

MA Creative Writing: Reading Log Summer Tasks

Reading is essential for writers. This programme asks you to keep a log or journal of your reading, so that you can track what influences and inspires you. The process of creating a reading log will also be a crucial component of Critical Reading Group and Writing in Genre. A 'Reading Log Template' is available for you to use, so start filling it in...

The set text to help you prepare for your Reading Log is:

Smiley, Jane. *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel*.

In this reference book, Smiley discusses the pleasure of reading, why a novel succeeds or doesn't, and how the form has changed over time. Smiley's appendix of her own reading is particularly useful.

Inspired by Smiley's reading, we ask you to begin your Reading Log by following ONE of the pathways outlined below.

Read or reread the first named book; read the second named book; choose a third book. Keep drilling down. Move on to another path if you can. Keep notes on your reading and start filling in that log...

1: JANE EYRE

FIRST STEP: *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë's novel was published in 1847 and is certainly a classic book in the canon of British literature. If you haven't read it (recently or at all) start here.

SECOND STEP: *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In 1966, Jean Rhys published a 'back story' novel to *Jane Eyre*, telling the story of Rochester's first wife before she became the 'madwoman' in the attic.

THIRD STEP: Inspired by Brontë and Rhys, choose your pathway. Will you read more Brontë or another work from the 19th century? Will you read more Rhys? Will you find more writing that follows minor characters from a classic text, such as Jo Baker's *Longbourn*, which tells the story of the 'downstairs' life of the servants to the family of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*? Or *Jack Maggs* by Peter Carey, which reworks characters and alternative plots by Dickens? What other literary appropriations can you find?

2: DRACULA

FIRST STEP: *Dracula*. Bram Stoker's 1897 novel is a horror classic, but it was ground-breaking in many ways, including its use of multiple voices/points of view and forms such as diaries and letters (epistolary writing).

SECOND STEP: *The Turn of the Screw*. The horror in this 1898 tale by Henry James is psychological. This short text has been hugely influential for modern horror- and thriller writers as well as film-makers.

THIRD STEP: Choose your pathway. Will you read another classic horror text, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*? Will you choose a contemporary look at the vampire? Or can you find more psychological horror stories inspired by James?

3: LOLITA

FIRST STEP: *Lolita*. Vladimir Nabokov's controversial bestseller continues to divide opinion. The classic unreliable narrator and a huge influence on popular culture: hard-hitting but magnificent.

SECOND STEP: *Beloved*. Toni Morrison's 1987 slave narrative has divided critics, falling short of a national Book Award and winning a Pulitzer. Like *Lolita*, the novel has been subject to bans. Read it and see why.

THIRD STEP: Look for a contemporary take on any controversial subject. You might consider *Notes on a Scandal*, Zoe Heller's *Lolita*-esque novel; A M Homes' *The End of Alice*; *Putney* by Sofka Zinovieff, or *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich.

4: 1984

FIRST STEP: *1984*. You may have read George Orwell's classic dystopian novel ages ago: it's time for a re-read, if so. A true classic for writers of speculative fiction.

SECOND STEP: *The Man in the High Castle*. Philip K. Dick's 1962 novel tells the alternative history of a world divided between post-war fascist powers. It's also a great romp, following multiple protagonists through a complex plot.

THIRD STEP: Choose between one of these literary dystopian novels: *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro's tale of genetics; *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy's exploration of a brutal post-apocalyptic world; or *Station Eleven*, Emily St. John Mandel's story of what happens to society in the wake of a devastating virus.

5: CIDER WITH ROSIE

FIRST STEP: *Cider with Rosie*. Laurie Lee's 1959 autobiographical novel/memoir tells the story of his rural childhood. A classic of the memoir form.

SECOND STEP: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The first in Maya Angelou's series of memoirs: another classic.

THIRD STEP: Choose your pathway. Will you read another childhood memoir? Try *I Capture the Castle*, Dodie Smith's autobiographical novel about yearning and becoming a writer, or James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain* about growing up in Harlem. Or look at more contemporary work: there is a modern explosion of memoir. Follow your curiosity.

6: ALICE IN WONDERLAND

FIRST STEP: *Alice in Wonderland*. Published in 1865, Lewis Carroll's classic gives agency to its child protagonist, setting a new trend for children's literature.

SECOND STEP: *The Phantom Tollbooth*. Norton Juster's 1961 adventure has been likened to the *Alice* books and *The Wizard of Oz* for its use of fantasy, puns and wordplay. Time to rediscover this forgotten classic.

THIRD STEP: Choose your pathway. Will you read another definitive children's adventure, such as *Robinson Crusoe* or *Treasure Island*? Or a more recent classic like *The Wizard of Earthsea*, *The Bridge to Terrabithia* or *A Wrinkle in Time*? You could take the temperature of middle grade and young adult fiction in bookshops and start reading a contemporary series that's new to you.