story is assured from the start, the voice of the narrator is instantly recognisable. The setting intrigues, the detail is entirely convincing. The ending is open as a good story should be. The characters engage immediately. The woman's pain is expressed in the barest of factual sentences and the narrator's responses are suitably inadequate. This is a story about real life reactions.

## Short Story Competition.

We once again invite English Teachers to enter our Short Story Competition. The story isn't restricted by theme or genre but must be 3000 words or below.

To enter just email your story, with a short bio, to [inotewritingcomp@gmail.com](mailto:inotewritingcomp@gmail.com) with the subject heading **SHORT STORY COMPETITION.**

**Closing date is Friday, December the 13th 2019**

Prizes to be announced at a later stage but the winner will feature in the next INOTE Magazine.

## On the Beach at Coronado

by Robert McDermott

The sweeping arc of the bridge to Coronado Island is as breath-taking as it is banal. It rises through the San Diego docks like a stretching cat made sluggish by the California sun. The ascent is gradual so you don't notice the height until you begin to imagine what would happen if there was an accident and then every bit of its two hundred feet grabs at you like a frightened child, that is, if such things bother you. They never bother me. I don't mind being high up, whether it's on a bridge going sixty or a plane going six hundred, it makes no odds how far above ground you are, it's just a way of getting places. The rise doesn't last, you are beginning to descend before you realise it and that's when the island comes into view. It's not much to look at, but in a car with the top open on a July day it's better than being dead. The bridge is America's second favourite suicide bridge, though I can't understand why you'd want to kill yourself if you lived in San Diego, aside from the fact *Top Gun* was filmed there. Yeah when it comes to leaving this life it's second only to the Golden Gate Bridge and there I was thinking the Golden State was full of happy golden people, goes to show doesn't it?

This was the first time we crossed the bridge together. Susan, my wife, had been to San Diego years before and in her excited giddiness she had made the crossing to the island sound exhilarating and wonderful, but like everything fuelled by anticipation, nostalgia and imagination, it fell short. Mustering my best acting I told her it was amazing and that I was having a great time. I asked our ten-year-old son who was sitting in the back of the car if he was having a good time, but he was too busy chasing images on a screen. It occurred to me that his generation was likely to be underwhelmed by everything because reality would never catch up with the fizzing neurons of their gamer existence.

We sloped down the final stretch of the bridge and on to the island. An old toll-booth, its canopy still intact, sat squat and sun bleached like something left behind on the set of a sci-fi film. I made

a quip about free entry to the island, but no one commented.

We parked somewhere off Avenue B or C. In the warmth of the day it didn't matter, we had no particular place to go and plenty of time to get there. I asked Susan about it but she said nothing and strolled ahead with the boy, now gadget free and enjoying the heat. My thoughts

wandered in the lazy warmth and I found myself appreciating the manicured lawns, the tidy streets and the flags that hung from flagpoles like landed marlin. As I ambled along I saw an old man, perhaps eighty, maybe more, trudge one step at a time up a small path and then move stiffly up the wooden steps to his porch before finally flopping into a wicker chair like someone who'd been holding a secret and now suddenly unburdened could relax. His sense of relief for having made it to safety made me think about that peculiarly American sense of pride in one's home and why Americans felt so strongly about their guns and their right to bear them. I looked back at the old man and imagined him levelling a rifle at me and winking and telling me to keep on walking and leave him be.

A loud and powerful pickup truck chugged past leaving the smell of petrol and gears and mechanical processes in its wake. It unmoored me from my daydreaming and I looked at Susan who was about fifty feet ahead and nearing the end of the street. She was pointing to the right, indicating the direction in which I was to follow her. She turned the corner and I jogged to catch up. By the time I got to the corner she was, once again, fifty feet ahead.

After another short street and a couple of more turns we arrived on Orange Street where Susan became animated as if privy to some delicious gossip. She smiled broadly and said she knew where she was and that it was all coming back to her. She skipped ahead with the boy and in the wind after her, I caught her words, faint and delicate like a dragonfly's wings, the hotel, the beach, *Some Like it Hot*.

The hotel was like any other. Opulent and grand for sure with an airport concourse like reception and gift shops and teeming tourists flashing along corridors. I knew the reason for its fame and while I liked the movie, I

wasn't especially impressed. While my wife and son walked through the cool foyer and out towards the courtyard that lead to the beach I paused to ask a bellhop how much a room cost per night and once I'd had a moment to process the information I followed on. The courtyard led to a set of double doors through which red-carpeted stairs dropped into a small garden that led to the dry white heat of the beach. They were waiting on the stairs and once I arrived, they moved on. Race you said the boy, his mother in gleeful chase. I watched them go towards the white sand and stop suddenly as if it had turned to shards of glass.

You are missing it Susan said urging me to hurry up. I thought to myself that I was missing nothing, that whatever was there would still be there when I arrived. I ambled along and when I got there, I asked what it was I was missing. Susan gave me a distant look and then told me matter-of-factly that the sand was too hot to walk on barefoot. It was. We took a spot near enough to the water for the boy to play unsupervised. He gravitated to the rocks and rock pools and after enduring some small talk with my wife, I left her to the sun and followed the boy. He was among a group of blonde-haired kids that may or may not have been related. It was his dark hair that made him recognisable to me as I'd forgotten the colour of his t-shirt. Approaching him, I noticed it was red white and blue, of course.

The assembly of kids were looking at crabs scuttling under the rocks and across the rocks or standing absolutely still waving their pincers in a touchingly feeble display of threat. Get them, get that one, said one of the kids reaching for a bucket and plunging it in the water of a deeper pool. Once full, a hand deposited a crab into it, then another crab until there were several crabs circling the bottom of the bucket. The boy and I peered in. I said something to him and half expected someone to say you're not from 'round here to me, but nothing was said and the boy who was now welcome in the group moved on to the larger rocks that spread into the frontier of the ocean.

I realised in that moment that I'd stood in the Pacific before acknowledging it was my first time seeing it. I looked at how it stretched out into a pile of grey

and white cloud and how much darker the water appeared than what movies would have you believe.

I said that very thing to a woman who appeared at my right. I don't know why I said it, maybe I just thought it needed to be said.

'Are you from England?' she asked.

'Ireland,' I said.

'My husband always wanted to go there,' she said.

I didn't reply but my natural cynicism about the American cliché of visiting Ireland began to rise. I expected her to compliment my brogue or tell me about her relatives in some god-forsaken part of West Cork. I let words come to the surface but passed on the chance to commentate and instead took a surreptitious look at the woman by pretending to focus on an imaginary point down the beach. She was older than me, mid-fifties perhaps, I couldn't tell exactly but I could tell she'd miles on the clock. That said, she retained something of a youthful attractiveness. Her hair was blonde and she was slim. I pictured her as a younger woman on the beaches of La Jolla or Newport in the company of some surfer, discussing a future that had since come to pass. 'He never got there,' she said.

'There's still time,' I said offhandedly.

'He died two weeks ago.'

'I'm sorry,' I said automatically and then thought how hollow it sounded.

'Thanks,' she said, 'how do you like it here?'

It was then that I noticed her accent, it was broader and slower than a generic American accent, as if every word had to earn its place, and for an instant I thought of Fargo. I asked her where she was from.

