
School Books

Posted by erwin - 06-04-2008 04:10

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(May have been done before on the old board, but ...)

Stuff you had to read at school: which did you like, which did you hate, and why?

'King Lear' - Immense!

'Pardoner's Tale' (From 'Canterbury Tales') - gibberish to my adolescent eye. Favourite bit: "Filthy music from both ends".

'Paradise Lost' - Nah.

'Sons and Lovers' (DHL) - Vivid evocation of working class family life from someone who doesn't belong.

Wilfred Owen - Devastating.

'Candide' - Volta Voltaire!

'Die Physiker' (Dürrenmatt): My German was crap, so I didn't get much from this, but it seemed interesting.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Jimski - 06-04-2008 07:26

Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe) - Excellent book, nice and easy to read too.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (Solzhenitsyn) - Very bleak, but this appealed to my teenage self. Also it had swear words in it.

Billy Budd (Melville) - thankfully only a novella. Hated it. Allegory which didn't convince as a story. Characters all represented something rather than existed in their own right (e.g. The Captains's name was Vere = 'truth' - get it? Get it? GET IT? For fuck's sake.) Overwritten too.

Richard II - Once I got through the Shakespearian language to the actual story, I got more than a bit obsessed with it. The language is/was a barrier at first though.

The Mayor of Casterbridge (Hardy) - Thought this was absolutely brilliant. Ok, so in Hardy you tend to skim past whole paragraphs of over-description to get back to the story. But the story and characterisation had me absolutely hooked. We had to read it about 3 times, and I liked it better each time.

Re:School Books

Posted by Etienne - 06-04-2008 09:32

Z for Zachariah - Rubbish.

Romeo and Juliet - Tedious.

Animal Farm - OK.

Lord of the Flies - OK.

Can't remember anything else. I didn't enjoy fiction much when I was at school.

Re:School Books

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 06-04-2008 09:51

Julius Caesar- A bit pompous, I remember thinking. My class developed an ironic obsession with the word 'twixt, however, and would drop it into conversation in various lessons (eg "Mr Wright, the gauze is 'twixt the bunsen burner and the flask").

Journey's End- Tedious stiff upper lip fuckwittery. I desperately wanted something conveying the horrors of war, and this wasn't it.

The NEAB Poetry Anthology- Carol Anne Duffy= lesbian who looks like Hitler (but we all secretly loved her poems). Wilfred and Siegfried pretty good.

Henry V- My teacher hated patriotism and hated teaching this. I hated patriotism too, but the character studies made it alright, like.

Of Mice and Men- Short, economical. A "tour de force". A Great American Novel.

"Now what the hell you s'pose is eating them two guys?"

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Re:School Books

Posted by Melbourne Arab - 06-04-2008 10:21

The best thing was being introduced to Orwell (1984 and Animal Farm).

The worst was having to read The Hobbit.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 06-04-2008 10:41

Macbeth: rock and roll.

R&J: love it now, but not what I wanted at the time.

Collected works of Keats: ditto, really. Though I can now quote lines like "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies/When a new planet swims into his ken/Or stout Cortez tum-ti-tum wild surmise tum-ti-tum silent upon a peak in Darien" and wish I had that older-generation facility to do that with a wider range of poets.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 06-04-2008 10:42

Also, stuff like To Kill a Mockingbird. Meh.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Tubby Isaacs - 06-04-2008 11:14

I liked Journeys End. Given that the officers really copped it in WW1, I thought it did get to the heart of the horror. Stanhope was a good character, and I liked The Colonel who showed up and said it would all be OK because they'd get medals.

Didn't like Billy Budd either.

Macbeth brilliant though found the first scene a bit ridiculous. But the second scene "Doubtful it stood like two spent

swimmers" got me into the language as well as the plot, even if it was difficult.

Paradise Lost (books 1 and 2) brilliant too.

