

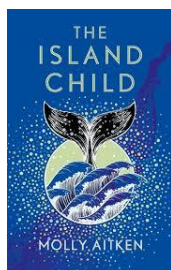
# Senia - Reading list for English Reading Groups, season 2021-2022



Note: this sign (📖) refers to the difficulty of the book. There are three levels: one booklet being the easiest, three the hardest.

On page 1-5 you will find the newly added titles with brief descriptions of 2021-2022. Reader's Guides of these books will be published mid 2021. Pages 5-15 display older titles with descriptions, of which Reader's Guides were published previously.

## New Titles



### Molly Aitken - *The Island Child*

E21-01, 2020, 310 pages 📖📖

Oona grew up on the island of Inis. An island that was a gift for some, but for others, like Oona, a prison. Barely more than a child, she flees the island. *The Island Child* goes back and forth between Oona's youth on the island and her adult life in Canada. Will she ever be fully able to escape the island?

*This is a gripping tale with identity, motherhood and freedom as its main themes. 'The Island Child' is Molly Aitken's debut novel. It is atmospheric and full of Irish folklore.*



### Brit Bennett - *The Vanishing Half*

E21-02, 2020, 343 pages 📖

*The Vanishing Half* follows the lives of two twin girls Desiree and Stella, both light-skinned, who run away from home at the age of sixteen. They live in Mallard, a fictional small town in Louisiana in the 1950s and are remote descendants of a slave owner and a slave. They want to create opportunities for a better life for themselves. Desiree marries a dark-skinned man and gives birth to a very dark-skinned girl named Jude. Stella takes on a new identity, that of a white woman. She marries a well-to-do white man and gives birth to a white girl named Kennedy. Stella's

husband and child will never know that she is from a black family. One day the nieces happen to meet each other and start a friendship where secrets are gradually revealed and family ties prove to be unbreakable.

*This story shows that once you start making up lies, in order to take up a new identity, there is no escaping from it. 'The Vanishing Half' was long listed for the National Book Award.*



### Sarah Blake - *Naamah*

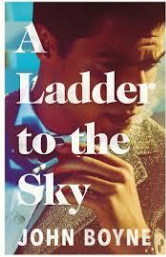
E21-03, 2019, 298 pages 📖📖

Only one family is spared the coming of the Great Flood: Noah's family. Noah built his Ark with his sons and, of course, his wife. This is the story as told by Noah's wife, Naamah, who tells what it is like being trapped on a big boat with lots of restless animals. At the same time Naamah struggles with her beliefs.

Why was her family spared?

*This is a unique retelling of an ancient story in fresh, modern language. A story that sometimes shifts between reality and myth with the help of Sarah Blake's poetical writing style. There is quite a lot of attention for sexuality and some scenes are quite graphic, but it never becomes vulgar.*

*This debut novel by Blake won the National Jewish Book Award.*



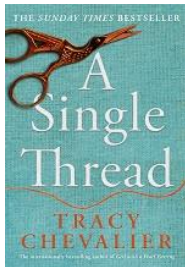
**John Boyne - A Ladder to the Sky**

E21-04, 2018, 434 pages

Maurice Swift's ambition is to become a writer. He has already written six short novels, none of which attracted many readers, when he meets the celebrated author Erich Ackermann. Despite his success as a writer, Ackermann is lonely and immediately feels a bond with the young, handsome

Maurice and makes him his personal assistant. Maurice's problem is that he is technically a good writer, but lacks the creativity to come up with good stories. But when he finds out that Ackermann has a story to tell, he steals this story and uses it for his own novel. This then becomes his first great success as an author.

*'A Ladder to the Sky' is the story of an aspiring writer who will go to any length to fulfil his ambitions. But it is also a story about loneliness. These two storylines combine to create a page-turner with an exciting plot.*



**Tracy Chevalier - A Single Thread**

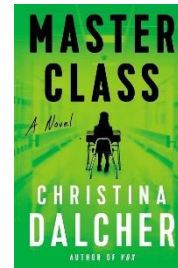
E21-05, 2019, 346 pages

Violet Speedwell suffered the loss of her fiancé and beloved brother in the first world war. In 1932, now in her late thirties, she is deemed a "surplus woman", single and without prospects in marriage, expected to care for her aging, impossible mother.

Her job as a typist at an insurance firm is poorly paid and she struggles to cover the bare necessities of her sober existence.

*A Single Thread* takes the reader through Violet's trials, tribulations and successes in establishing her independence through striking out on her own, learning to embroider in a group dedicated to producing kneelers for her beloved Winchester Cathedral. The friendships she forms along the way broaden Violet's horizons, opening her heart and giving unexpected turns to her life story.

*A richly detailed portrayal of an independent single woman in a world that does its best to ignore their existence.*



**Christina Dalcher - Master Class**

E21-06, 2020, 319 pages

Elena Fairchild has two daughters, sixteen-year-old Anne, who is bright and does very well at school, and Freddie, aged nine, an anxious child who struggles to keep her grades up. Elena's husband Malcolm is partly responsible for an education system where everyone is given a Q score, based

on monthly testing. This determines a person's place in society: the higher the Q score, the more privileges are available. When Freddie fails her test and is sent to a state boarding school where parents can only visit once every three months, Elena, who is slowly starting to realise something sinister is going on, decides to give up her job as a teacher at an elite school to try to save her daughter.

