



QUEENS' SCHOOL *Dare to Write*

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2024:

BRILLIANT BOOK REVIEW RESULTS:

Reading is at the heart of everything we do in the English Department. We are incredibly fortunate to have one of the best school libraries in the county and students at Key Stage 3 have one lesson in the library every month. They also start every English lesson with 10 minutes silent reading where they are also encouraged to complete their Reading Journal. One homework every week is to read their novel independently for at least 30 minutes and then to complete our online book review form so they can share their thoughts with other students. This has been incredibly successful this term with nearly 1,500 book reviews completed. Congratulations to our top performing forms: 7AB, 8TM and 9FD. A particular well done to the following students who have submitted the most book reviews in their year. Year 7 – Nigany; Year 8 – Micaela; Year 9 – Rebecca.



YEAR 11 REVISION:



Students have been working incredibly hard in the run up to the mock exams. We have a range of Loom revision videos available to them to help them prepare for all the papers. We have also been running online revision sessions every Tuesday from 4pm-5pm. These will continue after the New Year and a full programme will be released to parents and students in January. In the meantime, we wish Year 11 all the best of luck with their mock exams.

POPULAR POETRY COMPETITION:

Poetry is a really important part of everything we do in English. Students regularly study poems as part of the schemes of work that we cover. We also have a poem of the month that we share with students. So far we have had 'The First Time I Wore Hearing Aids' by Raymond Antrobus, 'How to Cut a Pomegranate' by Margaret Atwood and 'Winter Trees' by William Carlos Williams.

This year's National Poetry Day Competition was on the theme of counting giving students lots of scope to exercise their imaginations. In conjunction with the library, we had an amazing array of entries that were thoroughly impressive and often original. Congratulations to our joint winners Aryan and Cecile and to our super second place, Stefan. The results were incredibly close.



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THOROUGHLY EXCITING VOCABULOUS



Vocabulous is a programme that we use with Year 7 students. The aim of the programme is to help students learn root words so that they are able to improve their vocabulary and recognise unfamiliar words based on their morphemes (root words). Students complete a series of levels over the course of the year and certificates and prizes are awarded at the end of the year. The current Year 7 have been enthusiastic and diligent in their use of the Vocabulous programme and the results are closer than ever this term with many students completing all levels so far and achieving numerous stars. Congratulations to our top performing form so far – 7FX (followed very closely by 7AE). Keep up the great work Year 7.

A GREAT GLADIATORIAL EXPERIENCE:

On the 28th of November, we took a group of Year 11, 12 and 13 Classics students to see the new Ridley Scott 'Gladiator' movie at the Vue Cinema in Watford. It was a fantastic opportunity for students to see a recreation of the Colosseum as well as other great buildings from Ancient Rome many of which are studied as part of their GCSE Classics Civilisation course. Although not entirely historically accurate, it was a great spectacle to watch especially as we had the cinema entirely to ourselves. A huge thank you to Ms Kinshuck for organising the first of many theatrical experiences this year.



BRILLIANT BOOKS TO READ:

Every month, the English department offer a Key Stage 3 and adult recommended read of the month. You will find our recommendations for November and December below. If you would like to find regular recommendations, then follow us on X: English@Queens'. You can also find further book recommendations on the Queens' School website: <https://www.queens.herts.sch.uk/students/lrc/reading-lists/>