'I live in Phoenix,' she said, 'but I come from a small town in Maine.'

'Aren't all towns in Maine small?' I asked.

She smiled and as a small wind rose, pulled her hair away from her face.

'I guess so,' she said, 'same as Ireland.'

I nodded in appreciation of her riposte.

'Was your husband from Maine?' I asked.

'New York,' she said.

'How long have you lived in Phoenix?' I asked.

'About a week,' she said.

I didn't know what to say after that. I looked at the rocks to where the boy, now fully integrated into the blonde clique, was climbing with the casual steadiness of a cat. I looked again at the woman and then behind me to where Susan lay on the sand, almost invisible because of the whiteness of her skin.

'A new beginning,' said the woman,

'just in case you're wondering about why I moved to Phoenix.'

I said nothing and smiled in a way that conveyed a willingness to listen. I felt she had more to say.

'We lived in New York for almost thirty years. He was a stockbroker, he worked non-stop, chasing all the money in the world. In the end he smoked, drank and stressed himself to death.'

She paused before continuing. Her voice carried an echo of wistfulness but it was faint and dwindled like a dying ember with each word.

'We had three kids and we never went anywhere or did anything. He was all about work and golf. I looked after the kids and when they moved on I had nothing to do anymore.'

I was about to parrot another sorry when a cry of delight rang out from the ocean startling me. I saw a girl rising from the water on the shoulders of a muscular young man. He took hold of her waist and threw her into the air. It was like something you'd see on the beaches of Magaluf or Ayia Napa, young people enjoying themselves in the rising sun time of their lives. I watched as she hung in the air and for a moment everything stopped before she crashed into the water with a loud splash.

'Aside from the fresh start why Phoenix, why not Maine?' I asked.

The woman didn't seem to object to the question but took a moment to reply.

'The weather.'

'My wife's the same,' I said.

'My husband didn't care for the sun. He was a cold person, in all sense of the word.'

I wanted to ask her if she was glad he was gone, just for my own satisfaction, but I didn't need to, the tiny trace of a smile on her face was like a flower emerging in spring, unaccustomed to its new surroundings, only needing time to bloom.

'You be good to your wife,' she said to

me, 'treat her right.'

'How do you know I don't?' I asked.

It was her turn to look beyond me and into the distance.

I wanted to press the point but I realised it would be better if I didn't say anything.

The boy came running towards me his face filled with energy and urgency. He told me in a breathless gasp that there was a huge crab in one of the pools and I had to come and look at it.

'Ginormous,' he said, his eyes wide as saucers.

I told him I'd be over in a minute and he ran off with the same urgency as he'd arrived.

'He's a good-looking boy,' said the woman.

'Thanks,' I said.

'You'd better go see that crab before it scuttles away,' she said in a voice that conveyed a sense of purpose.

I nodded, she was right. I began to make my move.

'I threw his ashes in the water just beyond those rocks,' she said almost as an afterthought

I looked at the rocks and how the waves threw white and frothy spray onto them.

'It's a beautiful place,' I said, 'seems as good a place as any to do something like that.'

'He hated the beach,' she said.

I turned to look at her but she had turned and was she moving with casual ease up the shoreline. The waves crashed and broke and stretched along the sand and almost tickled her feet, but not quite. My eyes trailed up the sand to where Susan was waving at me. She was pointing at the boy.

He called to me again and I began to run towards him hoping all the time the crab would still be there when I arrived.



# Senior Poetry Competition

# 3

RD PLACE

**Niamh Petrie**, Méanscoil  
Mhuire Gan Smál,  
Roscommon

## GIRL VERSUS MALE ENTITLEMENT: COURTROOM NUMBER ONE.

She stands in the dark corner, trembling,  
While he sits, arms folded tight,  
She glances, with bile rising upwards,  
At the one who destroyed her that night.

Another man stands and approaches;  
He leans in to the girl, right up close,  
"About the night in question –  
Do you know what puzzles me most?"

"Your clothes – they were very revealing,  
In fact, they were screaming out yes ...  
Don't you see what you looked like,  
Venturing out in that dress?"

Then he pulled something white from his pocket,  
And waved it 'round freely in court ...  
"Don't tell me you weren't really up for it  
That you weren't ready for all kinds of sport!"

She raised her head very slightly,  
Her shoulders began to get tense;  
Her friends had all tried to tell her  
That he'd have an aggressive defence.

They were right, he was a Rottweiler,  
He leered and he preened and he roared  
Then something stirred up deep inside her  
And rose right up through her core.

She met his eyes and she held them;  
Then, slowly let out a strong sigh:  
"About the night in question –  
I thought I was going to die!"

"He pinned me down, your Honour",  
She turned to face the judge:  
"But I didn't give him permission;  
He had no right to touch!"

Rottweiler didn't like to be challenged:  
"Your Honour, my client has rights!"

"And was he concerned about mine, do you think,  
As I screamed NO on that terrible night?"

Rottweiler waved white 'round the courtroom,  
The jury had the grace to look stunned,  
"You can see she was out for a good time –  
These show she was up for some fun!"

"I won't let him twist my story;  
I will not be violated again –  
My time as a victim is over!"  
She declared to the jury right then.

Turning to a chastened Rottweiler:  
"Let me spell out just what I mean;  
It doesn't matter what dress I was wearing –  
You have no right to demean!"

Steeling against his aggression,  
She continued with new-found intent:  
"I want you all to hear what I'm saying –  
My underwear is not a form of consent!"

# 2

ND PLACE

**Zara Browne**,  
Presentation Secondary School,  
Thurles  
Tipperary

## Courageous Woman

DEDICATED TO SUE ANNE O' DONNELL

Strong women are called diamonds, because they don't break.  
But the most courageous woman I've met,  
Is a woman who once fell to pieces right before my eyes.  
This woman, was no diamond, far from one indeed.  
Why do I admire her? For, she wasn't afraid!  
She wasn't afraid to be human and true to herself.  
She wasn't afraid of her trembling voice,  
When she tread lightly on what broke her heart.  
She wasn't ashamed to show what streamed down her face,  
When she came to the part that shattered her.  
She blinked away every tear that began to fall,  
Picked up all of her broken pieces,  
Made them shine like the shards from her heart,  
And carried on as if she wasn't broken at all.