*What makes this novel such a compelling read is the realisation that the events mentioned in the story are not as unimaginable as one might think but instead reflect the American eugenics movement of the early nineteenth century.*



**Anne Griffin - When all is Said**

E21-07, 2019, 326 pages

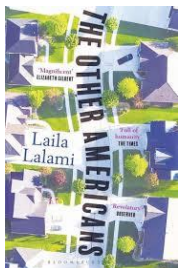
Maurice Hannigan was a poor young farmhand working for a bullying boss, Hugh Dollard, and his sadistic son, Thomas, in County Meath, Ireland. One day Maurice picked up a precious gold sovereign that had been thrown out of a window during an argument between Thomas and his father and hid it.

From then onwards, Maurice's fortunes started rising while those of the Dollards began to dwindle.

The story starts in a hotel bar, with 84-year-old Maurice looking back on his life. He thinks about the five people who have been most important to him during his long and eventful life and proposes

a toast to each of them in turn while reminiscing about what they meant to him.

*A touching story of a person who thinks he is coming to the end of his life and wants to make a clean breast of everything he has lived through.*



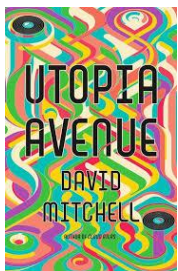
**Laila Lalami - *The Other Americans***

E21-08, 2019, 301 pages

Moroccan immigrant Driss Guerraoui is killed in a hit and run accident. The subsequent investigation turns the lives of several characters, divided by race, religion and class, upside down: Nora, the daughter, who is in an unhappy relationship and is trying to make a career as a composer; Salma, Nora's sister,

who is frustrated by always having had to do her duty; Maryam, Driss's wife, who still longs for her homeland; Jeremy Gorecki, the sheriff's deputy and an Iraq veteran, who is in a difficult relationship with Nora; Erica Coleman, the detective, who is worried about her thirteen-year-old son; Anderson Baker and his son A.J., who own the bowling alley next to Driss's restaurant, and Efraín Acaves, who witnessed the accident but doesn't want to come forward for fear of deportation.

*As each character is given his or her own voice, an interesting picture emerges of both a family and a town full of secrets and prejudice.*



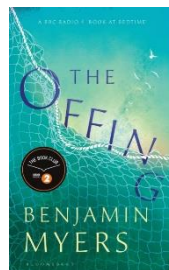
**David Mitchell - *Utopia Avenue***

E21-09, 2020, 561 pages

It is 1967 and the world of pop music is in turmoil. Bands are emerging and rising to fame fast. The recently formed Utopia Avenue is working hard to find an audience for their music, travelling to the ends of the UK, bonding as a band so their music grows in intensity and creating their own original

sound. Famous popstars such as David Bowie, Jimmy Hendrix and Brian Jones make an appearance. And through all the troubles the band members experience getting into the Top 10. They share their stories. Dean Moss needs to free himself of his drunk father, Elf Holloway from a lost love and the death of her little nephew, and Jasper de Zoet from the curse of his ancestor Jacob. This harks back to *The Thousand Autumns* and the creation of Mitchell's Über-novel, with many cross-references to his previous books.

*The swinging sixties brought to life by the wonderful storytelling of David Mitchell. 'Utopia Avenue' not only brings this exciting time alive through the ups and downs of the band's three songwriters, but also brings you into close contact with the in-crowd of that time. A feast for lovers of Mitchell's work and an invitation to novices wanting to experience more.*



**Benjamin Myers - *The Offing***

E21-10, 2019, 260 pages

In wonderful prose *The Offing* tells the story of a young man venturing out into the Big Wide World, shortly after the Second World War. Tired of the gloomy mining town where he was raised, he arrives at the North Sea coast, where he is invited to spend some of his young days with a mysterious woman with a poetic secret. While he does odd jobs, she cooks, using the harvest from the garden to create the most wonderful dishes. Such delicacies were previously unknown to him. There is more for the reader to experience, the secret of the sea and this song of summer. And, in this coming-of-age novel, the body of a boy is growing into a man just as his mind learns about literature and the power of words.

*'The Offing' is a poetically written, jubilant song of young life. Discover how a secret is revealed and life sings through the summer haze.*

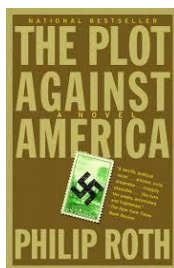


**Kiley Reid - *Such a Fun Age***

E21-11, 2019, 305 pages

Emira Tucker, a young black woman, works as a babysitter for Alix Chamberlain, a rich social media celebrity. When Emira takes her three-year-old charge Briar to the supermarket, she is accused of having kidnapped a white child. Although Emira is not all that bothered and more concerned about having little money and no proper job, Alix is horrified by the incident. She realises that she doesn't know Emira very well and decides that is going to change. Finding out more about her babysitter confronts her with events from her own past that turn her world upside down and at the same time change the direction of Emira's future.

*In addition to friendship, motherhood and class, race is an important theme in this novel. It is described from an interesting angle as it is the white people in Emira's life, proud of themselves for having so many black people among their friends, who are more preoccupied with race than she is.*



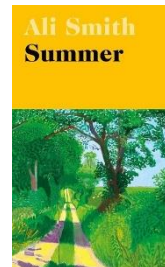
**Philip Roth - *The Plot against America***

E21-12, 2004, 391 pages

What if the well-known pilot Charles Lindbergh, instead of F.D. Roosevelt, had won the American elections in 1940? In what way would his anti-Semitic ideas have influenced American citizens and their way of life?

Philip Roth rewrites a few years in American history and their impact on his own Jewish family and the Jewish community in Newark, where he grew up. What is it like to be a seven-year-old boy, to see and hear things you do not understand, to feel your safe daily life being threatened? How do large political issues affect the small family world?

