



English 12 Independent Novel Study

1. Canadian Authors

Margaret Atwood – *Alias Grace*

Grace Marks does not come from a moneyed back round, and she lacks the respectability or formal education to get anything more respectable than a housemaid's position. Not long after her arrival in Canada from Ireland, she finds employment with Nancy Montgomery and winds up regretting it when the authorities come knocking on her door, claiming Grace murdered her.

Margaret Atwood – *Oryx and Crake*

A dystopian novel taking place in a near future where science and technology have transgressed the limits of the acceptable. Jimmy, or Snowman, the narrator of the novel, is the only human being who survived the destruction of humankind. Living in a tree to protect himself from dangerous hybrid animals, he is slowly starving while brooding over the past. He is not completely alone, though; curious human-like creatures, the Crakers, bring him fish and seem to regard him as a sort of prophet and inoffensive monster. Gradually, Snowman reveals who he is, who the Crakers are, and what happened to the world before the catastrophe.

Anita Rau Badami – *A Hero's Walk*

Set in the dusty seaside town of Totupuram on the Bay of Bengal, *The Hero's Walk* traces the terrain of the family and forgiveness through the lives of an exuberant cast of characters bewildered by the rapid pace of change in today's India. Each member of the Rao family pits his or her chance at personal fulfillment against the conventions a crumbling caste and class system.

Michael Ondaatje – *The English Patient*

A young Canadian nurse, A Sikh bomb disposal expert, a thief turned spy, and a man burnt beyond recognition, meet in the last moments of the Second World War. The identity of the patient is the heart of the story as he tells his memories of a doomed love affair in the North African desert.

Jane Urquhart – *The Stone Carvers*

At the center of the story is Klara Becker, the granddaughter of a master woodcarver, who spends her childhood in a German-settled community in southwestern Ontario in the years leading up to the Great War. It is a childhood punctuated by tremendous losses: her mother dies of cancer when she is a teenager; her older brother, in love with wandering, eventually leaves the family; and her brief but passionate love affair with Eamon O'Sullivan is cut short when he volunteers for action and never returns. But Klara's inherited gift for carving eventually reunites her with her brother and gives her purpose as she works on the memorial that will make her whole again.

Hugh MacLennan – *A Watch that Ends the Night*

George and Catherine Stewart share the worry of Catherine's illness, which could cause her death at any time, and the memory of Jerome Martell, Catherine's first husband and George's closest friend. Martel, a brilliant doctor passionately concerned with social justice, is presumed to have died in a Nazi prison camp. His sudden return to Montreal precipitates the central crisis of this novel. Hugh MacLennan takes the reader into the lives of his three characters and back into the world of Montreal in the thirties, when politics could send an idealist across the world to Spain, France, Auschwitz, Russia, China, and back, finally, to his old home.

Rohinton Mistry – *A Fine Balance*

Against the emergency measures imposed by Indira Gandhi in the mid-1970s, *A Fine Balance* follows the lives of four unlikely people as they struggle "to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair." Originally published in 1995, *A Fine Balance* is both a warning about the human terrors that await a society without compassion and a testimony to the enduring greatness of the human spirit.

Mordecai Richier – *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*

Duddy — the third generation of a Jewish immigrant family in Montreal — is combative, amoral, scheming, a liar, and totally hilarious. From his street days tormenting teachers at the Jewish academy to his time hustling four jobs at once in a grand plan to "be somebody," Duddy learns about living — and the lesson is an outrageous roller-coaster ride through the human comedy.

M.G Vassanji – *The In-Between World Of Vikram Lall*

A haunting novel of corruption and regret that brings to life the complexity and turbulence of Kenyan society in the last five decades. Rich in sensuous detail and historical insight, this is a powerful story of passionate betrayals and political violence, racial tension and the strictures of tradition, told in elegant, assured prose.