Was something of a non-reader of set books at that time. Didn't read Jane Eyre or Decline and Fall.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Not me - 06-04-2008 12:26

Macbeth. Badass.

The Merchant of Venice. Pretty good.

Silas Motherfucking Marner. Kill me now. Just kill me, please. Now. Please.

At 6th Form:

TS Eliot's Selected Poems. Great, if a bit etiolated. Having already consumed the lyrics of Manic Street Preachers and the cut-ups of William Burroughs for a couple of years, the fragmented, referential form and apocalyptic tone were easy to get on with.

Larkin. Wet.

Jane Austen - Pride and Prejudice. Just get on with it and say what you fucking mean: I'm nearly 17, I don't have much time left. (I hoofed this book across the room on a couple of occasions.)

Virginia Woolf - The Waves. Stream of consciousness. Nice idea; we get it. Could the stream perhaps be a bit shorter and racier please? And less congested with unbearable posh children? (University lecturers later told us to avoid this book like herpes.)

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Re:School Books

Posted by EIM - 06-04-2008 12:57

Mayor of Casterbridge - hated it. Poorly written, episodic dirge. Completely ruined Hardy for me,

Animal Farm - Loved it then, still love it now. Served as a gateway to Orwell for me, for which I'm eternally grateful.

Cat's Eye - I can't abide Atwood. A lot of it is to do with this book, but more of it was down to the teacher who made us read it. Like a lot of literature I would probably otherwise like, it'll forever be tainted by the foul stench of dull Friday afternoons.

Measure for Measure - I still use 'Tickling for Trout in a peculiar river in everyday conversation. No one knows what the fuck I'm on about. Nowt changes.

Macbeth - what they all said.

Of Mice and Men - One of my favourite books. When my sister named her rabbit George, I assumed it was a nod to Steinbeck. It wasn't.

Volpone - Total shit. Fuck off.

Wyatt - I read To Kill A Mocking Bird quite recently. Someone left a copy in the pub, and didn't come back for it. So I nabbed it and used it to pass the time on the N89. I really, really enjoyed it.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 06-04-2008 13:30

Volpone fucking rocks you madman. "Your parasite is a most precious thing, dropped from above, not bred 'mongst clods and clodpoles here on Earth! I muse the mystery was not made a science, it is so liberally professed. Almost all the wise world is little else in nature but parasites or sub-parasites."*

As true today as it's always been.

(*I've been in it y'see.)

Re:School Books

Posted by EIM - 06-04-2008 13:33

I'll try and reread it I guess. But back then (1996/7?) I hated it.

Re:School Books

Posted by Antonio Gramsci - 06-04-2008 13:46

Crime and Punishment. Fantastic. Went on to read all of Dostoyevksy, a chunk or Turgenev and Gogol. But then again, I was a miserable fuck back then.

Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Macbeth, As you Like It. Prefer tragedies to comedies.

The Deptford Trilogy by Robertson Davies. Bilgewater, required Canadian content (EIM, I seriously doubt you'd enjoy Atwood much more outside of school...even her sci-fi is pretty dull).

Paradise Lost, Books 1 and 2. Loved it. Am possibly alone in the universe on this point.

Things Fall Apart. Meh.

Madame Bovary Would have preferred to scratch my eyes out than read this.

Pride and Prejudice, Northanger Abbey. The former is OK, the latter only slightly better than Bovary.

Oediups Rex. Couldn't he just have read some Flaubert as punishment instead?

Re:School Books

Posted by Amor de Cosmos - 06-04-2008 14:41

The Deptford Trilogy by Robertson Davies. Bilgewater,

Wha.....?! The wrongest thing you've ever posted on OTF AG.

I have only vague memories of books we did for 'O' level back in '64: The Cruel Sea 'cos of the sex scene. Well not really a sex scene, more the implication the act has recently occurred, but we took what we could get back then.

Priestley's The Good Companions, the brilliant justification for football as art in the opening chapter won me over, otherwise it was pretty blah.