*In a sublime way Roth combines true and fictional events, thus creating a convincing alternate history.*



**Ali Smith - *Summer***

E21-13, 2020, 378 pages

At centre stage in this novel is Sacha Greenlaw, a 16-year-old girl living with her brother and divorced mother, a former actress. Together the three of them lead us through the summer months, sharing stories of the past and future. Words tumble out on top of each other, not always leading to the three living together better. But there are also new friends to meet. These new friends come from Smith's earlier work because *Summer* is the closing part of the Four Seasons project that she has been working on over the past four years. Making a statement on the world today, but also spinning a fine thread through the lives of her main characters, running from the outbreak of the Second World War and how foreigners were expelled from society and locked away in camps to a refugee seeking asylum today and also touching on Covid 19 and other recent events.

*'Summer' is not about a plot, and not even about the plot covering the sequence of her Four Seasons book. It is about prose and about understanding a world we all share. It is about letting in the lightness of the summer season. Making wonderful prose and wondering about the meaning of it all.*



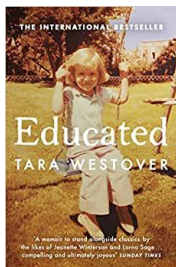
**Douglas Stuart - *Shuggie Bain***

E21-14, 2020, 430 pages

This novel is about a young boy and his mother Agnes, who live together with Catherine and Leek, his siblings, in a tenement building in a former mining district in Glasgow in the 1980s. Agnes's partner, Hugh, is Shuggie's father. Agnes's life is dominated by alcohol. However little money there is, she spends it all on cheap beer and vodka. At the start of the novel Shuggie is five years old and not so aware of the struggles in the family. As he grows older he notices more and is increasingly concerned about his mother, whom he loves

dearly. He doesn't give up hoping that one day she will stop drinking. On top of all this, Shuggie is not like most boys. He behaves differently and is being bullied because of it.

*In this story a laugh and a tear are never far away. The boy Shuggie will find an enduring place in your heart. Douglas Stewart won the Booker Prize 2020.*



### **Tara Westover - *Educated***

E21-15, 2018, 377 pages

This is Westover's memoir of her childhood in Idaho, where Washington is far away and God very close. She was born into a family of Mormon fundamentalists. Her father is the family prophet who lives strictly by the Bible. Dairy products, medicine and hospital treatment are forbidden. Anything official is shunned. Her father does not believe in sending his children to school; the younger ones aren't even officially registered. From a very early age, each child has to help father Gene in his scrap metal business, involving long hours of dangerous work. It is from this environment that Tara gradually disentangles herself and, without any formal education, struggles her way to college.

*A moving story of an almost unbelievable accomplishment, told without sentiment.*

## **Readers' Guides 2011 – 2020**

### **Ayòbámi Adébáyò - *Stay With Me***

E19-01, 2017, 298 pages

Yejide and her husband Akin met and fell in love at university. After a few years of marriage, the couple have not yet been able to conceive the child they want so much. Although both of them are opposed to polygamy, Akin feels forced by the absence of a baby to consider another wife. And while Yejide decides to try everything in her power to get pregnant and not to lose her husband, the drastic risks she's willing to take may prove too high a cost.

### **Margaret Atwood - *The Heart Goes Last***

E17-01, 2015, 416 pages

In this contemporary dystopian novel we see what might happen if the economy and, with it, civilisation were to break down. Stan and Charmaine, a destitute young couple, sign up for a Project promising them a happy life. The catch is that once you have signed up, there is no way out. At first they enjoy their new life, but then cracks start appearing and they both start breaking the rules. Life in the Project is so intensely monitored, however, that they are both found out, with far-reaching consequences. In a farcical, fast-paced ending the scene changes to Las Vegas, where all the protagonists get their just deserts.


### **Pat Barker - *The Silence of the Girls***

E20-01, 2018, 291 pages

This book comprises a retelling of the Trojan War, this time from the point of view of a young woman. A Greek army led by Achilles attacks a small city, killing the men and abducting the women, including Briseis, the childless wife of the king. When the women are given to the leaders, Briseis is awarded to the nearly-invincible Achilles. Serving unveiled at Achilles' table, Briseis eventually realises why he wants her to be seen by his comrades.



The following events – Achilles' refusal to join the fighting and the deaths of Patroclus, Hector and, finally, Achilles himself – lead to the fall of Troy and are told from the perspective of a woman's experience of war and its lack of glamour.

### **Julian Barnes - *The Only Story***

*E18-02, 2018, 213 pages* 


This is a novel about a complicated love story. It is narrated by Paul, who is looking back at his life. Paul was 19 when he first met Susan, a woman more than twice his age. They met at a tennis club and fell in love. The setting is in the London suburbs in the 1960s. The novel is divided into three parts, written in three different narrative voices: the first, second and third person. With each change, Paul moves on to a new phase in their affair, describing the demands that are placed on him by the lifelong consequences of his first love.

### **Julian Barnes - *The Noise of Time***

*E16-01, 2016, 180 pages*  

In this fictional biography of Dmitri Shostakovich, Julian Barnes describes the inner struggles of an artist during Stalin's reign of terror and the compromises he was required to make under a totalitarian regime, to stay alive. The reader meets the Russian composer at three critical moments in his life, firstly as a young man standing by a lift expecting to be taken away by the powers that be. The next encounter is after the Second World War, on a propaganda tour in the USA. In the third part, the older Shostakovich has become embittered by the relentless demands of the party, even although Stalin is dead. Barnes succeeds in giving the reader remarkable insight into the composer's relationships with family, wives and friends.