1

ST PLACE

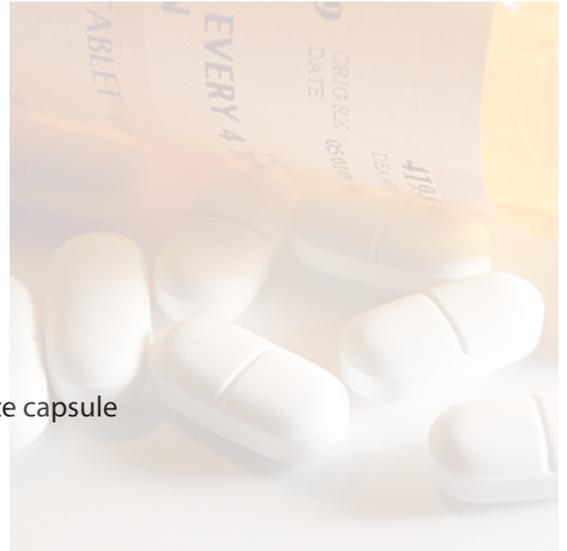
Caitlin Kelly,  
St Raphaela's Secondary  
School,  
Stillorgan  
Dublin

## Sedated

I am not used to this  
This clear, focused lens  
Sharpened and saturated,  
A cauterising eye  
Filtering sepsis,  
Grain free

Un-yellowed, un-ruddied,  
Cynosure amplified  
Solace found in a chalky white capsule

It is too quiet



# Junior Cert Film



By Conor Murphy

## Suffragette

This 2015 film directed by **Sarah Gavron** is a fictionalised recounting of the Suffragette movement. Carey Mulligan plays Maud Watts, a fictional character caught up in the movement. Maud is a composite character used to convey the many ways in which women were treated as the inferior sex, at the beginning of the last century. A thematically strong film this is a great way of opening up discussions around issues of gender equality.

## Man on Wire

One of the two documentaries on the list, **James Marsh's** film tells the story of how Philippe Petit walked a tight rope across the Twin Towers. A heist movie of sorts, the film, through archival footage and some recreations, goes through the difficulties in pulling off this illegal act. The audacity of the act is fascinating in itself but beneath the surface we can see how Petit gathers, and manipulates, those around him. The final act itself is not only one of courage but also all about the arrogance of Petit, the crowd looks up to see this one man walk and dance his way back and forth across the expanse



## Amadeus

Winner of eight Academy Awards this is the biopic of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, directed by **Milos Forman** based on the play by Peter Schaffer, who also wrote the screenplay. This 1984 film plays a little loose with the facts, instead concentrating on creating a realistic portrayal of the life and times of Mozart. But the use of 'facts' here results in a film about envy, genius and love. We get a very 80s version of Amadeus as performed by Tom Hulce, Amadeus as childlike Jim Morrison. But in the conflicted Salieri we get a more nuanced performance by F. Murray Abraham. If you're looking for an easy metaphor to get you into the film just look to the wigs, they're glorious.



## Whale Rider

A Maori girl, Pai (Keisha Castle-Hughes) must prove to her community that she is a worthy new chief, even though she is female. Her main stumbling block is her Grandfather, Koro (Rawiri Paratene), a man who clearly adores his granddaughter but can't conceive of a world with a female chief. **Niki Caro's** film is full of humour and wit, with a very clear vision of what constitutes appropriate symbols and metaphors for this age group, and

this culture. Tradition, family, responsibility and love are the core themes, along with the overt discussion of gender roles. This is not confined to the community's attitude to women but also its attitude to their expectations of men, and particularly fathers.

## Hotel Rwanda

Northern Irish director **Terry George** manages that most difficult of tasks, making a film about genocide accessible to a younger, and thus wider, audience. Don Cheadle plays Paul Rusesabagina in this biopic of the hotel manager's rescue of hundreds of Tutsi refugees from the marauding Hutu militia. George makes the important decision to concentrate on Hutu Rusesabagina's relationship with his Tutsi wife, Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo). Importantly for a biopic we see Rusesabagina change over the course of the film as he glimpses the genocide happening outside the grounds of his hotel. This is one of those films where you think you are witnessing horrors but George, resisting the opportunity to shock us with images of acts of genocide, instead shows us the reactions of the characters, most memorably Rusesabagina's son near the beginning of the film and the hotel manager himself during a return journey to his hotel. Both are traumatised by what they see. The real punch delivered here is not the historical significance of the genocide but the fact that moments like this are still happening and the west is still sitting back and ignoring the results of their colonial actions. Watch it before showing it, but the discussions that a film of this sort bring out can lead a class to many places.

## Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Another film set in New Zealand and another film about family. This one buries its themes beneath the humour of **Taiki Waititi**, ably abetted by Julian Dennison as Ricky and Sam Neil as Hec, with Rachel House coming on to steal the odd scene as a social worker that thinks she is Tommy Lee Jones in *The Fugitive*. Dennison plays Ricky Baker, a city delinquent who has been fostered by Bella, Hec's partner. Hec isn't too pleased with the new arrival and the new arrival isn't too pleased with his new surroundings. After Bella's untimely death the Ricky and Hec go on the run.

Kind of. Well, they don't realise that they are on the run, but they are. Kind of. You just have to watch it to understand. Although the film is hilarious and touching in equal measure Waititi is too much of an artist to just rely on those elements, the film is also beautifully shot with an eye for composition.



## His and Hers

The second documentary on the list, from 2009, is less conventional than *Man on Wire* but all the more interesting for its simple premise. In **Ken Wardrop's** film, a series of girls/women talk about the men/boys/men in their lives, starting with children talking about their fathers, then boyfriends, then husbands. The simplicity of the topic is matched by the simplicity of the film's aesthetic; mostly static, carefully framed, shots within a domestic setting, a colour palette of primary colours, with only the voices of the women used. Not only is the film a snapshot of the time it was made it is also a revealing document on how the relationships between the genders changes over time. We see many women but hear of only 'one' man. Reactions will vary according to the students that watch the film. Set in the midlands the film might seem archaic to some, too white to others, or too close to home to most. But the central truths of the film are eternal and, often, hilarious.

## Beasts of the Southern Wild

I look at film through the lens of poetry when I introduce it and this film is pure poetry. A magical realist film from **Benh Zeitlin** the film centres around a young six-year-old, Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis), who has to learn to fend for herself in the town of Bayou La Batre. With her father seriously ill and her mother missing, she must turn to her community for help and guidance. The film is a fairy tale set along the Mississippi delta, with an environmental backdrop involving melting icecaps. But the core of the film is about courage and, once again, love. The courage not only to defend yourself, to take care of yourself, but also the courage to be yourself. The courage not to conform. The giant boar-like aurochs, having been released by the melting glaciers, are coming, a magical realist metaphor to confront Hushpuppy. Shot in browns and stagnant greens, with flashes of light, the film places itself firmly in the soil of the bayou. We are left in no doubt where these people belong, especially when we are almost blinded by the sharp whites of a hospital later in the film. Students love the film, they see it as an idyllic existence, and often miss the fantasy at the centre of the story.

## ET

**Steven Spielberg's** 1982 film is a classic in every sense of the word. Not only in its 'much loved' status but also within the canon of great films. At the core of the film is a boy, Elliott who is struggling on a number of fronts. He must come to terms with the fact that his father has left the family home, he must come to terms with being an outsider and he must also say goodbye to his childhood as he enters adolescence. He must mature. Enter ET. Or should we talk about ET as the main character and say, 'enter Elliott? ET also seems to be an outsider, although his troubles are self-inflicted. I spoke about ET a few months ago so I don't want to go over it again here, suffice it to say that this is the perfect film for anyone to teach, study, or enjoy. Every shot, colour, sound, piece of music is there with purpose and imagination. The script is tight and full of small details that reward careful scrutiny.