Carol Shields – *Larry's Party*

At 26, Larry Weller thinks his future lies in flowers. He still lives at home, has a new career as a floral designer, and a girlfriend about whom he is somewhat ambivalent. What Larry is about to discover is that life is never a straightforward path. His girlfriend becomes pregnant. They marry and set off for their honeymoon in England where Larry stumbles upon what will become his greatest passion in life. He takes up the creation and construction of meticulous mazes, which leads him down blind alleys and dead ends, failed marriages and changing expectations.

Margaret Laurence – *The Diviners*

His is the powerful story of an independent woman who refuses to abandon her search for love. For Morag Gunn, growing up in a small Canadian prairie town is a toughening process — putting distance between herself and a world that wanted no part of her. But in time, the aloneness that had once been forced upon her becomes a precious right — relinquished only in her overwhelming need for love. Again and again, Morag is forced to test her strength against the world — and finally achieves the life she had determined would be hers.

Timothy Taylor – *Stanley Park*

A young chef who revels in local bounty, a long-ago murder that remains unsolved, the homeless of Stanley Park, a smooth-talking businessman named Dante — these are the ingredients of Timothy Taylor's stunning debut.

Sara Gruen – *Water for Elephants*

Jacob Jankowski, a young man suddenly adrift at the height of the Depression, enters the world of a second-rate circus struggling to survive through one-night stands in town after town. Working in the circus menagerie, Jacob meets Marlena, the beautiful star of the equestrian act, and her husband, August, a charismatic but cruel animal trainer. He also comes to know Rosie, an elephant who seems un-trainable— until Jacob finds a way to reach her.

Lawrence Hill – *The Book of Negroes*

Abducted as an 11-year-old child from her village in West Africa and forced to walk for months to the sea in a coffin— a string of slaves— Aminata Diallo is sent to live as a slave in South Carolina. But years later, she forges her way to freedom, serving the British in the Revolutionary War and registering her name in the historic "Book of Negroes." This book, an actual document, provides a short but immensely revealing record of freed Loyalist slaves who requested permission to leave the US for resettlement in Nova Scotia, only to find that the haven they sought was steeped in an oppression all of its own.

2. Contemporary Authors

Khaled Hosseini– *The Kite Runner*

This is an unforgettable and beautifully told story about the friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan grow up in different worlds: Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazara — a shunned ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, Amir thinks that he has escaped his past. Yet, he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him.



Khaled Hosseini – *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

This novel is a breathtaking story set against the volatile events of Afghanistan's last thirty years -- from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to post-Taliban rebuilding -- that puts the violence, fear, hope and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. It is a tale of two generations of characters brought jarringly together by the tragic sweep of war, where personal lives -- the struggle to survive, raise a family, find happiness -- are inextricable from the history playing out around them.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The author recreates a seminal moment in modern African history: Biafra's impassioned struggle to establish an independent republic in Nigeria during the 1960s. We meet five characters caught up in the extraordinary tumult of the decade. Fifteen-year-old Ugwu is houseboy to Odenigbo, a university professor who sends him to school, and in whose living room Ugwu hears voices full of revolutionary zeal. Odenigbo's beautiful mistress, Olanna, a sociology teacher, is running away from her parents' world of wealth and excess; Kainene, her urbane twin, is taking over their father's business; and Kainene's English lover, Richard, forms a bridge between their two worlds. As we follow these intertwined lives through a military coup, the Biafran secession and the subsequent war, Adichie brilliantly evokes the promise, and intimately, the devastating disappointments that marked this time and place.

Bryce Courtenay – *The Power of One*

This powerful book will inspire hope and lift the soul. *The Power of One* follows a boy named Peekay as he copes with the harsh realities of racism, war and lies in South Africa. Born to an Englishwoman, nurtured by a black woman and tormented persistently throughout his youth, he vows to survive and become the welterweight champion of the world. However, his journey is filled with modern prejudice and tribal superstitions. He learns of the power of words and communication and its ability to transform lives and communities. As he learns to sustain himself through the mystical and spiritual world he appreciates, he manages to see through the cruelty of the world.