### **Sebastian Barry - *The Temporary Gentleman***

*E16-02, 2014, 320 pages* 

Holed up in a relatively humble dwelling in Ghana, the middle-aged Irishman Jack McNulty sits down to write his life story. His


commission as an engineer in the army during World War II saw him stationed in Africa. Now, however, it is 1957 and the war is over, but he is reluctant to return to Sligo in his native Ireland. Jack's eventful past produces both nostalgia and yearning, as well as fear and loathing, as he reconstructs his troubled marriage with the beautiful and enigmatic Mai Kirwan. Jack shares a turbulent life with her, from the blossoming stages of carefree youth in the 1920s to the disarming conflict of losing one another. *The Temporary Gentleman* is the story of a lost soul retracing his steps so as to be able to go forward.

### **Chloe Benjamin - *The Immortalists***

*E20-02, 2018, 352 pages* 

The book is set in New York in 1969, when four siblings in the Jewish Gold family are given a fortune teller's predictions of their dates of death. The next forty years of each of the children's lives are consecutively followed as "the day" comes nearer. They all lead full lives: Simon escapes, searching for love, to the West Coast, while Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, Daniel seeks security as an army doctor, and Varya dedicates herself to science. Do the predictions come true for one or all of them? How did the predictions work out? Did the fortune teller have a special gift? Was it just coincidence? Or were the outcomes caused by the children themselves?



### **Alan Bennett - *The Uncommon Reader***

*E18-03, 2007, 121 pages* 

*The Uncommon Reader* is a novella about the reading habits of Queen Elisabeth II of England. While walking her corgis, the Queen visits a travelling library parked in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace. It turns out that the mobile library comes to the courtyard every Wednesday. The librarian introduces the Queen to reading novels and this marks a change in her life. Having never had a 'normal' life, she now begins to live in books. Her advisors, however, are not so pleased with her new hobby. The Queen continues to read and to ask questions. She also begins to write,


and her insights convey a sense of humour. She then starts discussing novels with other people, with several other books and writers being mentioned in this novella. The Queen becomes so enthusiastic about reading that her work suffers from it. The end of the story is surprising.

**Alain de Botton - *The Course of Love***

*E17-03, 2016, 240 pages*  

The long-awaited follow-on from Alain de Botton's first novel "On Love" finds the Lebanese-German Rabih Khan grown into a young man of thirty-one. In his capacity as an architect, he meets a client Kirsten McClelland and they fall deeply in love. What follows is a captivating description of the relationship over a period of thirteen years where marriage and the birth of a son and daughter set the back-drop for an in-depth examination of the emotions and behaviours that draw the couple together and nearly drive them apart. Ideals are put to the test by the pressures of an average existence with humdrum routines.


**Geraldine Brooks - *Caleb's Crossing***

*E17-04, 2011, 311 pages* 

In this novel the author takes her readers to a fledgling community of English Puritan settlers on America's North East coast in the 1660s. What features is that these early settlers seek peaceful cohabitation with the local tribes.

Main character Bethia Mayfield's future is determined by the orthodox views of her father, brother and grandfather. But she possesses a free roaming mind and finds a kindred spirit in Caleb, son of the chieftain of the local Wampanoag. They are brave openhearted characters in search of knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance. What follows is Bethia's struggle to maintain a position between the strict rules of Puritan society and the ways of the native Americans. Her endeavours culminate in two Wampanoag students being allowed to enter Harvard University.



**J.L. Carr - *A Month in the Country***

*E15-03, 1980, 111 pages* 

Tom Birkin, a war veteran, looks back on a summer spent in a small village just after the First World War. In summer 1920 he had arrived by train in rainy Oxgodby, a village in the quiet northern English countryside. Although his initial encounter with some villagers was somewhat stand-offish, this quickly changed for the better. His reason for travelling to the village was to uncover and restore a huge medieval wall painting hidden beneath whitewash on the wall of the village church.



Tom was still visibly shaken by his wartime experiences and the painful break-up of his marriage. While in Oxgodby he befriended another veteran, Charles Moon, who was searching for a lost grave. Their shared past helped them to come to terms with the horrors of war, while the hospitality and warmth shown to Tom by some of the villagers left their mark on the rest of his life.

**Emma Cline - *The Girls***

*E17-06, 2016, 355 pages*  

Evie Boyd is a typical fourteen-year-old girl: she is insecure about her looks, does not know how to behave around boys and is embarrassed by her mother's behaviour after her parents' divorce. One day she meets Suzanne, who is a few years older and lives on a ranch in a kind of commune led by the charismatic Russell. Evie finally feels she has found a place where she belongs and where she is accepted for what she is. As she is drawn in, however, Evie starts to lose touch with the real world and does things she had never previously dreamt of doing.



**Jonathan Coe - *Middle England***

*E20-03, 2018, 432 pages*  

In this State of the Nation novel we meet characters from Coe's earlier books *The Rotters' Club* and *The Closed Circle*. Working around main character Benjamin Trotter Coe presents the reader with a sometimes harsh, sometimes kind description of people from various classes during the period in which the British had to cope



with the outcome of the referendum on leaving, or staying in the EU, causing deep rifts between all kinds of Britons, also between families. Nostalgic memories of what England once was and will never be again, along with downright racism, opportunism and ruthless politicians rushing forward to a break from Europe of which no one really understands the political and especially the economical impact.

**Margaret Drabble - *The Dark Flood Rises***

*E17-07, 2016, 326 pages*  



Margaret Drabble invites us in this novel to look through her eyes at how sad, how funny and how absurd aging is. The main character Francesca Stubbs in her seventies, still active, racing around England writing reports on sheltered housing for the elderly and caring for her dying ex-husband has recently become somewhat obsessed with mortality. The novel follows Fran, her family and friends over a period of two months, jumping from character to character and from England to the Canary Islands. Each characters' story adds to a beautifully written contemplation on what it is like to grow old.