## Sing Street

A musical set in a 1980s Dublin inner city secondary school where Conor (Ferdia Walsh-Peelo) must come to terms with moving from a posh fee-paying institution to one with less lofty ideals. To do this, and get the girl, Ann (Kelly Thornton), he starts a band. Most of the humour in the film comes from the band's changing tastes as they go from pop to more cerebral efforts, citing the 80s influences along the way. A nice touch is how the actors pace the development of their own singing voices, it is noticeable how better they are at the end of the film than at the beginning. The film is more than a simple comedy though. There's the family that is slowly dissolving, the hints of physical and sexual abuse, the mother with hopes and dreams that the age wouldn't allow, and the introduction of diversity into the country. But these elements never impose themselves on the film, they are all subtly dealt with, a subtlety that is refreshing. If you know your Highschool films then you'll recognise some of the tropes that director **John Carney** plays around with, even down to the Highschool dance. As the film progresses this allusion to the Hollywood fantasy slowly seeps into the fabric of the film until, at the end, we get a film that embraces Hollywood and the French New Wave in one glorious shot. My students will be studying this film.

## Moonrise Kingdom

**Wes Anderson's** 2012 film is a simple story about two young people in love running away to be together. Parents, Scout Troups, The Police and Social Services must track them down. Set in 1965 the film is full of Anderson's quirks; no character is left without an oddity to define them, and, of course, there is Anderson's symmetrical cinematic style. Issues are raised but no answers given. Everything is questioned, leaving the audience alone to come up with possible solutions.

A nice antidote, or companion piece, to *Romeo and Juliet* in both narrative and style.

## Wadjda

A culture shock of a film. Set in Saudi Arabia the film tells the story of Wadjda (Waad Mohammed), a ten-year-old girl that wants to buy a bicycle. To get the money to buy the bicycle she must win a Koran recitation competition, not her strong point. **Haifaa Al-Mansour** has a lot to say about how women are treated in Saudi Arabia but doesn't instead of a creating a polemical text she allows the clear narrative structure of her film to do the talking for her. In *Wadjda* she has created the perfect conduit for her discussions. *Wadjda* is a recognisable character from any culture in any part of the world; a child that wants to play. The fact that she is a female in Saudi Arabia is her only barrier to this simple hope. Girls aren't even supposed to ride a bicycle. **Al-Mansour** has a clear love of the people of Saudi Arabia, we are never induced to hate any characters just to question their motives. The city of Riyadh is similarly shot to reveal its beauty and question its inhibitions.



## Spirited Away

Another film that I have taught in class. Although some may balk at the idea of using an animated film in a class of thirteen to fifteen-year olds, this is no simple animation. **Hayao Miyazaki's** film is about Chihiro (Rumi Hiragi), a little girl who must save her parents, who have been turned into pigs for being too greedy. In the process of doing this she must enter a fantasy world set in a bath house.

Miyazaki gets distracted by his characters notably he gets distracted by No-Face, a character who, literally, only had a walk on part until he was plucked from obscurity to be given a starring role.

This isn't the only diversion in the classic "plot" structure of a heroic tale, the whole impetus is moved

when new characters are introduced at random and a story line is wrapped up before it even begins. This only adds to the glory of the film. As with all Ghibli films it is first and foremost beautiful to look at, to which you can add a telling sound scape and emotive soundtrack. The film is poetic at every level, sound, editing, imagery, with an array of Gods/spirits, turnipmen, giant babies, multiple armed workmen, giant blobs of filth and a blue Dragon. Family, love, the importance of work and acceptance of difference are all present. Typical of a film with its target audience it is mostly a coming of age film, about leaving things behind, about embracing change. In the end though, it's one of those films where you will see something new in it whenever you watch it.



## Kes

The classic **Ken Loach** 1969 film comes to the Junior Cycle, and it is a very welcome arrival. Billy Casper (David Bradley) doesn't lead a very happy life. Treated abysmally by his older brother, and not much better by his mother, the fifteen-year-old working class teenager finds solace and meaning in his Kestrel. There are many films on this list that touch on the lives of young adults and those entering their teenage years, but few do it as starkly, and as warmly, as *Kes*. At times brutally realistic, at times beautifully realistic, the film trusts its actors to live out their characters, to allow themselves to just inhabit the skin of the people they are creating. Shot in Yorkshire the film doesn't make any concession to those of us a little rusty with the accent, this, allied to the time distance, results in a film with a distinctly foreign feel. Yet, again, the truth beneath the accents universalises the themes. We all know a Billy. I've taught a few, male and female.

Loach lets the film unfold at its own pace but pay attention to how interiors and exteriors are shot, *Kes*, like *ET*, is all about the outside, the freedom of nature.

## Night of the Hunter

Stonecold classic. A masterpiece of cinema. Another film I have used in class, and not just with the junior cycle students. **Charles Laughton** directed **Robert Mitchum** in this noir-fairy-tale. And it has **Lillian Gish**. Imagine a fairy tale about an evil step-father hunting down two children for the family treasure. Now imagine that being turned into a film by a director that seems to have swallowed every German Expressionist film made, before watching all the noirs available up to 1955 (some would say the end point of the true film noir 'movement'). Mitchum plays **Harry Powell**, a man that shared a cell with the father of the two children in question, **John** (**John Chapin**) and **Pearl** (**Sally Jane Bruce**). Before their father, **Ben**, is executed he tells Harry about the \$10,000 he has left in his family home. Harry, upon release, goes straight to **Ben's** widow (**Shelley Winters**), woos her, marries her, kills her. **John** realises what's going on and goes on the run with **Pearl**. **Laughton's** film wasn't well received when it was first released but time has exposed those critics as being blind to the true art before them. The gothic elements are accompanied by a firm understanding of how a film utilises perspective, both of the audience but also of the characters. This is a film worthy of any classroom.



The films on the new list are a diverse bunch, in terms of director, protagonist, setting and language, but they all seem to contain a similar understanding of the centrality of agency in the human experience. Without



# LEAVING CERT FILMS

by **Conor Murphy & Padraig O'Shea**

The list of films has come a long way since 2001. A careful balancing act has developed over the years. We get auteurs, films from the canon, modern acclaimed indie movies and some added extras. Now all we can do is sit back and debate about the merits of the various texts on the list (as English teachers love to do) basking in the knowledge that we weren't given the thankless task of having to come up with the titles ourselves.