Lark Rise to Candleford No real memory of it from school but I read it years later and thought then — still do — that it's perhaps the finest book about rural England that's ever been written.

Re:School Books

Posted by Wyatt Earp - 06-04-2008 15:38

Sir: the finest book about rural England ever written is that containing maps of the principal roads to London. Or something.

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Re:School Books

Posted by boris - 06-04-2008 17:12

King Lear Brilliant - really opened up Shakespeare for me.

The Sandcastle Hated it. Boring shite. I'll never read anything else by Iris Murdoch as a result of having this diabolical bollocks forced down me.

Metaphysical poets anthology Loved it, especially Donne and Marvel, but lots of others too. Although, it helped having the teacher explain what they were on about a lot of the time.

Of mice and men Nice.

The Time Machine Excellent - led me to read lots of other HG Wells stuff, but nothing really approached the depth of the Time Machine.

I'm sure there were loads of others that I had to plough through for English O and A levels, not to mention the French books I had to endure, but they obviously left little impression on me, either good or bad.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Kowalski - 06-04-2008 19:58

We read;

Kes, good. (Watched half of the film version 10 times in class)

Our Day Out, ok (Watched half of the Television version 10 times in class)

Z for Zacariah, ok (Watched parts of the television version a few times in class)

A Christmas Carol (abridged edition), good

I must have had the only teacher that never covered Shakespeare, I feel cheated now.

I don't think my English teacher liked me very much either and I don't know why. As with others I didn't enjoy reading until I left school. I realised how much I'd missed out on when I met my French Girlfriend and she had read more classics than I had.

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Re:School Books

Posted by gerontophile - 06-04-2008 20:41

To Kill a Mockingbird Brilliant.

Macbeth and
The Merchant of Venice hated both. Just couldnt get on with Shakespeare at all.

Animal Farm I liked a lot.

There were a couple of others, CS Forester rings a bell (though no idea why) and I think I read Down and Out in Paris

and London but that was purely for 'pleasure'

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Re:School Books

Posted by King Mob - 07-04-2008 15:37

My mind's gone ablank. What did I read at school? 1984, and plenty of Shakespeare, of course, of which Macbeth was understandably the most appealing. Jude The Obscure in the 6th form (too many tedious references to religion), and The French Lieutenant's Woman, surprised that hasn't cropped up yet.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Mighty Mudhsuden - 07-04-2008 15:43

Having done English all the way up to degree level I've read far too much stuff to list here, but I'd just like to say anything by Jane Austen is utter, utter shit.

Cheers.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Andy C - 07-04-2008 16:23

We did a lot of Shakespeare: Macbeth, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice and all the histories covering the sequence from Henry IV to Richard III, and it completely closed Shakespeare off for me. I've put in a lot of effort to be able to enjoy a decent production of one of his plays, but they still seem to be intrinsically pretty tedious, with creaky plots, erratic pace, woefully contrived plot devices, shallow characterisation and blustery circumlocution. Fortunately, the best actors and directors disagree with me and so are able to make something entertaining out of the raw material.

On the other hand, school managed to bring Dickens alive - I really learned to savour the sprawling darkness and the black humour of Great Expectations and David Copperfield (although having studied those two books in fairly close succession I frequently confuse the details of the two), Nicholas Nickleby and so on.

I remember being disappointed by Animal Farm because I'd expected it to be funny.

I got the first inkling of the brilliantly crafted and precisely targeted subtle delights of Pride and Prejudice at school, but it's only on re-reading the book at a more mature age that I realise what an absolute delight it is.

The History of Mr. Polly was a bit of a non-event.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Reed Miller - 07-04-2008 17:07

Romeo & Juliet and Hamlet are the only two Shakespeare plays I remember reading in high school, although there may have been others. Both are ace, the latter being much more ace than the former.

