



## English 11 Independent Novel Study

### 1. Canadian Authors

#### ***Crow Lake* – Mary Lawson**

Mary Lawson's debut novel is a shimmering tale of love, death and redemption set in a rural northern community where time has stood still. Tragic, funny and unforgettable, this deceptively simple masterpiece about the perils of hero worship leapt to the top of the bestseller lists only days after being released.

#### ***Fugitive Pieces* – Anne Michaels**

When Jakob Beer is saved from the horrors of a Polish town during the Second World War, his hero is an unlikely one. Athos Roussos is a Greek scientist and humanist who brings Jakob to live with him on a Greek island during the last days of the Occupation. At the end of the war, Athos accepts a teaching post at the University of Toronto and Jakob and Athos start a fresh life. ***Fugitive Pieces***' second part focuses on Ben, a professor who meets the now 60-year-old Jakob and Jakob's incredible wife Michaela.

#### ***A Jest of God* – Margaret Laurence**

Winner of the 1966 Governor General's Award, *A Jest of God* is as moving and relevant today as it was then. Margaret Laurence explores the life of Rachel Cameron, a woman struggling to come to terms with love, death, herself and her world. Rachel longs for contact with another person who shares her rebellious spirit. She finds what she needs in a summer affair with Nick Kazlik, a schoolmate from years earlier who shows her how to make herself vulnerable at last.

#### ***Disappearing Moon Café* – Sky Lee**

Sometimes funny, sometimes scandalous, always riveting, this extraordinary first novel traces the lives and passionate loves of the women of the Wong family through four generations. As past sins and inborn strengths are passed on from mother to daughter to granddaughter, each generation confronts, in its own way, the same problems-isolation, racism the clash of cultures-and each evolves a little bit more.

#### ***Surfacing* – Margaret Atwood**

When her father mysteriously disappears, a young woman returns to the remote Quebec backwoods of her childhood to search for him. Though her lover and two friends accompany her, she feels isolated, set apart by her insight into their pretensions. As her father's whereabouts comes to haunt her more and more, her obsession with finding him finally descends into madness.

#### ***Not Wanted on the Voyage* – Timothy Findley**

It's just before the great flood and Noah's family is living life among the sinners and preparing for the end of the world. Timothy Findley introduces us to a host of characters with a unique perspective on the world, on Father Noah and on his family. From the blind cat to Noah's blue son, these characters are not the people you'd expect to be inheriting the world. This strange, mystical novel reveals uncomfortable possibilities about our religious past. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* presents a vision of the world that makes readers question the wisdom of the flood and the future of our society.

#### ***Tamarind Mem* – Anita Rau Badami**

The author magically captures the indescribable relationship between mothers and daughters. Traveling across India alone by train, an embittered mother entertains fellow passengers with the stories of her life. She makes nasty phone calls and sends disturbing postcards to her daughter Kamini, who has just moved to Vancouver, and is trying to understand her mother's angst. *Tamarind Mem* explores the selective memory and uniquely contradictory ties of love and resentment existing between mothers and daughters.

#### ***Water for Elephants* – Sara Gruen**

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

### ***The Book of Negroes* – Lawrence Hill**

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

## **2. Contemporary Authors**

### ***Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* – Rebecca Wells**

The story follows renowned theatre director Siddalee Walker, who inadvertently mentions some colourful family secrets to a columnist for the *New York Times*. The public then brands her mother, Vivi, a “tap dancing child abuser.” Vivi virtually disowns Sidda, but Vivi’s intrepid gang of lifelong friends, the Ya-Yas, sashay in and conspire to bring everyone back together.

### ***The Kite Runner* – Khaled Hosseini**

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

### ***A Thousand Splendid Suns* – Khaled Hosseini**

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

### ***Half of a Yellow Sun* – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

The author recreates a seminal moment in modern African history: Biafra's impassioned struggle to establish an independent republic in Nigeria during the 1960s. We meet five characters caught up in the extraordinary tumult of the decade. Fifteen-year-old Ugwu is houseboy to Odenigbo, a university professor who sends him to school, and in whose living room Ugwu hears voices full of revolutionary zeal. Odenigbo's beautiful mistress, Olanna, a sociology teacher, is running away from her parents' world of wealth and excess; Kainene, her urbane twin, is taking over their father's business; and Kainene's English lover, Richard, forms a bridge between their two worlds.