**Bernardine Evaristo - *Girl, Woman, Other***

*E20-04, 2019, 452 pages*  



It is the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, a play written by Amma, a black woman in her fifties, who is a free spirit, a lesbian and a feminist. In the audience is Shirley, Amma's oldest friend, a school teacher who has become disappointed in a school system that no longer takes children's fluctuating needs into account. Shirley is surprised to see Carole again, one of her former pupils, who is now an investment banker and whose mother, Bummi, feels that her daughter has rejected her Nigerian culture by marrying a white English man. Meanwhile, Morgan, who used to be Megan, is there to review the play for the one million followers on her Twitter account, which was initially set up to describe her journey to a gender-free identity.

**Aminatta Forna - *Happiness***

*E19-02, 2018, 320 pages*  



Distracted by a fox, two pedestrians collide on Waterloo Bridge. These are the main characters in Forna's latest novel: Attila, a Ghanaian psychiatrist specialising in trauma, and Jean, an American wildlife biologist studying the habits of urban foxes. Attila is in London to deliver a keynote speech and to contact his immigrant niece, who has not called home for a while. Eventually it turns out that Tano, his niece's young son, is missing. When Attila and Jean meet again by chance, she uses her network of volunteer fox spotters to help with the search. As the quest continues, an unusual friendship between Attila and Jean develops.

**Jane Gardam - *Old Filth***

*E18-06, 2006, 289 pages*  

Sir Edward Feathers, also called Old Filth (FILTH is an acronym for "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong) finds himself bereft of his beloved Betty in a beautiful house in Dorset at the age of 82. His next door neighbour is a widower as well and a former colleague. There was no love lost between them. But compelled by need they get in touch again and this seems the beginning of an 'opening of shutters on the past that he (Edward) had kept clamped down.' He was a Raj orphan brought up by foster parents in Wales. This period in particular left scars on his soul and had a huge impact on the rest of his life.

**Lisa Halliday - *Asymmetry***


*E19-03, 2018, 277 pages*  

In part one of this debut novel, junior editor Alice has an affair with Ezra Blazer, a famous, much older author. Their romance takes place in New York in the early years of the Iraq War. Part two abruptly switches setting and moves to the Immigration Office at Heathrow on the last day of 2008. Doctorate student Amar, an Iraqi-American, is detained on his way to see his brother in Kurdistan. He tells about growing up in the US in an immigrant family and wrestles with questions of memory and identity. The third part of the novel




contains the transcript of a short radio interview with Ezra Blazer talking about his musical preferences. Although the three parts seem at first sight to be unconnected, they are tied together in a very subtle way.

**Emma Healey - *Elizabeth is missing***

*E20-05, 2014, 275 pages* 

Maud, in her eighties and the narrator of this novel, suffers from dementia. She asks the same questions over and over again and no longer likes reading because she can never remember where she left off. Sometimes she doesn't even recognize her daughter and granddaughter. All over her house are bits of paper telling her what she should or shouldn't do. One of these notes says that her friend Elizabeth is missing. Maud is determined to find out what happened to her. Maud's search triggers memories about the time Sukey, her older sister, disappeared, just after the Second World War, and was never found.



**Gail Honeyman - *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine***

*E18-08, 2017, 327 pages* 

Eleanor Oliphant's life is built around routine and she does not live up to social expectations. She works as a finance clerk and keeps mostly to herself. When she coincidentally gets involved with Raymond, an IT guy at the office, she gradually discovers friendship and compassion.

The book is divided into three parts: Good Days, Bad Days and Better Days. The first part depicts Eleanor's weekly routine, providing an overview of who she is. Later on, it is revealed how things from the past have shaped her.


**Kazuo Ishiguro - *Never Let Me Go***

*E18-09, 2006, 276 pages*  

*Never Let Me Go* is the story of Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, and of the love-triangle they begin at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School. Ruth is the controlling one, Tommy is the one who used to find it hard to keep his temper, and Kathy is a carer by nature as


well as profession. They have heard that love - or art, or both - will get you a deferral. Kathy, now 31, is the narrator of the story, in which she tries to come to terms with her childhood, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends. Ishiguro, winner of the Nobel prize in literature 2017, was praised by the Swedish Academy for novels which were driven by 'great emotional force'.

**Rachel Kushner - *The Mars Room***

*E19-04, 2018, 338 pages* 


*The Mars Room* is the strip club where Romy Hall used to work as a lap dancer. She is now in Stanville Women's Correctional Facility in California, serving two consecutive life sentences plus six years. Her seven-year-old son Jackson is staying with her mother. The events leading up to her incarceration are described in a series of flashbacks. Through Romy's eyes the reader learns about the rules of life inside and gets to know a wide range of characters: Conan, a woman who looks and behaves like a man; Betty LaFrance, who is on death row; Button Sanchez, who gives birth in prison; Doc, a dirty cop, and Gordon Hauser, who is hired to teach the prisoners literature.

**John Lanchester - *The Wall***

*E20-07, 2019, 276 pages* 



After a climatic development called "the Change", an island very similar to Great Britain has built the Wall – a massive defence structure around its entire coastline. Joseph Kavanagh, the story's narrator, has to serve two years on the Wall as a Defender, staring out to sea, keeping watch and making sure the Others don't get in. For every Other who makes it across the Wall, a Defender will be banished from the country and is put out to sea on a boat. Just as Joseph is growing closer to Hifa, one of the other defenders, something happens that changes everything.

**Harper Lee - *To Kill a Mockingbird/Go Set a Watchman***

*E16-07, 1960/2015, 324/278 pages* 



Lee's debut novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is the story of Scout. Through her eyes we watch how things come to a climax in the climate of racism and prejudice that had been simmering for a long time in the 'tired old town' of Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s. The events of that summer, in which her father, Atticus Finch, plays a significant role as the lawyer of the young black man accused of raping a white girl, eventually lead to the battering and injuring of her brother Jem and teach Scout much about life and the true nature of some of the inhabitants of Maycomb.

