

English Suggested Reading

Contrary to popular opinion, studying English Literature at university involves far more than just piles of books and endless reading lists. At its heart English is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary subject, uniting elements of History, Philosophy, and Politics with the study of literary works. Context is vital when it comes to interpreting a text, and you will find that studying English at university level involves detailed exploration of the social, historical, and geographical factors influencing a work of literature. However, throughout the course of an English degree you will often have the chance to explore the subject from a more abstract perspective, asking questions like: What makes something a classic? How do we define poetry? Why do we need literature?

If you are considering applying for English at university, the resources listed below may be useful. Remember to follow your nose and pursue what interests you. Universities are looking for students who are curious and can think for themselves so use the below as a starting point and if something captures your imagination, follow it up! Read more books by the same author, or books by different authors from the same period and think about how they compare. Use your school library, the internet, and ask your English teacher what else you might be able to look at.

Books

1. **What Good are the Arts?** by John Carey asks the perennial question: what is art? It also seeks to discover what benefits the arts have on society – particularly relevant given the supposed 'crisis' the humanities are in at the minute – and argues for literature being the most powerful art form. Includes interesting sections on things like Stendhal syndrome, which involves dizziness, fainting, and even hallucinations in response to a particularly beautiful work of art. Carey is very annoying and polemical at points but this book is definitely good for getting you thinking about the importance of literature and the humanities more generally to society!
2. **Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction** by Jonathan Culler is a useful and accessible primer for literary theory, which can often seem painfully abstract in relation to literature (and indeed reality).
3. **Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd and Pierre Bayard's Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?** Christie's novel has a very famous twist ending. Pierre Bayard's fun piece of literary criticism proposes to revisit this text, claiming that Christie 'got it wrong', and the killer is not who we believe it to be. Instead, he builds up a very convincing argument, with particular reference to psychoanalytic theory, that the culprit is someone else entirely.

Websites

4. **You Tube Thug Notes**
<http://www.youtube.com/user/thugnotes>
Funny reviews of literary classics, 'gangster-style'.

Magazines

5. **The English Review magazine.** A magazine to inspire. It has articles by current Oxford students, papers by academics at Oxford on lots of AS/A-level set texts, breakdowns of student essays, and similar. It features lots of canonical texts (Shakespeare and Chaucer are particularly prominent) but also some slightly more obscure pieces of literature. You might want to talk with your school librarian, and see if your school can start a subscription.