Grapes of Wrath - I read it on my own for a book report where we had a choice of about 100 great books, then we did it as a class in 11th grade with Mrs. Delisovoy, who was clearly around the bend and not very interested in teaching English anymore, but still failed to make me dislike anything we read. One of my all time favorites.

Great Gatsby - Did it for a book report. Awesome. I've read it three times, I think.

Animal Farm - Short. Easy to comprehend. Good book report.

Old Man and the Sea - Short. Good book report fodder. I like Hemmingway's style, but some of his stories are a bit

tedious. This one was cool. I like stories about the sea and fish.

Some books we read were ruined by my insane English teacher's presentation and interpretation of them. Indeed, all four of my high school English teachers were batshit crazy, which was entertaining, but not educational. Fortunately, I had good teachers in junior high and my mom taught me how to write properly.

Lord of the Flies makes sense to me now, but it didn't in 10th grade with Mrs. Kingsbury, the stentorian battle-ax who called us her wretched children.

The Stranger makes sense to me now, but it didn't to my 12th grade teacher Sue Proia, who led us all astray as to its point. She was also a bit skeezy. Most of the time, she seemed to be not-too-subtly hitting on Seth Lambiase and Craig Erickson, who sat in the front of the class (she's improved since then I've heard).

In that class we also read Wuthering Heights, which I thought was pretty stupid at the time, but maybe I just resented having to plow through it. I should give it another chance. The semaphore code version is pretty good, to be fair.

Ibsen's The Dollhouse (12th grade) is a bit lame too. Maybe at the time it was subversive but now it just seems so obvious. Yeah, we get it, it was hard being a woman in them days.

Tale of Two Cities (10th grade) is just shit.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Inca - 07-04-2008 17:23

Shakespeare I read: Romeo & Juliet (9th grade), MacBeth (11th), and Hamlet (12th). I also read The Merchant of Venice for extra credit, and in 9th grade our teacher showed us the R & J film where you see Juliet's boobs.

Only Dickens I read was Great Expectations, and I hated it.

10th grade was a bad year, not necessarily because of the books, but we all hated our teacher. As this was the year for American literature, it's sad how many bad associations I have with a lot of American classics. About the only book I read in there and didn't hate was Huckleberry Finn. I still haven't picked up The Great Gatsby again after that class.

11th grade was completely different--great teacher. He taught existentialism and surrealism, so we read The Stranger, the Myth of Sisyphus, Ionesco, and some modern poets. I didn't fall in love with much of anything, but I really respected him. It wasn't until I got to college and read The Plague as a freshman that Camus clicked with me.

12th grade was a bit of a grab bag--the teacher had been in our program for years, so we read a lot of stuff that she liked, besides the focus on mythology, which came at the start of the year. Read Gilgamesh and the Odyssey, as well as some Greek plays. The second half of the year was all over the place--Death of a Salesman read aloud in class (where I came out of my shell and excelled as Happy), Lord of the Flies, and ugh--Animal Dreams by Barbara Kingsolver. The best part of the class was when discussing Animal Dreams, our teacher pointed out that saguaro cacti take 50 years to grow each arm. My friend John, who had an innocent childlike nature that let him get away with a lot, exclaimed "Mrs. Kephart--you have two arms!"

Ironically for being in California, we only read one Steinbeck book, and it was The Pearl, and not The Grapes of Wrath. I only read that a few years ago, when I had to teach it in a class.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Matej - 07-04-2008 17:36

I honestly can't think of many books I read in my school days that I really disliked. I think that may be due to the fact that I had a few really good English teachers who made everything interesting. (As for the bad teachers, they were usually bad enough that I'd end up re-reading something again - easy A, or just reading a different Vonnegut.)

College I honestly can't remember much that I had to read that I disliked.

So pretty solid reading except for two:

In high school - Madame Bovary. Had to do it as an independt read, and hated it. CliffsNotes and faking my way through it.

In college - Uncle Tom's Cabin. Horribly written, skimmed the highlights and faked it.

I've also read far more 'classics' since leaving school than I ever did in school.

