

Want to feel like a teenager again? Just dig out the books you were forced to read at school

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss in pairs.

- What three books do you remember fondly from childhood or adolescence? What did you enjoy about them?
- Would you like to re-read any of those books as an adult? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

adolescence armpits braces brevity bursary
contraceptive cutlery depiction fever dream hipster
idiosyncrasies ill-fitting interminable nuance prose

1. not properly fitted or of the wrong size; loose or too tight _____
2. the hollow areas beneath the arms at the shoulders _____
3. devices used to straighten or align teeth _____
4. endless or seemingly endless; tediously long _____
5. a subtle difference in meaning, expression or sound _____
6. ordinary written or spoken language, not poetry _____
7. a representation or portrayal in words or images _____
8. a monetary grant or scholarship to assist students _____
9. conciseness or briefness in speech or writing _____
10. distinctive or peculiar features or characteristics of a person or thing _____
11. a person from a 21st-century subculture of young, educated people who are known for their fashion; people from this subculture are often seen as pretentious _____
12. a strange, often frightening dream experienced during a high fever _____
13. the period of life from puberty to adulthood _____
14. a device or drug used to prevent pregnancy _____
15. eating utensils such as knives, forks and spoons _____

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b. Use some of the key words from task A and complete the examples. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. The professor's lecture was _____, leaving the students struggling to stay focused.
2. During _____, teenagers go through many physical changes, but it's a time of personal growth too.
3. At the formal dinner, guests had so much _____ to choose from that they were unsure which fork to use for each course.
4. The runner applied extra deodorant to her _____, knowing the heat would make her sweat more than usual.
5. Despite the initial discomfort, Alexis knew her _____ would give her the confident smile she'd always wanted.
6. The style of _____ in the novel was beautiful, but the story went off on tangents.
7. Thanks to the university's generous _____ programme, Alfie could study astrophysics without taking on student debt.
8. With social media, _____ in communication has become more valuable – posts should be short and sweet.
9. Reliable _____ methods have had a profound impact on women's health, family planning and societal norms.
10. As a diplomat, she understood the importance of _____ in negotiations, where a change in tone could alter the entire meaning of a statement.

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All it takes is a few pages of Animal Farm and I'm 14 again, braces on my teeth and longing in my heart

Nell Frizzell

28 August, 2024

- 1 This isn't one of those social-media writing challenges or book trends you've missed, such as NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) or #ReadWomen.
- 2 But perhaps it should be. Re-reading the opening chapter of Animal Farm is like turning the page on an old photo album. There I am, a teenager in an ill-fitting Punkyfish T-shirt, under my white nylon school shirt. My hair is tied up with plastic butterfly clips, my armpits smell of my mum's Amplex deodorant, and there is the near-constant taste of blood in my mouth thanks to the loose wires of my braces slicing the inside of my cheek.
- 3 Reading about Boxer and Clover's quiet love, I am filled once again with longing for a miscellaneous boy in skater trainers who listens to Finley Quaye and flicks his curtains out of his eyes so regularly that he's developing a new muscle down the side of his neck. And yet, aged 39, much of the book strikes me in a totally new way. Since that first reading, I have actually been to Russia; I have been in a union; I have sat through interminable local-government meetings; and I have mixed cement on a building site. Not to mention reading the rest of Orwell's books. So much of the political nuance, the simplicity of the prose, the postwar depiction of the English countryside slipped past me when I was 14.
- 4 But the biggest surprise? I managed to re-read the whole thing during one ferry ride to Dublin. Animal Farm is not a long book! How did we stretch it out over a whole term? Well, I'm about to find out, because like 26,955 other people last year, I've decided to finally study for a teaching qualification, and Animal Farm will be one of the texts on the curriculum. I can do it part-time, I get a bursary to cover most of my fees and, most excitingly of all, I can buy a new pencil case.
- 5 Animal Farm is not the only book that has shocked me with its apparent brevity. A Christmas Carol? You could finish it in a day! Dickens, it is now obvious to me, 20 years and a whole career later, was a journalist. I didn't know it at 16 – I had never really read any other Victorian literature, nor been commissioned by an editor myself – but he delights in the snide details and funny idiosyncrasies as much as any political diarist, hipster magazine writer or celebrity interviewer. And yet, somehow, the whole thing fits into 112 pages – that's a man who knew how to hit a word count. What I remember most about reading the book isn't Tiny Tim's demise or the description of a squalid central London. Instead it's the view out of my English classroom on to the dinner hall, where they served up a version of street food created in a gastrointestinal fever dream: pizza baguettes, hot chicken tikka rolls and chips with ham and mayonnaise. I remember the Virginia Woolf poster on the wall. I remember the strange and starchy way my skirt folded under my knees because, of course, I had sewn my own school skirt out of a piece of wetsuit material I'd found in a scrap shop with my mum. When I moved, it sounded like someone shuffling a deck of cards.
- 6 There are so many details I'd lost over the years – Frankenstein is from Geneva? Boxer splits his hoof? Jack makes himself a crown? – but not the ones from my own life. The books may have turned into a muddy landscape of scenes and characters, but in scanning the pages, the specifics of my own adolescence come roaring back with an almost frightening degree of clarity.
- 7 Which is why I would like to take this opportunity to suggest to anyone who picked up a set of exam results this summer to put a note in your phone to re-read Cat on a Hot Tin Roof in 2053, when you've actually lived in a rented one-bedroom flat, had a shit boyfriend and been sent temporarily insane by the wrong contraceptive pill. Or Lord of the Flies in 2051, after your children have started school and one of your colleagues gets

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school and one of your colleagues gets promoted and immediately replaces all the cutlery in the kitchen with small wooden stirrers for no apparent reason. Or *Pride and Prejudice* when you're 40 and have been married for 12 years and spend most evenings talking about how to stack the dishwasher. Because these books will mean something different to you then; and you'll be able to travel through time.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How did the author's perception of *Animal Farm* change from teenage years to adulthood?
2. What personal experiences did the author have before re-reading *Animal Farm* as an adult?
3. What surprised the author about the length of *Animal Farm*?
4. What book is mentioned as being part of the teaching curriculum?
5. What does the author say she remembers best about reading Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*?
6. What book does the author mention can be finished in a day?
7. According to the author, what profession does Dickens's style reflect?
8. Why does the author suggest re-reading books like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Lord of the Flies* later in life?
9. What personal examples does the author mention to show how people might understand *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Lord of the Flies* differently in the future?
10. Why does the author think it's almost scary to read books from teenage years?

4 Key language

a. Read the following quotes from the text and rewrite them using reported speech.

1. Re-reading the opening chapter of *Animal Farm* is like turning the page on an old photo album.

2. Since that first reading, I have actually been to Russia.

3. I managed to re-read the whole thing during one ferry ride to Dublin.

4. *Animal Farm* is not the only book that has shocked me with its apparent brevity.

5. I had never really read any other Victorian literature.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- The books we read as children shape our worldview more than the ones we read as adults.
- Remembering being a teenager is far better than being a teenager.
- Novels entertain us, but they also help us learn empathy.

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about the current bestselling novels for adults, teens and/or children. Answer these questions.

- Which books sound the most interesting to you? Why?
- Are there any common themes on the bestseller list? If so, what are they?
- What do you look for in a good book?
- What would you recommend a teenager to read?

b. Report your findings to the class and share the facts you learned and your opinions.