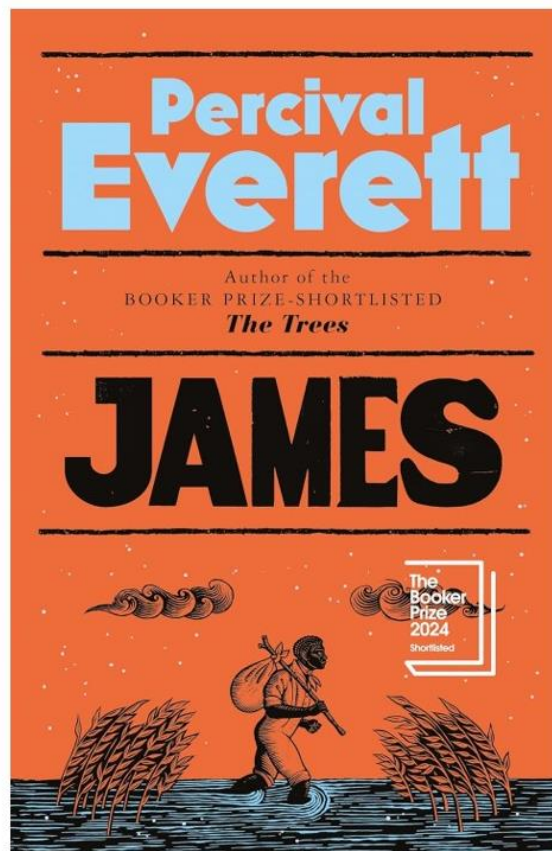
NOVEMBER RECOMMENDED READ – ADULT

'JAMES' PERCIVAL EVERETT

Short-listed for this year's Booker Prize and, in my opinion, the likely and worthy winner, Everett has created yet another exceptional and poignant narrative. Told from the perspective of the runaway slave, Jim, 'James' is a re-telling of Mark Twain's classic 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'.

Forced into running away for fear of being sold and separated from his wife and child, James, accompanied by the young Huck who is also fleeing his abusive 'father', find themselves on a treacherous voyage down the Mississippi River. As they make their way further south, their struggles only seem to worsen as they are forced to run from slave masters, con artists and even a touring minstrel show. However, in the manner of the 'Odyssey', 'James' is a nostos narrative without any real sense of home. Instead, Everett explores the brutal reality of what it means to live in a perpetual state of fear and vulnerability.

Much like his superlative 'Erasure', Everett addresses issues associated with race, prejudice and oppression unflinchingly. Deftly manipulating the original narrative, Everett's novel is laced with irony, dark comedy and painful realism whilst simultaneously maintaining the propulsive narrative of the original adventure novel. Powered by the insightful and sensitive narrative voice of James, Everett not only fills in the blanks from Twain's original where James and Huck are separated, but also exposes the cruel reality of enslavement transmuting the moral climax of the novel's original into something much bleaker and offering a unique twist that exposes the complexity of both racism and racial origins. This is a difficult but deeply moving novel that starkly reveals the 'living hell' of slavery.



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NOVEMBER RECOMMENDED READ – YOUNG ADULT