Re:School Books

Posted by S. aureus - 07-04-2008 20:10

Richard III (Shakespeare) - Liked it. We got taken to see it as a play that year also, which was cool.

To The Lighthouse (Virginia Wolfe) - I actually rather enjoyed it at the time, but probably didn't really understand it. Haven't read it since, and probably still wouldn't understand it.

Travesties (Tom Stoppard) - Seemed a little too 'look at me clever' when I was 16. not sure if I'd revise that opinion now.

Nun's Priests Tale (Chaucer) - I couldn't get on with the language. It just seemed too much hard work to get any sense of the meaning.

Persuasion (Jane Austen) - Hated it. Haven't read any Austen since, though I probably should give it a go.

Volpone (Ben Jonson) - The fact that it was obviously our teacher's favourite rather put me of it. I couldn't see that attraction. Tolerable.

In French class we did Les Justes (Camus), which I did not enjoy at all. I suspect that this was, at least in part, due to the pretentious assholes who populated my French class. I've enjoyed all the Camus that I've read since (in translation, mind you). Maybe I was simply too young.

Re:School Books

Posted by Tony C - 07-04-2008 20:34

The kids in my Year 11 classes tend to really like 'Of Mice and Men' - aided of course by the stimulus from excellent Gary Sinise movie adaptation (which I've mentioned before on here).

'R & J' is generally well received, too. Again I give the kids a visual introduction (via the Baz Luhrmann film) but the themes and effects are timeless.

My favourite kids' book to teach is Louis Sachar's fabulous 'Holes' which is for my Year 8 groups. Very well written, lots of subplot/flashback action that displays a good sense of literary technique to the pupils without ever becoming flashy or wordy. Lovely, compelling stuff.

Re:School Books

Posted by Matej - 07-04-2008 20:45

Holes is a fantastic book. Decent movie too.

Re:School Books

Posted by erwin - 07-04-2008 21:34

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Isn't 'Catcher in the Rye' an American schools staple? Or maybe you've moved on ...

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Re:School Books

Posted by Reed Miller - 07-04-2008 21:53

We didn't read *Catcher in the Rye* in school. Maybe because all kids like it but Alan Bloom thought it was shit, so now the academics have put the kybosh on it and told teachers only to teach books kids hate.

I didn't read it until I was 25 or 26 and didn't like it that much, actually. I think I was biased because I'd just read something about Salinger that made him seem like a total asshole.

In my school, we didn't really read that much. I mean, we were always reading something but we tended to drag it out and not crank through as many books per year as they do at most schools. My school's English curriculum was more about learning how to write. This made it harder in my freshman English course in college because everyone else had read Chaucer except for me, but overall, the kids in my school were much better served. Kids have the rest of their life to study the symbolism in *Wuthering Heights*, but learning how to write properly and communicate effectively is invaluable skill for anyone to have.

My mom taught technical writing at Penn State, including the writing classes for students who didn't want to write, and found that the kids from my high school were always better than average student writers.

BTW, this seems apropos of this discussion.
<http://www.theonion.com/content/node/39205>

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Re:School Books

Posted by Inca - 07-04-2008 22:04

Forgot I read *Catcher* in high school, because I had read it the summer before starting 9th grade. They sent out a list of recommended books to read, and I read that, and tried to read *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but gave up on that.

Reed, I thought you were going to go with this:
<http://www.theonion.com/content/node/37346>

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Re:School Books

Posted by Mighty Mudhsuden - 08-04-2008 10:30

"My friend Lisa did hers on *Middlemarch*," Durst said, "and I was like, 'Are you crazy?' That thing is like 10 times longer."

I love The Onion.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Jon - 08-04-2008 23:15

At University I always choose the courses on poetry or plays rather than novels, for exactly the same reason as Durst's friend Lisa.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Crusoe - 09-04-2008 07:44

I don't remember much from GCSEs (Lord of the Flies was okay), but A-levels were much better. I loved The Great Gatsby (and still do, although not the soft-focus Redford film version we watched), quite liked One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest and enjoyed the satisfaction of getting to the end of Riddley Walker. We also had a very good teacher for Shakespeare, who made it an enjoyable and involving experience to read Henry V.