Roddy Doyle – *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

It is 1968. Paddy Clarke is ten years old, breathless with discovery. He reads with a child's voraciousness, collecting facts the way adults collect grey hairs and parking tickets. Doyle captures the speech patterns of childhood brilliantly, the weird logic of incessant questions the non-sequiturs and wonderments...Like all great comic writers, Roddy Doyle has become an explorer of the deepest place of the heart, of love and pain and loss.

Erich Maria Remarque – *All Quiet on the Western Front*

The story follows the experiences of Paul Bäumer, a soldier whose teacher inspires him to join the German army shortly after the start of World War I. He arrives on the Western Front with his friends (Tjaden, Müller, Kropp and a number of other characters) and meets Stanislaus Katczinsky, known as Kat. The older Kat soon becomes Paul's mentor and teaches him about the realities of war. Paul and Kat swiftly become almost brothers, bonded by the hardships of the war.

Scott Fitzgerald – *The Great Gatsby*

Jay Gatsby's lavish lifestyle in a mansion on Long Island's gold coast encapsulates the spirit, excitement, and violence of the era Fitzgerald named "the Jazz Age". Impelled by his love for Daisy Buchanan, Gatsby seeks nothing less than to recapture the moment five years earlier when his best and brightest dreams - his "unutterable visions" - seemed to be incarnated in her kiss. A moving portrayal of the power of romantic imagination, as well as the pathos and courage entailed in the pursuit of an unattainable dream.

Ernest Hemingway – *A Farewell to Arms*

This is a story of a tragic romance set against the brutality and confusion of the First World War. A volunteer ambulance driver and a beautiful English nurse fall in love when he is wounded on the Italian front. Their relationship weaves through ups and downs and eventually explodes.

John Steinbeck – *The Grapes of Wrath*

In stark and moving detail, John Steinbeck depicts the lives of ordinary people striving to preserve their humanity in the face of social and economic desperation. When the Joads lose their tenant farm in Oklahoma, they join thousands of others, traveling the narrow concrete highways toward California and the dream of a piece of land to call their own. Each night on the road, they and their fellow migrants recreate society: leaders are chosen, unspoken codes of privacy and generosity evolve, and lust, violence, and murderous rage erupt.

Aldous Huxley – *A Brave New World*

Far in the future, the World Controllers have created the ideal society. Through clever use of genetic engineering, brainwashing and recreational sex and drugs, all its members are happy consumers. Bernard Marx seems alone in feeling discontent. Harboring an unnatural desire for solitude, and a perverse distaste for the pleasure of compulsory promiscuity, Bernard has an ill-defined longing to break free. A visit to one of the few remaining Savage Reservations, where the old, imperfect life still continues, may be the cure for his distress.

William Golding – *The Inheritors*

Eight Neanderthals encounter another race of beings like themselves, yet strangely different. This new race, Homo sapiens, fascinating in their skills and sophistication and terrifying in their cruelty, sense of guilt, and incipient corruption, spell doom for the more gentle folk whose world they will inherit.

J. D. Salinger – *Catcher in the Rye*

This classic 1951 novel tells the tale of a defiant 16-year-old prep school student who runs away to New York City after getting expelled. Although Holden Caulfield is more cynical than a Gen-Xer, his pain and loneliness slowly escape from underneath his tough exterior

George Orwell – *1984*

A satire on the possible horrors of a totalitarian regime in England in 1984. Hidden away in the Record Department of the sprawling Ministry of Truth, Winston Smith skillfully rewrites the past to suit the needs of the Party. Yet he inwardly rebels against the totalitarian world he lives in, which demands absolute obedience and controls him through the all-seeing telescreens and the watchful eye of Big Brother.