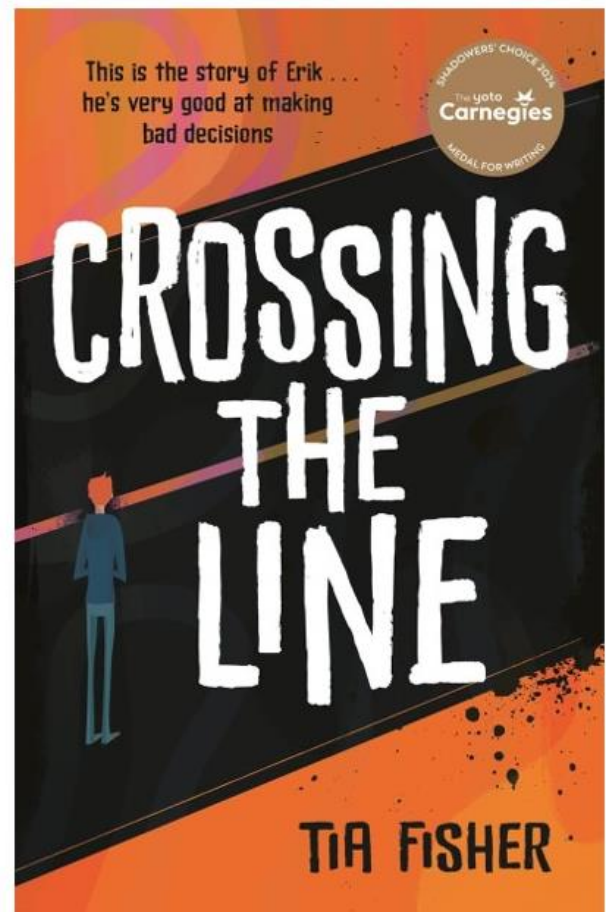
'CROSSING THE LINE' TIA FISHER

Winner of the 2024 Yoto Carnegie reader's choice award, 'Crossing the Line' is a moving verse novel suitable for students from year 9 onwards.

It follows the story of Erik, whose family slowly falls apart following the death of his father. Feeling increasingly lost at school, his behaviour draws him into the wrong crowd until he finds himself sucked into a horrifying world of drugs and violence. Although he is initially led to believe that he is making money that might help his family, he soon finds himself in huge debt to shadowy and threatening figures who demand more and more from him. Terrified not only for his own life but that of his friend and baby sisters, Erik has got to find a way out of the awful situation in which he finds himself whilst desperately trying to keep his double life a secret.

This is very much a novel for modern times addressing issues associated with county lines, drugs and bullying. Fisher carefully crafts a character who is both troubled and deeply sympathetic. Whilst not appropriate for younger students, this is a very moving narrative that addresses the terrible reality faced by far too many young people today.

Fisher uses a combination of clever visual effects with her poetry as well as harrowing details to create a novel that has both an important message and a very emotional conclusion.



DECEMBER RECOMMENDED READ – ADULT

'BEASTS OF ENGLAND' ADAM BILES

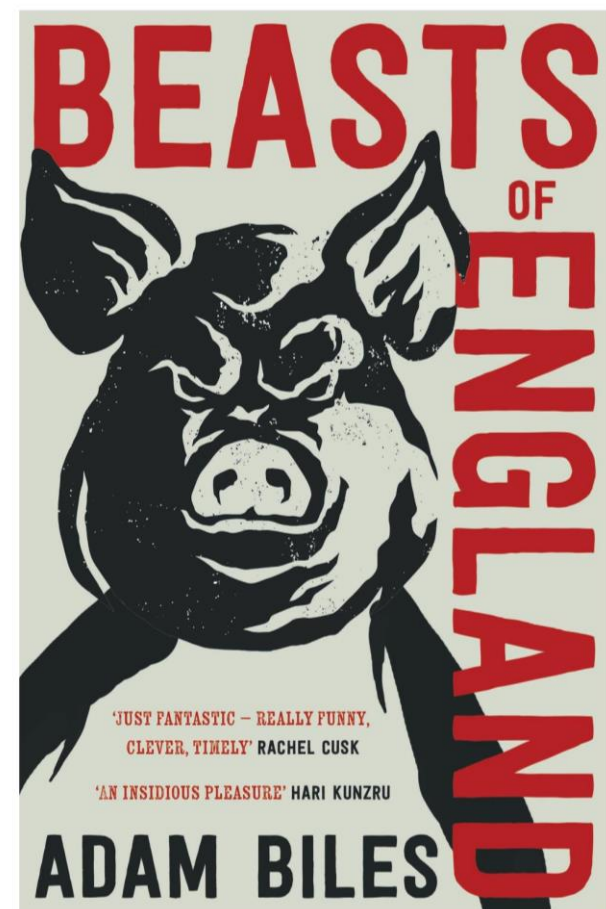
Set several years after the events of Orwell's 'Animal Farm', 'Beasts of England' is a superb sequel to Orwell's original political satire addressing modern political issues through a whole new range of anthropomorphised characters. In so doing, Biles honours, updates and cleverly subverts the original.