**Penelope Lively - *Moon Tiger***

*E19-05, 1987, 208 pages*  


Claudia Hampton, historian and author, lies in a hospital bed, recalling a life full of adventure and relationships, while making a last attempt at writing a world history as seen through her eyes and connected to events that have happened in her life. Focusing especially on the Second World War, when she was stationed in Egypt as a newspaper correspondent, she tells the story of the tragic romance that has influenced her life ever since.

**Valeria Luiselli - *Lost Children Archive***

*E20-08, 2019, 350 pages*  



A woman and her husband, both audio documentary makers, are driving from New York to Arizona with her five-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son. The man is interested in the Apache leaders who were the last to surrender and wants to make "an inventory of echoes", while the woman is planning to work on an audio project about the many refugee children who go missing when trying to enter America. During the road trip, presented through the eyes of the woman and the boy, it becomes clear the family is slowly drifting apart. The two children then decide to run away in the hope of making things better for them all because "If we too were lost children, we would have to be found again."

**Bernard MacLaverly - *Midwinter Break***

*E18-11, 2017, 243 pages* 


Gerry and Stella, a retired Irish couple in their late sixties, set out for a holiday weekend in Amsterdam. They have an adult son living in Canada and one grandchild. The Troubles in Ireland were the reason they moved to Glasgow. Gerry used to be an architect and Stella was a school teacher. Initially we meet a couple whose relationship seems safe, easy and familiar. Soon though the reader learns about their secret thoughts and behaviour; about their traumatic experience of a bomb attack in Belfast and the impact it has had on their lives up to the present day. Gerry makes fun of her being a devout catholic. Stella knows that he drinks too much whisky. The couple are experts in avoiding talking about subjects that really bother them until it is bound to explode.

**Ian McEwan - *The Children Act***

*E15-10, 2014, 242 pages*  

Fiona Maye, a respected High Court judge in the Family Division, is 59 and has no children of her own. To her surprise, her husband Jack expresses discontent with their sex life and decides to have an affair. While her private life is in crisis, Fiona has to make daily decisions on other people's lives in her work, sometimes even on questions of life or death. One of these cases involves a 17-year-old Jehovah's Witness with leukaemia. He and his parents are refusing treatment because of their religious beliefs. That case and the judge's ruling on it make for very gripping reading.

**Ian McEwan - *Nutshell***

*E17-08, 2016, 197 pages* 

A wonderful tale from an extraordinary author. Trudy betrays her husband John, publisher of poems, with his brother, Claude, a grasping property developer. The two of them plan to get rid of John, but there is a witness. The entire story is told from the point of view of this witness, an almost fully grown foetus. And this is no ordinary foetus as he has been listening to podcasts and already

knows a great deal about the world he has not yet entered. Can the tiny narrator prevent this murder or find a way to avenge his father's death?

**Celeste Ng - *Little Fires Everywhere***

*E19-06, 2017, 338 pages* 📖📖

Shaker Heights is a model town with beautiful houses, wide lawns shorn to perfection and inhabited by perfect families. The perfect family featuring the story are the Richardsons, father and mother with successful careers and 4 teenage children getting fantastic grades in High School. Only Izzy, the youngest, is rather out of tune with the rest of the family.

The appearance on this idyllic scene of a shabby looking family means quite a change in the orderly lives of the Richardsons. Mia is an artist/photographer. She has decided it is time for her and her 15-year old daughter Pearl to settle somewhere after their hitherto itinerant lives and hopes to achieve this by renting a cheap "half a house" from Mrs Richardson. Lots of unexpected developments occur. In the end we find the Richardsons on their now not so perfect lawn, watching the fire brigade trying to extinguish the last flames of their burnt down house.

**Edna O'Brien - *The Little Red Chairs***

*E17-09, 2016, 299 pages* 📖📖

This story is set in an Irish village, where one day a mysterious foreigner walks into town and opens an alternative healing clinic. He manipulates the local women by providing hot stone massages and poetry. The beautiful Fidelma, who is unhappy about being childless, falls under his spell and becomes pregnant. When his true identity as a Balkan war criminal is revealed, shocking and harrowing events follow. To come to terms with the past Fidelma moves to London, where she lives among the homeless and hears stories told by refugees and victims of horrors. After attending the war criminal's trial in The Hague, Fidelma finds a way to give her life a new direction.

**Michael Ondaatje - *Warlight***

*E19-07, 2018, 304 pages* 📖📖

In 1945, fourteen-year-old Nathaniel and his older sister Rachel are unexpectedly abandoned by their parents, who are moving from London to Singapore for a year. Nathaniel and Rachel are left in the care of two strangers, an enigmatic figure called the Moth, and Pimlico Darter, a former boxer and dog-racing fixer. Shortly after their parents leave, the children find out that their mother has left her trunk of clothes in the basement. So something mysterious must have happened.

The novel, set in post-Second World War London, is Nathaniel's reconstruction of what happened in the past and also a quest to find his parents. It contains a number of layers, including Nathaniel's coming of age and the work of the secret services after the end of the war.

**Ambrose Parry - *The Way of all Flesh***

*E19-08, 2018, 416 pages* 📖

A historical crime novel set in 19th-century Victorian Edinburgh. The protagonist, Will Raven, is a medical student and an apprentice to the brilliant and renowned gynaecologist Dr Simpson. After several young women are found dead in the Old Town, all having suffered gruesome deaths, Will and Sara, a clever young housemaid he meets in Dr Simpson's house, try to solve the murders. The story also focuses on medical history and evolution in this pre-caesarean period, especially the newly discovered science of anaesthetics.

