



CLASSICS
Reading List





Year 9, Middle School and Sixth Form

This list is for all years and for anyone, whether studying Classics or not. Some of the books are more suitable for general reading and are marked with an asterisk *. All of those in the 'modern novels' section count in this category. This is in no way exhaustive and is simply designed as a starting point.

EPIC

**Iliad* and *Odyssey* – Homer translated - Richmond Lattimore (Chicago)

The books everyone educated in the ancient world had to know. This is a translation which doesn't get in the way of the imagery or of the story. There are free translations online at <https://www.poetrvintranslation.com/> where much else besides is to be found (but avoid the Greek drama translations!)

Otherwise there are hundreds of translations available: Hammond and Rieu respectively for faithful prose versions but also many literary ones, especially by Heaney and Logue.

Homer in English ed. Steiner (Penguin)

The Singer of Tales (Harvard) – Albert Lord

Quite heavy and scholarly but amazing - it describes field research undertaken in the 1930s, in which ancient Bosnians playing a weird stringed instrument called a gusle sang long epic poems, and applies this to the origins of 'Homer's' epics, which clearly came from a similar oral tradition.

* *Aeneid* – Virgil translated - Cecil Day-Lewis (Oxford) - Martin West (Oxford)

The founding of Rome by Aeneas and his group of Trojan refugees. A response to Homer rather than an imitation. This was the Romans' version of Shakespeare, along with Homer.

**Metamorphoses* - Ovid

Its an epic and not an epic all at once. Instead of having a Jon Snow type 'hero' it is a series of linked stories on the theme of change. Change is almost the 'hero' itself. One of the most important books in the Western World, at least up to the 19th century. Kline again has a reliable translation.

MYTH

Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*

Stephen Fry, *Mythos*

Stephen Fry, *Heroes*

Obviously Ovid does this as well!

DRAMA

Try beginning with:

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (intense emotionally - better in performance as reading it makes it seem slow-moving, which it isn't)

**Sophocles, Oedipus the King/Oedipus Tyrannus* **Euripides, Medea and The Bacchae* **Aristophanes, Lysistrata* (over 15s only)

**Plautus, The Rope and The Haunted House/Mostellaria*



LATIN NOVELS

**Satyricon* - Petronius translated by P.G. Walsh (Oxford)

Very funny and full of social comment (adapted as *The Millionaire's Dinner Party* which we use in the VI Form). Only suitable for over 15s.

The Golden Ass - Apuleius translated by P.G. Walsh (Oxford)

A story in which the narrator gets turned into a donkey after a mistake with magic.

*MODERN NOVELS WITH CLASSICAL SETTINGS

Valerio Massimo Manfredi

An Italian archaeology professor from Milan. Very cinematic (and *The Last Legion* is already a film). Accurate detail and easy reading.

- The Alexander Trilogy
- Spartan - read in conjunction with Paul Cartledge's *The Spartans*.
- The Last Legion
- The Lost Army
- This uses Xenophon's *Anabasis* (see under GREEK HISTORY) for the story of Greek mercenaries trapped in the Persian empire and making an epic retreat homewards.
- Tyrant
- This is about the tyrant (ruler) of Syracuse in Sicily (which was part of the Greek world) and his epic struggle with the might of Carthage on the North African coast.

Harry Sidebottom

A lecturer at Oxford (see also under MILITARY HISTORY). His books are full of action and like Manfredi's aim for historical accuracy as well.

Warrior of Rome Trilogy:

- Fire in the East
- King of Kings
- Lion of the Sun

The 'warrior' in question is an Anglian prince from Germany (that is, from the tribe which later colonised and gave its name to England) who has been brought into the Roman empire as a 'hostage' - an insurance policy, in effect, to stop his tribe from attacking the Roman empire. He has made a career as a commander in the Roman army, not without making enemies on the way.

Robert Harris

Very readable books based on thorough research - the historical accuracy doesn't get in the way of the story though.

- Pompeii - Highly recommended - strong story line and of course a volcano as one of the key players. Year 9/10 upwards should find it very approachable.
- Imperium
- Lustrum

The first two books in a trilogy about Cicero, the lawyer, philosopher and politician of the end of the Republic. Very good reading for VI form in particular.



David Wishart and Lindsay Davies

Both write detective novels set in Roman times. Easy quick reading.

Simon Scarrow

Writes adventure stories with Roman settings involving the ultra-hard centurion Macro and his friend and sidekick Cato, who isn't quite as ultra-hard. The earlier books are set in Britain while later ones take the pair to other (warmer) parts of the empire. The latest ones are:

- Centurion - A similar setting to that in Harry Sidebottom's books, on Rome's troublesome eastern borders.
- The Gladiator - See also <http://www.scarrow.co.uk/page12.html> for more details.

Lots more too: try Madeline Miller, Mary Renault, Ursula leGuin's Lavinia

LYRIC POETRY

Catullus

Poems translated by James Michie (Vintage)

Not the newest translation but gets to the style of the original - using the English poetic tradition - much more successfully than many. Some poems are only suitable for over 16s.

Horace

Odes translated by James Michie (Penguin) - as with Michie's Catullus the translations get close to the feel of the original while remaining accurate. Horace has been translated a great deal into English. Horace in English (Penguin) is a selection of these, mostly older translations.

*Odes and Epodes translated by David West (Oxford) - good translation and also accurate. These are some of the best poems you can read.