### ***The House of Spirits* – Isabel Allende**

More than plot or message, we learn about human nature through the relationships between the characters. Isabel Allende tells the captivating saga of the Truebas, a group of people who live life to the fullest and remain fixed in your imagination forever. While the family's trials, tribulations and deeply felt loves are at the heart of this novel, readers also get a very clear picture of the political landscape in South America at the time.

### ***Poisonwood Bible* – Barbara Kingsolver**

This is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them everything they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it -- from garden seeds to Scripture -- is calamitously transformed on African soil. What follows is a suspenseful epic of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa.

### ***Flowers for Algernon* - Daniel Keyes**

In this powerful, classic story, Charlie is a mentally disabled man whose mental and emotional progress mirrors that of a mouse named Algernon who is being given the same experimental treatment. When Algernon begins a sudden, unexpected deterioration, Charlie and his doctors fear the same might happen to him.

***Lovely Bones – Alice Sebold***

When we first meet Susie Salmon, she is already in heaven. As she looks down from this strange new place, she tells us, in the fresh and spirited voice of a fourteen-year-old girl, a tale that is both haunting and full of hope. In the weeks following her death, Susie watches life on Earth continuing without her - her school friends trading rumors about her disappearance, her family holding out hope that she'll be found, her killer trying to cover his tracks.

***The Breakfast of Champions – Kurt Vonnegut Jr.***

This is vintage Vonnegut. One of his favorite characters, aging writer Kilgore Trout, finds to his horror that a Midwest car dealer is taking his fiction as truth. The result is murderously funny satire as Vonnegut looks at war, sex, racism, success, politics, and pollution in America and reminds us how to see the truth.

***Catcher in the Rye – J.D. Salinger***

This classic 1951 novel tells the tale of a defiant 16-year-old prep school student who runs away to New York City after getting expelled. Although Holden Caulfield is more cynical than a Gen-Xer, his pain and loneliness slowly escape from underneath his tough exterior. Holden is one of the literary world's most memorable characters, which is why *The Catcher in the Rye* lives on in high schools today. Author J.D. Salinger's cutting language and adult themes continue to challenge and fascinate.

***The Islanders – John Rowe Townsend***

The inhabitants of Halcyon Island are ruled by the laws of the Deliverer and follow the same customs and traditions that have prevailed for hundreds of years. The laws state "no incomers", but when Thomas and Molly find a shipwrecked canoe with a boy and girl, barely alive, they are determined not to reject them outright. But the effect that the newcomers have on the close-knit community is beyond anyone's predictions.

***Catch 22 – Joseph Heller***

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

***The Van – Roddy Doyle***

Offering a fresh glimpse into life in working class Dublin, *The Van* opens with Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. struggling to fill his days now that he is unemployed. Things start to look up for Jimmy when his best mate Bimbo also winds up jobless; now bored Jimmy will have a buddy to pass his time with. When the two decide to become business partners and purchase a mobile chipper, serving up burgers and fish to the locals, they think they've found their calling. However, officious health inspectors, a less than booming business and temper tantrums create crisis between the two men and the van ultimately gets driven into the sea.

***Snow Falling on Cedars – David Guterson***

San Pedro Island, north of Puget Sound, is a place so isolated that no one who lives there can afford to make enemies. But in 1954 a local fisherman is found suspiciously drowned, and a Japanese American named Kabuo Miyamoto is charged with his murder. In the course of the ensuing trial, it becomes clear that what is at stake is more than a man's guilt. For on San Pedro, memory grows as thickly as cedar trees and the fields of ripe strawberries -- memories of a charmed love affair between a white boy and the Japanese girl who grew up to become Kabuo's wife; memories of land desired, paid for, and lost. Above all, San Pedro is haunted by the memory of what happened to its Japanese residents during World War II, when an entire community was sent into exile while its neighbours watched.

***The Joy Luck Club – Amy Tan***

In 1949, four Chinese women -- drawn together by the shadow of their past -- begin meeting in San Francisco to play mah jong, invest in stocks, and "say" stories. They call their gathering the Joy Luck Club and forge a relationship that binds them for more than three decades.