Manor Farm has now become South of England's premium petting zoo where animals are no longer beasts of burden, but free creatures: free to vote; make a profit; share their political views and have a say in the running of their world. Yet despite the façade of liberty and democracy, the time-old nature of corrupt, populist politics and capitalistic greed remain festering in the fodder.

On the surface everything seems ideal: the windmill continues to generate electricity providing the farm with a constant income even, oddly, when there is no wind; the songs and mottos of old are still chanted although the words appear to be shifting; the pigs remain in charge of the whole shebang – or are they?

When a strange new illness hits Manor Farm and the windmill suddenly stops, unrest begins to grow, and the harvest of political unease and the problems of a population divided by wealth and breed rise slowly to the surface. As the day of the Great Choozin grows ever closer, it becomes increasingly unclear whether Manor Farm can stand by the ethos of Old Major's dream or even if that dream ever truly existed.

This is a superb modern take on Orwell's classic novel perfect for anyone interested in politics. The final shocking events will certainly leave you thinking long after you have finished the novel.



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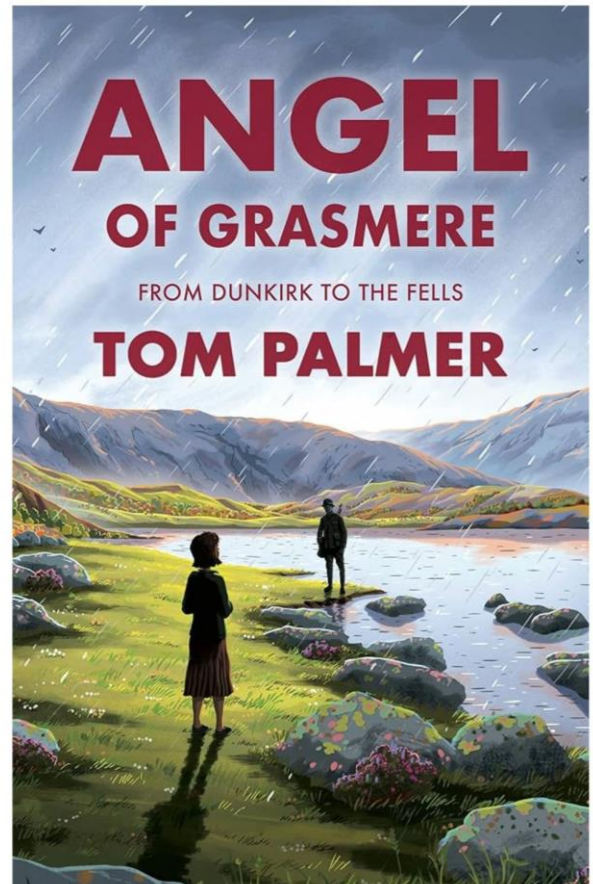
DECEMBER RECOMMENDED READ – YOUNG ADULT

'ANGEL OF GRASMERE' TOM PALMER

Set in the beautiful landscape of the Lake District, this is a heartwarming and gripping novel that combines historical detail with a moving narrative.

Set in July 1940, the story centres around Tarn and her family as they desperately try to get to grips with the loss of her older brother during the D-Day landings. As the threat of invasion grows ever closer, the people in Tarn's village must learn to cope with the rationing, evacuations from nearby cities, the constant worry for loved ones on the frontline as well as the demands of farming life. However, as the weather turns towards winter and snow begins to smother the landscape, small miracles start to occur: the village school roof is repaired; food is left for the poor in the church and a farmer's flock of sheep are saved. However, the identity of the guardian angel of Grasmere remains a secret and the angel themselves has no intention of being discovered.

This is compelling narrative about the importance of family and friendship as Palmer explores what it might have been like to grow up as a child during these turbulent years of World War Two. The reader is asked to consider what real courage might look like and how even small acts of kindness can transform a community. This is great story for any student from year 7 upwards but particularly those who are interested in history.



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