## Pride

directed by **Mathew Warchus**

Mathew Warchus' 2014 film tells the story of a group of LGBT activists in London fundraising for the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984. The film has a number of interesting quirks; characters are present merely to further the plot and contextualise themes, there seems to be no main protagonist, nor any real antagonist unless you count Margaret Thatcher or society in general. There is an attempt to create a visual motif of the Welsh countryside but this is never juxtaposed with any similar urban motif nor do they attempt to look at the environmental impact of the mines, that the men of the village work in, upon this landscape. All violence (whether on the environment or on humans) is largely left off screen and mentioned in passing rather than being tackled head on. Even when it is tackled the moment seems secondary, there merely because it is expected, rather than being used to illustrate the reality of these characters' lives. A simple scene where two characters chat whilst making sandwiches leave the fact that the sandwiches have no filling, are just bread and butter, unsaid. The careful cutting of them into triangles adds poignancy to the moment and says much more about the sacrifices the miners have made than any depiction of the picket line would. There's a similar simplicity to a scene where Andrew Scott's character waves goodbye to his friends before quietly returning to washing obscene graf-

fiti from his shop window, all the time smiling at the last joke shared before their departure. The washing of the window is routine, an everyday occurrence. Here we see the Director at his most confident, letting the images do the talking. CM



## About Elly

directed by **Asgar Farhadi**

This Iranian film, directed by Asghar Farhadi, is set in a, slightly dilapidated, holiday house on the Caspian Sea. Three couples, all old friends, holiday together. Elly, a primary school teacher, is brought along by Sepideh in her vain attempt to set the teacher up with Ahmed, newly returned from Germany. The film centres around relationships and, particularly, how lies can grow and grow. How honesty and truthfulness is difficult but necessary. The film is like a traditional farce reconfigured as a thriller. The interior of the ramshackle home is contrasted with the wide expanse of the sea. The camera, colour and editing of each space creates conflicting moods and an energy that often undermines the emotions the characters are experiencing. Theatrical in terms of its careful character building, and dismantling, the film might be seen as a metaphor for Iranian

society but that would be to reduce the film down to the exotic. The film is far more universal than that. We recognise some of the cultural elements, not only in terms of capitalist paraphernalia but more so in terms of the interactions between family and friends. Human interaction is the same all over the world. CM



## Brooklyn

directed by **John Crowley**

One of the most popular films on the list, John Crowley's film tells the story of Eilis who emigrates to America in the 1950s. When she returns to Ireland for her sister's funeral she is faced with a simple decision; stay in Ireland with her new male friend Jimmy (and take care of her mother) or return to Brooklyn and her Italian-American husband Tony. Once again we are presented with a film about interiors and exteriors except this time there are more parallels to consider as we visit interiors in Ireland that are all harsh textures, unrefined and exposed wood, sharp angles, sparse sets, whereas interiors in Brooklyn seem to be filled with lush, soft, inviting furnishings of deep

deep reds and warm browns. Brooklyn seems to be teeming with people, with life. This is replicated with exteriors, particularly the shots of beaches. Whereas we can barely see the sand on the beach in America with all the sunbathers, the beach in Ireland stretches off into the distant, empty and inviting. But cold. Of equal importance is the use of colours, from greens to bright yellows, the colours are reminiscent of Technicolor movies from the period. But only on Eilis. Beneath the narrative is a subtle critique of how society can restrict, of how we must move away from home, from family, to become independent. The film is at its best during quiet moments, during those scenes where Eilis is observing the world flow and drift around her. Eilis seems to be the audience looking on at a moment in time, at a society yet to face up to the constraints it imposes. POS

### Winter's Bone

directed by **Debra Granik**

One of the new films on the list, and one that, with the presence of Jennifer Lawrence, will probably prove to be popular, is this Debra Granik directed indie thriller, a careful step to the left of full-on Southern Gothic. Lawrence plays Ree, a young woman that must track down her father before she, along with her two brothers and her sick mother, is evicted from her home. A classic detective narrative, with strong hints of noir, the film is covered in a mist of browns, dusky reds and stagnant greens. Everything seems to be covered in an old flannel shirt, one that's been handed down from family member to family member. Loyalty to the clan is important and so is revenge. But the need to look after your own, your close family, is paramount. The law is there but only as an almost abstract concept. The camera often sweeps, often shakes, often pauses, each choice dependant on the emotions of Ree and where she is in her determined and spirited search. We are subtly reminded of how young she is, that she should still be in school, but this knowledge is only of passing importance to the wider community. If you're old enough to kick the hornets' nest you're old enough to suffer the consequences. A great cast, beautiful cinematography, astute directing and a script that keeps the darkness, and heart, of Daniell Woodrell's novel. CM



### Unforgiven

directed by **Clint Eastwood**



Clint Eastwood's 1992 film feels like a full stop to the post-war western. Dedicated to Sergio Leone and Don Siegel the film is equally indebted to John Ford. The film seems to be asking us if we actually thought about the violence of these films (and the time they were set), of the real, physical, consequences of these western 'heroes'. We get a reference to the famous final (or opening) shot from Porter's The Great Train Robbery (1903) when The Schofield Kid shoots one of the targets whilst he sits in an outhouse. Jaimz Woolvett looks directly down the lens and points his gun at us. Eastwood is setting his stall out for the audience, trying to implicate them in the violence, trying to make us complicit. But, just like the opening attack scene where a similar shot is quickly utilized, we are merely put in the place of the victim, we are never asked to question our enjoyment of these scenes. The film tries to have its cake and eat it. We still cheer at the end when Little Bill gets it. We don't bat an eye when the prostitutes take the law into their own hands by hiring assassins in the first place. The film is full to the brim of pathetic fallacy, of chiaroscuro lighting, of shotguns ratcheting. Eastwood masterfully exploits all the techniques available to him, from wide, poetic, landscapes to the carefully positioned shotgun above Ned Logan's head. Once again there is a contrast between exteriors and interiors. The autumnal pastoral images promise a world of nature, of possibilities and freedoms. The town, and particularly Little Bill's house are barely standing in the dark brown mud and grime. The world Munny's wife represents is only ready to emerge after the credits roll, and after we leave the cinema. CM

### Some Like It Hot

directed by **Billy Wilder**

A comedy, a gangster film, a commentary on sexuality, an ode to alcohol, an outrageous impersonation act. Billy Wilder's 1959 film is all of the these. Here is a farce where the exterior and interior is used not just for comedic effect

but also as a plot device, as metaphor for character developments and even as an observation on societies proclivities. Two male musicians witness the Valentine's Day Massacre and must flee Chicago. To do this they dress up as women and join an all-female band. One falls in love with the lead singer, the other has a romantic entanglement with a rich older man. Then the gangsters turn up. CM

### Trading Place

directed by **John Landis**

Trading Places is a 1980's take on Twain's classic 19th century 'The Prince and the Pauper'. Eddie Murphy's comedic talents shine in his role as a homeless hustler on the unforgiving streets of Regan era, 'greed is Good', New York. Dan Akroyd plays the pampered entitled financial broker yuppie whose world is turned upside down when he and Murphy 'trade places'. Apart from its obvious moral message there is plenty here to stimulate debate amongst the students. 1980's attitudes to racism, gender and class are presented in a way that is sure to shock a more enlightened and politically aware generation of students. POS



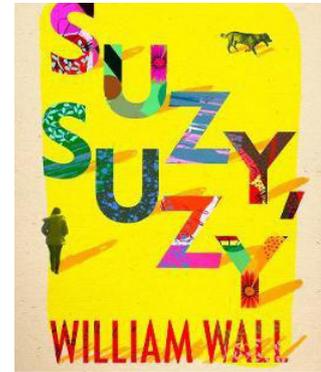
### Hunger

directed by **Steve McQueen**

Hunger centres around the 1981 hunger strikes in Northern Ireland with Michael Fassbender starring as Bobby Sands. But this is only the backdrop for McQueen to delve into those thorny films around humanity (both its physicality and its neuroses), conflict (both external and internal), agency and our tenuous understanding of each other's perspective (as political beings but more especially as conscious beings with emotions). McQueen's artistic background can be seen in some stark imagery, and rhythmic editing. The image of faecal matter on the walls brings to mind the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, the soundscape used reminds us of the poetry of Heaney and Yeats. A film so much more than the stunning central scene between Sands and his priest, this is one to savour. CM



# Not Just Another YA Novel



## CONOR MURPHY REVIEWS WILLIAM WALL'S 'SUZY, SUZY'

*'My dad is fat like in American TV shows. I blame Colonel Grace. My mam thinks KFC is a good way to feed a family of four. But maybe you get that way from sitting all day in a Lexus and only getting to tell people they are in breach of contract. Or maybe it's The Crash. Maybe it's revenge of the tenant? Or The Bank... Whatever, he is a tub of lard and it's surprising his heart can even get up in the morning.'*

Everyone knows that YA novels depict dystopian futures or desperately tragic events that the protagonist must come to terms with. Fight the tyrant, overcome rape, tackle the bully, confront racism and bigotry. These are the common themes of the YA novel, or at least they are to the uninitiated.