**Ann Patchett - *The Dutch House***

*E20-09, 2019, 336 pages* 📖

In this novel a mansion provides the basis for the Conroys. It's called The Dutch House by locals because the first owners were of Dutch origin: the Van Hoebeek dynasty. Self-made property magnate, Cyril Conroy buys the mansion from the bank including the furnishings and personal belongings from the former owners. Cyril's wife Elna doesn't feel comfortable in the house and leaves

her husband and their two children, Maeve and Danny. Cyril then marries Andrea, a young widow with two daughters. When Cyril dies Andrea disinherits Maeve and Danny. It's touching to read about the unconditional love between brother and sister; how they park their car in front of the mansion time and again and talk about the life they had together in the Dutch House.

**Sarah Perry - *The Essex Serpent***

*E18-12, 2016, 418 pages* 📖📖

Against the background of an ever growing interest in scientific approach to discoveries, which lead people to gradually understand what happened to the planet during all the eras preceding ours, 19th century England still harbours rural communities in which superstitious beliefs in ghosts, ogres and monsters remain close to the surface. This is the world in which newly widowed Cora Seagrave and devout reverend William Ransome find themselves to be contestants about the persistent tale of a monster lurking in the Blackwater estuary of Essex. She wants to find the truth. He wants to protect his parishioners from pagan rites.

**Sally Rooney - *Normal People***

*E19-09, 2018, 266 pages* 📖

This novel follows the lives of Marianne and Connell, who grow up in a small town in Ireland. Marianne lives with her mother and brother in a large mansion, where Connell's single mother works as a cleaner. Marianne is a social outcast, while Connell is popular at school. They begin a secret relationship that stops during their final year at high school when Connell treats her badly. A year later, they are both studying at Trinity College in Dublin and now it is the other way around: Marianne feels comfortable at university, and Connell doesn't seem to fit in. Over the following years, they repeatedly find themselves drawn to each other, on and off.

**Nicholas Searle - *The Good Liar***

*E17-10, 2016, 360 pages* 📖

Roy Courtney is in his eighties and cons people for a living. For his final grand scam he has his eye on Betty, a wealthy widow whom he met through an online dating site. Flashbacks show us the stunts Roy has had to pull in the past in order to save his own skin, but this time things end very differently from what he – and the reader – expects. It turns out that Betty is not the dithering scatterbrain that she seems and that she has her own reasons for getting involved with this swindler.

**Kamila Shamsie - *Home Fire***

*E18-13, 2017, 260 pages* 📖


The story is told by the five main characters, all of whom are from a British-Pakistani Muslim background. Isma who, after the death of their mother, took care of her younger twin siblings and is now finally able to pursue an academic career in Massachusetts; Aneeka, the beautiful younger sister, who stays behind in London; Parvaiz, Aneeka's twin brother, whose decision to follow in the footsteps of a father he has never known and join the Caliphate turns all their lives upside down; Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary, who becomes involved with Aneeka, and Karamat Lone, Eamonn's father, who has a point to prove.

**Elif Shafak – *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World***

*E20-10, 2019, 312 pages* 📖


After Tequila Leila's death her mind continues working: for 10 minutes and 38 seconds to be precise, during which time she remembers the important events in her life that shaped her into the woman she became. In these memories, the reader is introduced, in turn, to Leila's five best friends, all of whom are desperately trying to find her.

**Graeme Simsion - *The Rosie Project***

*E14-12, 2013, 327 pages* 


Don Tillman, a professor in genetics, does not understand jokes and takes everything literally. He is also very organised. Aged 39, he has decided it is time to marry. Unfortunately Don is not very good at dating. He therefore designs a questionnaire consisting of sixteen double-sided pages to help him find the perfect wife. Rosie Jarman is clearly totally unsuitable, but while Don is waiting for someone who does fit the criteria of the Wife Project, he agrees to help Rosie find her biological father. As Don and Rosie use rather unconventional methods to collect DNA samples from the various candidates, they frequently end up in awkward, but extremely funny situations. At the end of the novel Don realises that decisions made instinctively are just as sound as those based on logic.

**Ali Smith - *Girl Meets Boy***

*E19-10, 2007, 161 pages* 

This novella tells the story of two sisters, Anthea and Imogen, living in Inverness. Anthea dislikes her job at a local PR firm. Imogen ('Midge') is pursuing her ambitions at the same firm, which is trying to market bottled water. The story kicks off when a protester, known by the alias 'Iphis07', vandalises the firm's property. Anthea falls in love with the boyish girl Robin (the protester) and has to figure out what she wants from life. Imogen, on the other hand, learns about the dark side of global business. In this way, both sisters have to cope with big changes in their lives.


**Elizabeth Strout - *Olive Kitteridge***

*E16-11, 2008, 270 pages* 

*Olive Kitteridge*, the Pulitzer prize-winning 'novel in stories' by Elizabeth Strout, describes a small coastal community in Maine. We read about a young man contemplating suicide, a girl who is dumped on her wedding day, an elderly couple who have stayed together despite the husband's infidelity and a girl who has to cope with the fact that her mother ran away to become an actress. All of



these people know Olive Kitteridge, a retired maths teacher, who is very outspoken in her opinions and who is the link running through the thirteen stories. Sometimes she is mentioned only briefly, but several stories centre on her and describe her rather complicated relationship with her only son and her life with her quiet and gentle husband.

