

CCFB: **CERCLE DE LECTURE** : 2018-2019

**THERE WILL BE 6 SPECIFIC READING CIRCLE SESSIONS THROUGHOUT THE 2018-2019 YEAR, SPLIT INTO TWO GROUPS**

**Participants join one group, and will require at least Intermediate level English ability to follow and understand the chosen texts. Both groups will follow the same texts**

**Maximum number of participants in each group: 10**

**GROUP A: 17h00-18h30**

**GROUP B: 18h30-20h00**

### **SESSION 1 : Monday 5th November**

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Published 1960. Pulitzer Prize Winner.

The story takes place in Alabama during the Depression, and is narrated by the main character, a little girl named Jean Louise "Scout" Finch. Her father, Atticus Finch, is a lawyer with high moral standards. Scout, her brother Jem, and their friend Dill are intrigued by the local rumours about a man named Boo Radley, who lives in their neighbourhood but who never leaves his house. Legend has it that he once stabbed his father in the leg with a pair of scissors, and he is made out to be a kind of monster. Dill is from Mississippi but spends his summer in Maycomb at a house near the Finch's.

Atticus decides to take on a case involving a black man named Tom Robinson who has been accused of raping a very poor white girl named Mayella Ewell, a member of the notorious Ewell family, who belong to the layer of Maycomb society that people refer to as "trash". The Finch family faces harsh criticism in the heavily racist town because of Atticus's decision to defend Tom. However: Atticus insists on going through with the case because his conscience could not let him do otherwise. He knows Tom is innocent, and also that he has almost no chance at being acquitted, because the white jury will never believe a black man over a white woman. Despite this, Atticus wants to reveal the truth to his fellow townspeople, expose their bigotry, and encourage them to imagine the possibility of racial equality.

### **SESSION 2 : Monday 17th December**

*Nutshell* by Ian McEwan. Published 2016.

This is the 14th novel by English author and screenwriter Ian McEwan. It retells the idea behind William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* from the point of view of an unborn child. The baby is so frequently drunk — his mother Trudy, in her third trimester, makes it a point to "drink for two". But when sober, he learns to put the world together through its attenuated sights and syncopated sounds; he invents his own fuzzy, amniotic CCTV. The flavourful rise in his mother's hormones — the quickening of her pulse, the drip of adrenaline in her synapses — tells him a poisonous story to which he, alone, is privy.

### **SESSION 3 : Monday 28th January**

*And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini. Published 2013.

The book is written similarly to a collection of short stories, with each of the nine chapters being told from the perspective of a different character. The book's foundation is built on the relationship between ten-year-old Abdullah and his three-year-old sister Pari and their father's decision to sell her to a childless couple in Kabul, an event that ties the various narratives together.

#### **SESSION 4 : Monday 11th March**

*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. First published in 1848 under the pseudonym Acton Bell.

The novel is framed as a series of letters from Gilbert Markham to his friend and brother-in-law about the events connected with the meeting of his wife. A mysterious young widow arrives at Wildfell Hall, an Elizabethan mansion which has been empty for many years, with her young son and a servant. She lives there in strict seclusion under the assumed name Helen Graham and soon finds herself the victim of local slander. Refusing to believe anything scandalous about her, Gilbert befriends Helen and discovers her past. In her diary, Helen depicts her husband's physical and moral decline through alcohol and her desperate attempts to save their son from his influence in the dissipated aristocratic society from which she ultimately flees. The depiction of marital strife and women's professional identification has also a strong moral message mitigated by the authors's belief in universal salvation.

Most critics now consider *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to be one of the first feminist novels. May Sinclair, in 1913, said that the slamming of Helen's bedroom door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England. In leaving her husband, Helen violates not only social conventions, but also the early 19th century English law.

#### **SESSION 5 : Monday 29th April**

*Nemesis* by Philip Roth. Published 2010. Roth's final novel (he died 22nd May 2018).

Set in Newark during the sweltering summer of 1944, it tells the story of Bucky Cantor, a playground director "who, because of poor vision... was one of the few men around who wasn't fighting in the war". Instead, Cantor's war is with a gruesome outbreak of polio. The narrator is Arnie Mesnikoff, himself a child at the playground and also a victim of the disease - it is Mesnikoff who runs into "Mr Cantor" years later in 1971 and learns how things turned out.

#### **SESSION 6 : Monday 17th June**

*Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. Published 1928.

The eponymous hero is born as a male nobleman in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. He undergoes a mysterious change of sex at the age of about 30 and lives on for more than 300 years into modern times without ageing perceptibly. As a teenage boy, the handsome Orlando serves as a page at the Elizabethan court and becomes "favourite" of the elderly queen. After her death he falls deeply in love with Sasha, an elusive and somewhat feral princess in the entourage of the Russian embassy.

#### **OPTIONAL REVIEW SESSION (subject to sufficient interest) : Monday 24th June**

Discussion of potential book titles for the 2019-2020 year.

**\* Cercle de Lecture sessions have been scheduled to avoid the many Vacances Scolaires and Jours Fériés. Sessions are spaced a minimum of six weeks apart.\***