Suzy is a seventeen-year-old that does, indeed, come across some of the above but never in that brutal, sensational style of some novels within the genre. Suzy is too smart for simplifications. Well, she does have a photographic memory (or so she says). Along with Holly and, in a more complicated fashion, Serena she makes up a trio of friends navigating the end of their innocent teenage years.

Well, again, maybe not so innocent.

Like in real life nothing is as simple as it appears on the surface. Below every relationship are complications, compromises and secrets.

First-person narratives are inherently deceptive, you can't always believe what you are told.

Her father's business is falling apart. Her parent's marriage is similarly crumbling. There's a murder in the locality and her brother seems to be going

through some personal crisis. All of these events affect Suzy but, as she is not privy to all the facts, she struggles to process them.

This lack of communication is everywhere in the novel, even between us, the gullible readers, and Suzy. You find yourself wishing they'd all just sit down and talk to each other openly. But, then again, that doesn't happen in the real world.

William Wall is an ex-teacher turned writer, or should that be a writer who taught for a while? Poet, short story writer and novelist, he has a talent for creating first person narratives with such rich and rounded protagonists that you are enveloped in their world and the voice of the author is subsumed within.

But you'd know this is Wall's work.

For all of Suzy's teenage talk, her repetition of 'like', or 'idk', there are moments when her observational powers release her poetic side, often with the most astute of similes: 'There was a magpie swaggering around like a rugby player in a neoprene west.'

Reminiscent of 'Catcher in the Rye', Wall manages to utilise the rhythms of teenage patter as Suzy discusses everything from KFC to murder to (in a cheeky moment) Wall's poem 'Ghost Estate'. Wall cleverly establishes the specific moment in time these events unfold, thus avoiding the inevitable calls of 'but that's not how we talk'. No, that's how Suzy talks. And she loves to talk, or at least write.

As the story unfolds, as the secrets mount up, as her confusion turns

inwards, Suzy toys with the idea of self-harm. Handled with delicacy and honesty Suzy slowly becomes overwhelmed. Wall's ability to inhabit the internal world of women has already been demonstrated, particularly in his last book 'Grace's Day', but this ability has never felt so thorough as in this novel.

Maybe it's because I'm a father of a teenager, maybe it's because I teach teenagers, but what strikes you most about the novel is the sheer joy of living with Suzy. She is character so comprehensively drawn, so full of teenage foibles, that you want to follow her story, find out how she gets on afterwards. You find yourself wishing you could enter the narrative and help.

I must pause here to talk about Peter, my favourite character (besides Suzy). Suzy meets Peter late in the novel when she, and her father, go off to the country. An old turf cutter, Peter is the only one that looks on Suzy as an equal. There is a moment's hesitation on the reader's part when he is first introduced. An old man offering to help a vulnerable teenage girl... But our worries are quickly assuaged, and we too can enjoy his fireside tales and general amiability.

Wall's book has all the hallmarks of a classic YA novel but isn't restricted by the target market (are they really only for the teen market?). The novel may have many dark moments but I found it to be full of real warmth, humour and a political awareness and clarity that only teenagers possess while us adults live in our insular clouds.

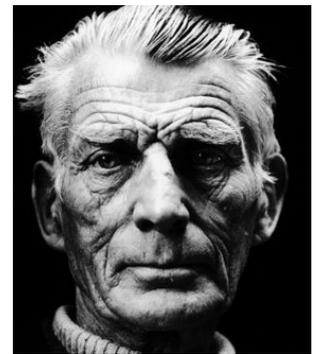
It's the kind of book you finish and hope that there's a sequel. I'd love to follow Suzy as she grows up.

# Prescribed Drama 2021

BY KATE BARRY

## Samuel BECKETT "Waiting for Godot"

One of the best-loved plays of the twentieth century, Beckett's masterpiece is as funny as it is bleak. The pared-back setting, small (all-male) cast and minimal plot are counter-balanced by rich language and thought-provoking musings about the meaning of life. The protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, wait by the appointed tree for the mysterious Godot. Spoiler: Godot never shows up. They are joined for a short time by the obnoxious Pozzo and his slave, Lucky. The second act mirrors the first yet manages to have a different, more humane tone leading to the observation that this is a play in which "nothing happens, twice". This is a sharp, challenging text where ideas of philosophy, individual freedom and possibly colonialism are played out in an unspecified setting.



## Patricia BURKE BROGAN "Eclipsed"

"Eclipsed" was written in the late 1980's and shone a light on what was then still an unacknowledged aspect of Irish society: the imprisonment of female "penitents", most of them unmarried mothers, in institutions where they provided what amounted to slave labour. The play has an all-female cast and is set entirely within such an institution. The characters are the penitents themselves and two of the nuns who are their wardens. A musical backdrop ranges from Handel's "Messiah" to the hits of Elvis and gives a sense of the outside world from which the women are excluded. Rare instances of escape are thwarted but one of the women makes a last bid for freedom. The play moves inexorable towards its tragic conclusion but is nevertheless full of life and humour.

## Marina CARR "By the Bog of Cats"

A recognised masterpiece of modern Irish theatre, "By the Bog of Cats" tells of the final tragic days of Hester Swane, a settled Traveller who is about to see the father of her child marry another woman. As a result of the marriage Hester is to lose her home and at the play's opening she holds the audience's sympathy as a clearly-wronged woman. Carr then skillfully shows us that the situation is more complex than it first appears and all of the richly imagined characters have dark secrets they wish to keep hidden. The dialogue is rich with humour, blending sharp wit with a keen ear for the vernacular of the Midlands, yet the play is also a stark, symbolic tragedy with echoes of Lorca.



## Brian FRIEL "Philadelphia, Here I Come!"

Set in 1964, Friel's play features a split character, Gar O'Donnell, with separate actors playing "Gar Public" and "Gar Private". Gar is about to emigrate from Ballybeg to Philadelphia but before he leaves there are various interactions between him and his father "SB", his love-interest Kate, and his friends. Some of these interactions are in flash-back form and gradually build a picture of a life starved of affection and meaningful communication with others.