### ***Memoirs of a Geisha* – Arthur Golden**

We follow Sayuri from her childhood in an impoverished fishing village, where in 1929, she is sold to a representative of a geisha house, who is drawn by the child's unusual blue-grey eyes. From there she is taken to Gion, the pleasure district of Kyoto. She is nine years old. In the years that follow, as she works to pay back the price of her purchase, Sayuri will be schooled in music and dance, learn to apply the geisha's elaborate makeup, wear elaborate kimono, and care for a coiffure so fragile that it requires a special pillow. She will also acquire a magnanimous tutor and a venomous rival. Surviving the intrigues of her trade and the upheavals of war, the resourceful Sayuri is a romantic heroine on the order of Jane Eyre and Scarlett O'Hara. And *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a triumphant work - suspenseful, and utterly persuasive.

### ***Mercy Among the Children* – David Adams Richards**

A fascinating tale about humanity and inhumanity and the lies and disappointments we constantly face. Believing that he may have accidentally harmed a friend, Sydney Henderson makes a pact with God, promising that if God will spare the boy's life, Sydney will live a pathologically gentle existence and never again hurt another human being. Exploiting this opportunity to torment the defenseless Hendersons, the others in his small rural community constantly ridicule and attack Sydney's entire family. Sydney's son Lyle decides to adopt an aggressive strategy to protect his family and, in the end, it is Lyle who will decide the family's legacy and fate.

### ***The Power of One* – Bryce Courtenay**

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

## **3. Classics**

### ***Treasure Island* – Robert Louis Stevenson**

The epic tale of a young man's quest to capture a hidden treasure on the open seas -- one of the best-loved adventure stories of all time. It is a tale of pirates, treasure and swashbuckling action on the high seas and continues to captivate readers of all ages.

### ***Tess of the d'Urbervilles* – Thomas Hardy**

Etched against the background of a dying rural society, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was Thomas Hardy's 'bestseller,' and Tess Durbeyfield remains his most striking and tragic heroine. Of all the characters he created, she meant the most to him. Hopelessly torn between two men—Alec d'Urberville, a wealthy, dissolute young man who seduces her in a lonely wood, and Angel Clare, her provincial, moralistic, and unforgiving husband—Tess escapes from her vise of passion through a horrible, desperate act.

### ***Around The World In Eighty Days* – Jules Verne**

In this all-time favorite, Phileas Fogg and his manservant set out to win a wager by traveling around the world in 80 days. They embark on a fantastic, action-packed journey into a world filled with danger and beauty, from India to the American frontier.

### ***Oliver Twist* – Charles Dickens**

This is the classic story of an orphan brought up in a workhouse and sold into apprenticeship to an undertaker. Travel with him to London as he rebels against starvation and ill treatment, only to be caught up in a different set of troubles. *Oliver Twist* is also famous for its recreation through the splendidly realized figures of Fagin, Nancy, the Artful Dodger, and the evil Bill Sikes--of the vast London underworld of pickpockets, thieves, prostitutes, and abandoned children.

### ***A Tale of Two Cities* – Charles Dickens**

It is a timeless classic of love and sacrifice during the French Revolution. With insight and compassion, Dickens casts his tale with such memorable characters as the evil Madame Defarge and her knitted patterns of death, the gentle Lucie Manette and her unflinching devotion to her downtrodden father, and the courageous Sydney Carton, who would give his own love--and life--for a woman that would never be his.

***Sense and Sensibility – Jane Austen***

Sisters of opposing temperaments who share the pangs of tragic love provide the theme for Jane Austen's dramatically human narrative. Their mutual suffering brings the two closer together--and love triumphs when sense gives way to sensibility, and sensibility gives way to sense.

***Emma – Jane Austen***

Emma is bright, pretty, rich, supremely self-assured, and determined to impose her romantic ideals on all those around her. Her well-ordered life is about to change, though, as she embarks on a journey of growth and discovery described with the wit, grace, and style and humor that is Jane Austen's unforgettable signature.

***Man in the Iron Mask – Alexander Dumas***

The Musketeers are back in another exciting adventure! This time a terrible secret threatens to bring down the throne of France. Aramis, Athos, Porthos, and d'Artagnan must rally once again to serve their king and save the country!

***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn – Mark Twain***

Join Huck and Jim as they encounter a wrecked steamship full of thieves, a fake duke and king, and two families locked in an epic feud in this timeless classic!

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY*****The Autobiography of Malcolm X – Malcolm X***

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

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

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