HISTORY

- **Xenophon - Anabasis (The Persian Expedition)**. A sort of boy's own adventure story about a Greek mercenary army marooned in the middle of Mesopotamia and their struggle to get back to their homeland. Simple, direct style and one of the two most famous sightings of the sea in history, if the other one is when the Spanish realised that Central America wasn't Asia after all. Feel free to leave out the endless lists of how far they marched each day though.
- Thucydides - The Peloponnesian War
- ***Herodotus – Histories**. This is the original history book - literally 'the enquiries of Herodotus of Halicarnassus'. It's full of stories and facts about the countries and peoples Herodotus describes as well as being an account of the war between the Greeks and the Persians.
- **Livy**. His huge book about Roman history only survives in part - the early history of Rome, full of famous stories about uber-virtuous early Romans, and the epic wars against Hannibal are the highlights.
- Tacitus
- **Agricola** - a biography of the governor of Britain - as a result very important for the history of Roman Britain.
- ***Annals** - witty, full of unspoken comment and a brilliant evocation of the excesses of the early Empire. Hugely clever and hugely sophisticated.
- **Histories** - more of the same, post-Nero this time.
- ***Suetonius - Lives of the Twelve Caesars** - this is the most readable book in this part of the list, mainly because of the chatty style and the fact that Suetonius was definitely interested in gossip and scandal.
- **Caesar - The Gallic War** - written in the third person. A favourable description of himself, as you might



imagine, but in fact very readable as well (although he does get very interested in how wide ditches are on occasion).

OTHER PROSE

- Cicero
- Cicero and the Roman Republic - John Murrell (Cambridge)
- Cicero's Speeches; The Man in Action - Stephen Usher (Aris and Phillips)

MODERN BOOKS ABOUT THE ANCIENT WORLD

- An Imperial Possession - David Mattingly (Penguin)
- Roman Britain - an excellent modern study.
- *Great Excavations - John Romer (Cassell). Absolutely essential first reading if you have any interest in archaeology or (more particularly) in archaeologists and what they hope to achieve by their work. Very good too as an introduction to the way in which Classical ideas were used by Western Europeans, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Roman Britain - Peter Salway (Oxford)
- Roman Roads in Britain - Hugh Davies (Shire)
- * Ancient Rome in So Many Words - Christopher Francese (Hippocrene). Long articles about key words and concepts for the Romans - like 'annona', the supply of wheat, or 'homo novus', the first person in a family to achieve high political office, like Cicero. Easy to dip in to.
- The Classical World - Robin Lane Fox (Penguin). Very readable one-volume history - reliable and scholarly as well.
- *The Spartans - An Epic History - Paul Cartledge (Penguin). The best place to find out about all of their weird (but often very much admired) customs and way of life as well as their rise and fall through history.
- The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others - Paul Cartledge (Oxford)
- *Persian Fire - Tom Holland (Abacus). Tells the story of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis from the other point of view. Highly recommended.
- *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great - Michael Wood (BBC Books). Michael Wood actually follows the route Alexander took, through the Middle East, Iran and Afghanistan to India and some of the way back. Still a highly adventurous journey!
- Daily Life in Ancient Rome - Jerome Carcopino (Penguin). An old book but still full of useful detail for the GCSE background paper or for initial ideas for an IB research dossier.
- An Intelligent Person's Guide to Classics - Peter Jones (Duckworth)
- The British Museum Book of Greek and Roman Art - Lucilla Burn (British Museum Press)
- The Greeks at War - Philip de Souza, Waldemar Heckel and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (Osprey)
- *The Fall of the Roman Empire - Peter Heather (Pan). Egypt, Greece and Rome. Very well written and unusual in combining all three ancient civilisations (which means that comparisons can be made).
- *Ancient Rome on Five Denarii a Day
- *Ancient Athens on Five Drachmas a Day *Simon Goldhill - Love, Sex and Tragedy (Penguin). A brilliant book which shows how different the Romans and Greeks were from us as well as indicating how they have influenced us in more ways than we can imagine. Only suitable for over 16s.
- *Ancient Warfare: A Very Short Introduction - Harry Sidebottom (Oxford). By the author of the Warrior of Rome novels in his academic role.
- *A History of Greece in Eleven Cities - Paul Cartledge (Oxford)
- Roman Britain - Guy de la Bedoyere
- As the Romans Did - Jo-Ann Shelton (New York: Oxford)
- Reading Roman Inscriptions - John Rogan (Tempus)
- Understanding Roman Inscriptions - Lawrence Keppie (Johns Hopkins)



POMPEII

- *Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town – Mary Beard (Profile Books). Very up to date with current research and archaeology. Challenges some ideas which people have assumed for many years (e.g. the idea that the town was full of brothels).
- *The Complete Pompeii - Joanne Berry (Thames and Hudson). By far the best for illustrations - also a detailed text.
- Pompeii: A Sourcebook - Alison Cooley and M.G.L. Cooley (Routledge)
- Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum - Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (Princeton)
- *Pompeii: The Living City - Alex Butterworth and Ray Laurence (Weidenfeld and Nicholson)

REFERENCE BOOKS

- The Cambridge Companion to the Ancient World
- The Oxford Classical Dictionary
- The Oxford Companion to the Classical World
- The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature. Old but still the best small guide and very easy to use.

Audio-Visual

The podcasts from Melvyn Bragg's In Our Time series (see on estream) almost always collect the best scholars together. Bragg sometimes doesn't entirely understand the Classical world but when on form is a very effective questioner.

BBC - Ancient Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire. Class. 12

BBC - I, Claudius (old but still very effective - extremely well acted.) Class. 15

There are lots more on estream and online, in particular those by Mary Beard, Michael Scott, Catharine Edwards, Bettany Hughes and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. Mary Beard on Pompeii and her Life in a Roman Town, as well as Michael Scott's Ancient Greece: The Greatest Show on Earth, are essential viewing.