**Graham Swift - *Mothering Sunday***

*E17-11, 2016, 177 pages* 


The novella follows Jane Fairchild, a maidservant at Beechwood House, during one day in March 1924. The day was Mothering Sunday, when servants were traditionally given the day off to visit their mother. Jane, being an orphan, spends the morning with Paul, her secret lover, who is the sole remaining son and heir of the neighboring estate. After he leaves her for a lunch date with the girl he is to marry in two weeks' time, Jane wanders through the house trying to memorize everything. As the narrative moves back and forth from 1924 to the end of the century, going back and forth between tragedy and romance, we learn more about Jane's life and how this special day influenced the rest of her life.

**Madeleine Thien - *Do Not Say We Have Nothing***

*E17-12, 2016, 463 pages*  


Madeleine Thien's epic novel spans seven decades and three generations. The story begins in the present day with Marie, a Chinese-Canadian mathematician trying to unravel the secrets around her father's suicide in 1989 and the unexplained arrival of a young woman from China and her subsequent disappearance. The story takes the reader back in time through the generations and traces the lives of families and friends forced by members of the communist regime to renounce their past lives and identities, endure hardship and deny their love for Western music and the arts. There is no trust and anybody can be a traitor, even friends and family members.

**Anne Tyler - *A Spool of Blue Thread***

E16-13, 2015, 358 pages 



This novel covers several generations of the Whitshank family. The mother Abby, a social worker, is at the heart of the story. She is married to Red, who works in construction. Red and Abby have two daughters and two sons. They are generally a happy family, although the older boy, Denny, never really seems to fit in. Now in her 70s, Abby is getting forgetful, while Red is going deaf, and there are concerns about whether they can continue to live independently. The family house in Baltimore is a character in itself. It was built by Red's father, Junior, for his wife, Linnie Mae. It is through the house that the reader learns about Abby's youth and the house's early days.

**Willy Vlautin - *Don't Skip Out on Me***

E19-11, 2018, 304 pages 

Horace Hopper has lived and worked on a ranch in Nevada since he was a teenager. His parents don't care about him. Mr Reese, the ranch owner, wants Horace to take over the ranch as he and his wife are childless and Horace is good with horses and cattle. Although they love Horace as if he were their own child, Horace dreams of a career as a boxer. His ambition is to become world champion to impress his parents. He therefore leaves the Reese family and meets a coach who trains him and organizes boxing matches. But then slowly but surely it becomes clear that Horace's dream is a delusion. Mr and Mrs Reese worry about him and try to keep in touch with him. Finally Mr Reese finds him and takes him home. But things are not what they seem. The novel is about the loneliness of Horace and how he comes back to Mr and Mrs Reese.


**Ocean Vuong - *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous***

E20-11, 2019, 242 pages  

This novel tells the story of Little Dog, the son of Vietnamese immigrant parents in the US. This is done in the form of a letter addressed to his illiterate mother. 'Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you – even if each word I put down is one word further from where


you are.' The writing is a mix of a shared past with his traumatised mother and a schizophrenic grandmother as well as his own thoughts and feelings. He is lonely and discriminated against because of the colour of his skin. He finds a friend in Trevor and growing up they discover their teenage sexual love for each other. The letter to his mother is at the same time a search for his own identity.

**Brad Watson - *Miss Jane***

E19-12, 2016, 279 pages 




The story begins with the birth of Jane Chisolm in rural Mississippi in 1915. It is immediately clear that she has a rare genital deformity that will have an enormous impact on her entire life as it is doubtful whether she will ever be able to become a proper wife and mother. There is little love left between her harsh mother, who is still grieving for the death of her favourite son, and her father, who drowns his sorrows in his home-brewed whiskey. Nevertheless, Jane is happy roaming the woods surrounding their farm. Fortunately she has a true friend and confidante in Dr Thompson who takes a personal and professional interest in her and admires her for the way she handles whatever life throws at her.

**Raynor Winn - *The Salt Path***

E20-12, 2018, 288 pages 

*The Salt Path* is the story of author Raynor Winn's remarkable journey walking the South-West Coast Path with her husband Moth. Just as their home and livelihood are taken away from them, the couple find out that Moth is suffering from an incurable illness. Against all advice, and with all their belongings in their backpacks, they start their journey from Somerset to Cornwall, trying to survive with barely any money.

### **Jeanette Winterson- *Frankissstein: A Love Story***

*E20-13, 2019, 346 pages*   

Frankissstein consists of two stories, told alternately. One is set in present-day Britain and America and tells the story of the young transgender doctor Ry and his lover, Victor Stein. Stein is a professor with great ambitions in the field of artificial intelligence. The other part is set during the life of the author Mary Shelley and tells the story of what led her to write her novel Frankenstein and her life after its publication. What will happen when homo sapiens is no longer the most intelligent being on the planet?

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### **The Booklist Explained**

The booklist is compiled by Senia's Department of English Literature. The members of the group are Cees van den Akker, Henny de Boer, Christa de Jager, Marc Kalf, Elise Prins-Kleuskens, Hans van der Weijden and Els de Wit. The readers' guides on this list are written by members of the group, volunteers and students studying English.

#### **Availability**

The booklist is determined at the beginning of the year in which reading groups make their choice for the next season, thus allowing enough time for the production of the readers' guides. It means that books published between February and August do not yet appear on this list but will be included in next year's selection.

The books on the booklist are available at the time of presentation (March 2021). We cannot guarantee that the availability remains the same in future.

#### **Other Booklists**

All the booklists from the other departments are to be found on the Senia website. In particular the booklist of Dutch and Translated Literature may be of interest to English Literature Groups as books from the English booklist may be found from time to time in Dutch translation.

#### **The Senia Books Notice Board**

We stimulate exchanging books through the notice board on the website [www.senia.nl](http://www.senia.nl). If you have any questions or comments on the readers' guides, please send a mail to [engels@senia.nl](mailto:engels@senia.nl).

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