Joseph Heller – *Catch 22*

Yossarian is the hero who endlessly schemes to save his skin from the horrible chances of war. His efforts are perfectly understandable because thousands of people he hasn't even met are trying to kill him. If Yossarian makes any attempts to excuse himself from the perilous flying missions, he is trapped by the Great Loyalty Oath Crusade, the hilariously sinister bureaucratic rule from which the book takes its title: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes the necessary formal request to be relieved of such missions, the very act of making the request proves that he is sane and therefore ineligible to be relieved.

Amy Tan – *The Joy Luck Club*

In 1949 four Chinese women - drawn together by the shadow of their past - begin meeting in San Francisco to play mah jong, invest in stocks, eat dim sum, and "say" stories. They call their gathering the Joy Luck Club. Nearly forty years later, one of the members has died. When her daughter comes to take her place, she learns of her mother's lifelong wish, and the tragic way in which it has come true.

Ray Bradbury – *Fahrenheit 451*

Nowadays firemen start fires. Fireman Guy Montag loves to rush to a fire and watch books burn up. Then he met a seventeen-year old girl who told him of a past when people were not afraid, and a professor who told him of a future where people could think. And Guy Montag knew what he had to do....

3. Classics**Virginia Woolf – *Mrs. Dalloway***

A masterpiece from Virginia Woolf, this is the story of Clarissa Dalloway, the ebullient wife of a Member of Parliament at the end of the Second World War. While preparing for an evening party her old lover returns from India, while in another part of London Septimus Warren Smith is going mad from shell shock. Mrs. Dalloway is a day-in-the-life of the lost generation, a portrait of separate lives yearning for beauty and love lost during the war, while embracing life's few precious moments.

Jane Austen – *Pride and Prejudice*

Published in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* announced the arrival of the comedy of manners, a welcome change from the stiff, moralistic novels of the past. In recounting the courtship of the witty, independent Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy--the handsome bachelor whose arrogant pride Elizabeth regards as a fatal flaw--Austen illuminates, with subtle humor, the prejudices of society as a whole.

**Charlotte Brontë – *Jane Eyre***

Widely regarded as a revolutionary novel, Brontë's masterpiece introduced the world to a radical new type of heroine, one whose defiant virtue and moral courage departed sharply from the more acquiescent and malleable female characters of the day. Passionate, dramatic, and surprisingly modern, *Jane Eyre* endures as one of the world's most beloved novels. This Modern Library Paperback Classics edition includes newly written explanatory notes.

Emily Brontë – *Wuthering Heights*

The passionate love story of stubborn Cathy and wild-as-the-wind Heathcliff has been a favorite since its original publication in 1848. The story is that of an orphan who falls in love above his class and the consequences that drive all of his subsequent actions. *Wuthering Heights* presents both the implications of strict social and class boundaries as well as the timeless subject of a love that will not be denied. Catherine Earnshaw, Heathcliff, and the windswept moors that are the setting of their mythic love are as immediately stirring to the reader of today as they have been for every generation of readers since the novel was first published.

Jules Verne – *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*

An American frigate, tracking down a ship-sinking monster, faces not a living creature but an incredible invention – a fantastic submarine commanded by the mysterious Captain Nemo. Suddenly a devastating explosion leaves just three survivors, who find themselves prisoners inside Nemo's death ship on an underwater odyssey around the world from the pearl-laden waters of Ceylon to the icy dangers of the South Pole . . . as Captain Nemo, one of the greatest villains ever created, takes his revenge on all society. More than a marvelously thrilling drama, this classic novel, written in 1870, foretells with uncanny accuracy the inventions and advanced technology of the twentieth century and has become a literary stepping-stone for generations of science fiction writers.

Sir Walter Scott – *Ivanhoe*

In the twelfth century, Sir Wilfred of Ivanhoe returns home to England from the Third Crusade to claim his inheritance and the love of the lady Rowena. The heroic adventures of this noble Saxon knight involve him in the struggle between Richard the Lion-Hearted and his malignant brother John: a conflict that brings Ivanhoe into alliance with the mysterious outlaw Robin Hood and his legendary fight for the forces of good.