On the other hand, the thought of reading any more of that bloated, turgid DH Lawrence rubbish still makes me violent.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 10-04-2008 10:17

You guys only had to read five books at school? What's that about?

Anyway, here's a selection:

Shakespeare: Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Romeo & Juliet, Richard III, Twelfth Night. Loved them all apart from Twelfth Night. Shakespeare is pretty much my ideal writer. I don't get on with Shakespeares's comedies though.

Paradise Lost: one of my favourite books of all time.

To Kill A Mocking Bird: Meh.

As I Lay Dying: Really opened up my eyes to narrative possibilities.

The Private Memoirs And Confessions Of A Justified Sinner: Fantastic. One of the funniest, darkest books I've ever read.

Chaucer: General Prologue and The Knight's Tale. Didn't really appreciate it at the time, but loved it when I did Chaucer at uni.

Translations (the Brian Friel play): Utterly brilliant. He combines Stoppard's linguistic wit and intellectual playfulness with a poignancy that's uniquely his own.

Arcadia: Not one of my favourite Stoppard plays, but, hey, it's Stoppard. Awesome.

Mansfield Park: Great, great stuff. Austen's prose style is incomparable.

Martin Chuzzlewit: I don't get on with Dickens. His prose style is insufferable.

Candide and Rasselas: Two wonderful, remarkably complementary books which despite near contemporaneous publication were apparently written without knowledge of each other.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Lyra - 10-04-2008 11:13

Some of these posts are making me think that they shouldn't teach anything good in schools as it seems to put people off really excellent books.

Erm what do I remember best.

Rebecca (great); Animal Farm (great); The Crucible and Death of a Salesman (great when you are 14 I guess). R&J like everyone else. They tried to make us read Sons and Lovers once but I was having NONE of it. I remember also I refused to appreciate Ted Hughes and insisted on writing about Tennyson instead - haha, how obnoxious of me. There must have been more though. Oh I remember I was the only one in class who made it all the way through David Copperfield.

in French we did Le Noeud de Viperes - which I thought was fabulous, Catholic angst of the best kind.

in Russian we read Three Sisters and a couple of stories by Turgenyev (Asya) and Pushkin (the Queen of Spades).

in Greek I remember doing Medea and the Oedipus Tyrannos and there must have been some prose but I have no idea what now.

and in Latin, erm, Aeneid 4 and Sallust's thing about Catiline and I'm sure there was something else but again I forget.

This thread has also made me realise what an astonishingly poor memory I have.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 10-04-2008 11:36

Oh yeah, foreign languages. Mine were quite similar to Lyra's: Queen of Spades, Aeneid IV, and Noeud de Viperes were all in there. Also: The Bronze Horseman, Mozart & Salieri, The Death Of Ivan Ilyich, Pliny's letters, Aeneid XII, Cupid & Psyche, Metamorphoses I, Ars Amatoria I, Horaces Odes, a fair bit of Catullus, Les Mains Sales, one of Guy de Maupassant's short story collections, Andorra.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Lyra - 10-04-2008 11:49

I was limiting it to A-level, I can't think what GCSE Latin asked us to read now. Oh, definitely Met IV. Some Catullus cos I remember doing 64. Some letters, I think Seneca's though although I do remember Pliny banging on about the price of fish nowadays or whatever.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Ginger Yellow - 10-04-2008 12:32

Christ I hated Seneca. What a sanctimonious prick. Tedious prose style as well.

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Re:School Books

Posted by Lyra - 10-04-2008 12:47

Yeah. The tragedies are fantastic though, they really are. I don't think I ever read the Apocolocyntosis and it's probably not as much fun as it sounds.

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