## Frank MCGUINNESS "Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme"

Like "Waiting for Godot" this play features an all-male cast but here the setting and the context could not be more specific. While opening with a contemporary (1980's) monologue, most of the play is set on the Western front in 1916. It is the eve of the battle of the Somme and the eight "sons of Ulster" have volunteered to fight for various reasons. The play sees them both develop as individuals and coalesce as a group and just before they meet their fate they re-enact the Battle of the Boyne. We know from the beginning that all but one of the men perish in the battle. The play deals not just with expected issues like patriotism, war and sectarianism but also with homophobia, survivor's guilt and class hierarchy.



## Nina RAINE "Tribes"

A 2012 play set in contemporary London. The "tribes" of the title refers to the deaf community and also to a sense of the family as a tribe. The protagonist, Billy, is the profoundly deaf son of hearing parents. He has gotten by due to his skill at lip-reading but is always at one remove from wider society and from the lively discourse of his siblings and parents. He meets Sylvia, a woman who is losing her own hearing, and is introduced to sign-language and to deaf culture. While this is hugely positive, he now feels less than at-home in two separate settings. This is a tough-provoking play with engaging themes and recognisable context and would fit well with many of the more established texts on the comparative list.

## William SHAKESPEARE "The Tempest"

For 2021 it is a comparative text only and for many it offers a welcome alternative to the tragedies. "The Tempest" is a theatrical box of treats as it features a love plot, political intrigue, comedy and magic. There are dark undertones of power, loyalty and colonialism. The plot is simple yet fantastical: Prospero, the ousted Duke of Milan, has taken over a remote island and developed magical powers. He creates the tempest of the title in order to wreck the ship of his treacherous brother, Antonio, and force the passengers on to the island. Also aboard are the King of Naples and his son, Ferdinand, who provides the love-interest for Prospero's daughter, Miranda.



## William SHAKESPEARE "King Lear"

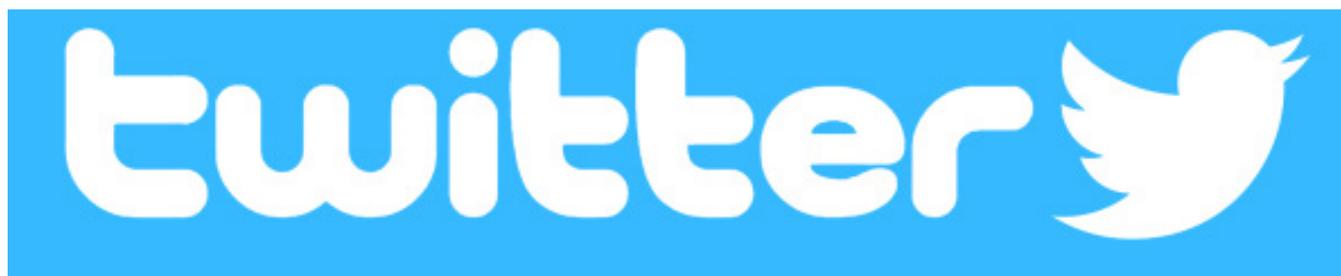
One of Shakespeare's great tragedies, "King Lear" tells the story of a king of pre-historical Britain who famously and disastrously divides his kingdom between his daughters. The play opens with a "love-test" where the two wicked daughters, Goneril and Regan, earn territory through exaggerated protestations of devotion to their aged father. A third daughter, Cordelia, refuses to participate in this charade and is punished for her integrity by being banished from the kingdom. Unsurprisingly things begin to unravel very quickly for Lear and, although there are glimmers of hope as Cordelia and the loyal Kent seek to defeat the forces of evil, the play has one of the bleakest endings in English drama as almost all the protagonists lie dead on the stage. There is also a sub-plot involving the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons: the noble, legitimate Edgar and the Machiavellian, illegitimate Edmund.

## SOPHOCLES "Oedipus the King"

Famously summed up by Alain de Botton in the form of the tabloid heading "Sex With Mum W as Blinding" this is by far the oldest text on the list. The play opens with Oedipus as King of Thebes, having solved the riddle of the Sphinx and married the widow of the previous king. Oedipus sets out to avenge the murder of his wife's first husband, Laius, only to find – in one of the first and finest plot twists – that he himself is the murderer. (Oedipus killed a man he thought was a person of little note, not realising it was the King of Thebes). In a further twist, it turns out that Laius was actually his father, making Jocasta his mother and his children his half-siblings. Unfamiliar as the context may seem for some students, the simple format and universal themes of "Oedipus" make this a perennially popular choice whose reappearance will be welcomed by many.



# 10 ACCOUNTS TO FOLLOW ON



By Elaine Dobbyn

## 01 @sccenglish

"Literature, Poetry, Drama, Fiction, Language, Education, Tech & more, from Julian in the English Department of @sccdublin. Organiser @researchEDDub."

Julian Girdham of St Columba's College has been a pioneer in the field of English department blogging for many years using <http://www.sccenglish.ie/> to showcase student work and share resources.

## 02 @JCTEnglish

"Official Twitter account of Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) English Team, a Department of Education & Skills support service for schools. Queries to: [info@jct.ie](mailto:info@jct.ie)"  
Great for links to webinars, resources and key information relating to the Junior Cycle.

## 03 @LitDriveUK

"Non Profit Resource & CPD Provision for English Teachers #TeamEnglish #Litdrive"

Great links to their amazing stash of resources on [litdrive.org.uk](http://litdrive.org.uk).

## 04 @PDST\_TechinEd @CESItweets

Both great for Tech in Education events and links.

## 05 @MartinDoyleIT

Books editor of The Irish Times (and Extra in Father Ted. Great for suggested reading and links

## 06 @IrishTeachers

"EdBlogsIE shares blog posts from Irish educators. Visit the blog to read full posts. EdBlogsIE is managed by Nigel Lane: @NL\_84. #edchatie #education #blogging"

## 07 @poetryireland

"Connecting Poetry and People. Also @PoetryIrelandEd (education)."

Great for poetry readings, seminars, workshops etc.

## 08 @Mr PHuff

"English teacher in @ASM\_Limerick, grammar tyrant, @ASMDebates mentor, NCSE Associate, & more!"

Good mix of stuff of interest to English teachers and debating.

## 09 @liassthermartin

"Teacher, writer, reader & eater. Joint Head of an English department"  
Focused on the teaching of English skills in the UK system – very useful links and ideas.

## 10 @Doug\_Lemov

"Author (Teach Like a Champion, Reading Reconsidered, Practice Perfect), dad. Work at Uncommon Schools. Most views borrowed from someone smarter."

The US perspective on developments in teaching methodologies.

*It's also a good idea to follow bodies like @INOTENews @Education\_Ire @NCCAie, @PDST @IFIDub @UCD\_English, your local library, local schools, universities, education centres and cultural organisations in your areas.*

*Follow the Hashtag #edchatie for education-based discussions with a chat on a specific topic taking place every Monday night at 8.30-9.30pm.*

*Plus look out for the contributors to this magazine:*

*@conorsmurf @KMUBarry @littlemsobrien*



**N**OBODY'S PERFECT. THE famous last line from the film *Some Like it Hot* is, in the context of the film, an acceptance of Jack Lemon's cross-dressing character's masculinity, an acceptance of same sex marriage, an acceptance of same sex love. Played for laughs it got passed the censors (if they thought about it at all they probably thought that it was a dig at homosexuality).