Herman Melville – *Moby Dick*

A masterpiece of storytelling and symbolic realism, this thrilling adventure and epic saga pits Ahab, a brooding sea captain, against the great white whale that crippled him. More than just the tale of a hair-raising voyage, Melville's riveting story passionately probes man's soul. A literary classic first published in 1851, *Moby-Dick* represents the ultimate human struggle.

Alexandre Dumas – *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, Edmond Dantès spends fourteen bitter years in a dungeon. When his daring escape plan works he uses all he has learnt during his incarceration to mastermind an elaborate plan of revenge that will bring punishment to those responsible for his fate. No longer the naïve sailor who disappeared into the dark fortress all those years ago, he reinvents himself as the powerful Count of Monte Cristo.

Boris Pasternak – *Doctor Zhivago*

The novel is named after its protagonist, Yuri Zhivago, a medical doctor and poet. It tells the story of a man torn between two women, set primarily against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Russian Civil War of 1918–1920. More deeply, the novel discusses the plight of a man as the life that he has always known is dramatically torn apart by forces beyond his control.

Bram Stoker – *Dracula*

The original vampire, *Dracula* continues to terrify readers with its depiction of a vampire with an insatiable thirst for blood and the group of hunters determined to end his existence before he destroys a young woman's soul.

Dickens – *A Tale of Two Cities*

After an unjust imprisonment for 18 years, Dr. Alexander Manette finally reunites with his daughter Lucie. Shortly after, trouble rears its head again. The two must testify against a young Frenchman falsely charged with treason.

Victor Hugo – *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*

The novel is set in fifteenth century Paris. The archdeacon of the Notre Dame cathedral, Claude Frollo, falls in lust with Esmerelda---a gypsy dancer who is much admired in Paris. At his instruction, Quasimodo, the hunchbacked bell-ringer of Notre Dame who he has befriended, kidnaps her. Esmerelda is rescued by Phoebus de Chateaupers (Captain of the Royal Archers) and she falls mistakenly in love with his bravery when he is in reality, something of a rogue and a braggart.

E.M. Forster – *A Passage to India*

Ranked among the greatest novels of the twentieth century, "A Passage to India" is the classic account of the clash of cultures in British India after the turn of the century. With careful crafting, exquisite prose, and a well-developed sense of irony, Forster reveals the menace lurking just beneath the surface of ordinary life, as a common misunderstanding erupts into a devastating affair.

Arthur Conan Doyle – *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

The recent death of Sir Charles Baskerville stirs up a dangerous business. For the "luminous, ghastly, and spectral" hound of the family legend has been seen roaming the moors at night, and appears that the new baronets has inherited, along with the ancient house and vast wealth of his family, a dreadful destiny.

4. Autobiography**Malcolm X – *The Autobiography of Malcolm X***

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is the life story of Malcolm Little: son of a Baptist minister, wide-eyed teenager in Boston, street hustler and prison inmate in New York, faithful and energetic member of the Nation of Islam, and, finally, Muslim pilgrim determined to create an organization for all blacks regardless of their religion. It is also a tale of, as the author puts it, a "homemade" education pursued in the schools, on the streets, in prison, and at the feet of his mentor Elijah Muhammad. Many considered Malcolm X's separatist philosophies (later softened) disturbing and in direct opposition to those of the period's other well-known black activists, including Martin Luther King, Jr., who argued for integration and non-violent confrontation.

Maya Angelou – *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

From her tragic youth in the Midwest to the epiphanies she had during her formative years in California, Angelou derives lessons from all that she has experienced in life. Taking full advantage of her literary sensibility, she makes her life relevant and engaging as both a cultural study and a personal tale to a point that both fans and general readers will appreciate.