But the line is also a meta-comment on Wilder's oeuvre. Time and again in his films he gives us characters that society has pushed to the periphery. Some have been used but, once that usefulness has been squeezed out of them, they are discarded. Emptied and castoff, Wilder's characters must find their agency again. Not every character is successful.

Billy Wilder was born in 1906 in what was the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. He worked for a time as a journalist in Vienna before moving to Berlin in 1929. At first he continued as a journalist but eventually found himself work as a scriptwriter. In 1933 he decided to leave Germany.

Wilder saw the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party and didn't like their divisive nature, how they picked on the weak, those outside of the norm in society. He could see the violence that was to come.

At first he moved to France where he continued to work in Film. With Alexander Esawy he directed the film *Bad Seed* in 1934.

He continued to move west and ended up in America, living with Peter Lore and without a word of English.

Wilder started his career in Hollywood as a screenwriter, partnering for years with the more politically conservative Charles Brackett. Their first film together was the 1939 comedy *Ninotchka* directed by the German Ernst Lubitsch. Brackett told of how Wilder and Lubitsch dressed in a similar fashion, spoke in a similar fashion and thought in a similar fashion. We can see elements of the Lubitsch touch in Wilder's comedies.

Wilder's American directorial debut was the 1942 comedy *The Major and the Minor* about a woman who pretends to be a child in order to

# 'A View from Outside'

Conor Murphy profiles Billy Wilder

save on a train fare. She is befriended by the Major, who doesn't notice the age difference.

Films like *Double Indemnity*, *The Lost Weekend* and *Sunset Boulevard* show that Wilder wasn't just interested in comedies. These films, although they had comic elements, were mature works for a mature audience. Wilder had things to say, things to discuss, beyond getting a simple laugh. These films are full of the aforementioned characters on the periphery, used up, wasting away, looking for agency, looking for a reason to continue.

As a foreigner with a heavy foreign accent, Wilder can be forgiven for being wary of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). This group of patriotic Americans was put together to hunt out any commies from Hollywood. Writers, Directors, Actors, anyone could be called before the committee to answer the question as to whether or not they were, or ever had been, a member of the communist party. They were also asked to name other possible members.

Refuse to answer, refuse to name names, and you would be blacklisted. Work would dry up. Humphrey Bogart at first fought against this committee but, after a bit of pressure (and some threats) he rescinded his attack in a newspaper advertisement.

This affected people's livelihoods. Name names or you never work in this town again.

At the height of the scare there was a struggle within the SDG (Screen Directors Guild). Cecil B DeMille, while Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the President of the SDG was away, pushed through a compulsory 'non-communist' loyalty oath for all members to sign.

To counteract this Mankiewicz needed 25 signatures for an injunction on the order and to call a general assembly of all members to discuss the oath and reassert his authority. Amongst those signatories were with the likes of John Ford, John Huston, and Billy Wilder.

When the dust settled on the controversy Mankiewicz instigated an oath anyway. Two Directors refused to sign it; John Huston and Billy Wilder.

Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett went separate ways; no one really knows why.

Wilder went on to form a number of writing partnerships most notably with I.A.L. Diamond, with whom he shares a writing credit on *Some Like It Hot*.

There are many great stories about the making of the film, especially in Tony Curtis' *'Some Like It Hot; Me, Marilyn and the Movie'*. In there, Curtis discusses the genius of Wilder's simplicity (he mentions the introduction of the two leads in their dresses by starting on their wobbling feet and moving up) and also the games Monroe played with the crew (notably the dress she wore for one performance that required lighting to

performance that required lighting to be changed lest her cleavage be revealed through the thin fabric).

But it's the ending of the film that reveals all. Four characters stuck in a boat. Two couples.

When we consider the future for them (the crash is about to happen, one of the females is male, a previous conversation revealed that Monroe won't stick with Curtis for much longer) we can see how things may fall apart.

But right there, in that moment, we are given a glimpse of perfection.

Here we have boat full of outsiders (one just doesn't know it yet) but they no longer feel that way. They've found each other.

Nobody's perfect and that's ok.

**OVER LEFT**

*Wilder on the set of Sunser Boulevard*

**OVER RIGHT**

*Curtis and Lemon in 'costume' in Some Like it Hot*

**BELOW**

*Joe E. Brown and Jack Lemon at the iconic ending to Some Like it Hot*



# LIGHTBULB MOMENT



Teachers share some methods that have worked in their classrooms Elaine Dobbyn



**Useful for:** Introducing new material, revising material ahead of exams.

**Method:** We all know that the best way to learn something is to teach it so occasionally flipping the classroom to make the students do the instruction is hugely beneficial for them (and gives you a break from the sound of your own voice- phew!). I find it especially useful when embarking on a new poet or revising material when the class is a bit jaded.

I arrange the class into groups of 4/5 in advance and assign a poem or piece of a text to each group. I'll pop a Word Doc on the board with all the information – no debates over swapping groups – it's a fait accompli when they get the information. They'll be given the date that they'll have to deliver a 15/20 minute presentation on the poem/text and I will give some guidelines for how they can structure the presentation.

**Here's an example from a project on Plath a few years back:**

Each group must present a 15 minute presentation on their given poem. This includes: a performance reading of the poem (music, props, artwork encouraged), a detailed explanation of the meaning of the poem, a discussion of key images, poetic technique and what we learn about Plath as a poet and a person from the poem.

You can give a certain number of classes for the groups to do some preparation possibly in a computer room if they don't have devices in class. Even if you have a lazy class it can be incredibly effective to still make them go up and deliver a presentation – you'll be surprised what insights they can gain into a poem when the whole class is staring at them!

# English Teachers' Response to CBA2: the Collection of Student's Texts

the process of drafting and redrafting increases the correction load and eats into valuable class contact time.

The skills learned are valuable but the assessment is poor and I question its value.

in the context of a Youthreach student CBA2 puts them at a disadvantage.

I feel like the time is not worth the effort.

Students experience a broad range of writing techniques and can develop their skills in their favourite area.

It is not a valid model of assessment as the pieces are so varied they are impossible to compare with any reliability

No real sense of national standard

It allows students to be more aware of how they write and how they engage with the process of writing in general.

The students see very clearly how editing their work using feedback from the teacher can improve their writing.

I can see the value of allowing students to draft and redraft their work, but regard the SLARS and descriptors as a waste of time.

# English Teachers' Response to CBA1: the Oral Communication Task

Confidence and maturity

As it stands, the CBA is too vague. It must be more subject specific.

Students with a lot of help at home do better

Gives students an opportunity to talk about topics of interest to them

It is a valuable skill that all students will use throughout their working lives

Not valuable in relation to the subject of English but valuable in relation to building up their confidence in public speaking. Perhaps if the Oral Communication was related to a writer or their work it would be more beneficial to the learning of English.

They look up Pogba or Messi or someone. Copy and paste onto a PowerPoint and read it out. Job done!

It places emphasis on another important skill set for students.

It over emphasises presentation performance rather than the content and structure of the oral communication.

Too much time given over to preparation and execution of the CBA and then the moderation. The students, as far as I can see, learn little from the whole process.