**Senior Booklist**

The Times Educational Supplement has recently published a list of 26 books students should read to ease the transition to further education, as chosen by academics. Here is the list and what the academics who chose them said about them.

## Aliens: why they are here **by Bryan Appleyard**

“Aliens is a great book because it deftly deconstructs popular culture (from conspiracy theories to Star Trek) in order to interrogate the desires, fears and ideologies that are coded into such representations and discourses. For any student of the arts and humanities, Appleyard is a primer in how to explore the ‘everyday’ and defamiliarise it in order to see it anew – and make connections between the micro and macro.”

## A Rage to Live: a biography of Richard and Isabel Burton **by Mary S Lovell**

“It’s for those who self-identify as misfits and mavericks, iconoclasts even. It’s a love story whose journey of long unrequited yearning will put any difficult university affair into perspective. It’s a story of how to lose friends and alienate people, which leaves you wishing you could engage in causes even half as dangerous and daring and not care about who you alienate on the way. Above all, the characters satisfy the book’s title: Richard and Isabel dare you to embark on your journey with a wild ‘rage to live’ – to push boundaries, to question everything and to relish every opportunity for love, adventure, roving and enjoyment. All good things for any beginning student to imbibe, I would have thought.”

## A Room of One’s Own **by Virginia Woolf**

“This essay is a provocative insight into the reasons why students may not encounter that many female philosophers, scientists and artists as they begin their studies at university. It demands that the reader reassess their assumptions about the role of women historically, and keep in mind the conditions required to work, create and develop as an individual. As well as being brilliantly written, it is imaginative, challenging and inspirational.”

## A Time of Gifts **by Patrick Leigh Fermor**

“This is a slightly offbeat choice because it’s not about someone who goes to university; instead, it’s about a 19-year-old and his walking tour across pre-Second World War Europe. I think all young people should read it because it speaks so eloquently about the importance of being open and engaged with the people around you, and is full of important lessons of life.”

## Galileo’s Middle Finger: heretics, activists and the search for justice in science **by Alice Dreger**

“I would suggest this cleverly named book to demonstrate the power of argument and the roles of evidence, scepticism and courage in academic endeavour, and the dire consequences of the lack of such qualities.”

## Landscape for a Good Woman: a story of two women **by Carolyn Steedman**

“Analysing the unfulfilled desires and frustrations of her mother’s life in the 1950s enables Steedman to bring her critical historical imagination to an analysis of the nature and limits of much of the theory we bring to understanding desire, especially desires for a better life – whether feminist, psychoanalytic, sociological, political or broadly psychosocial.”

## Life’s Greatest Secret: the race to crack the genetic code **by Matthew Cobb**

“I am tempted to advise students on the threshold of university not to worry about which book to read, so long as they read some books! But if I have to choose one, I would thrust Life’s Greatest Secret into the hands of the biology and biochemistry students arriving in my department. It will help them to break out of traditional modes of thinking about how science discovers the world.”

## Musicking: the meanings of performing and listening **by Christopher Small**

“This is a book that teaches us how to observe and question everyday human behaviour and institutions, and that demonstrates how to use theoretical analysis to draw wider conclusions about how meanings and values are created.”

## Old Goriot **by Honoré de Balzac**

“Though he hails from the early 19th century, the novel’s hero, Eugène de Rastignac, remains the model for first-year university students. Leaving his provincial backwater for bustling Paris to study law, he soon drops his texts and teachers for babes and balls. Not to worry, though: Eugène’s true education will come from life, not lectures. Will he, as he is warned, break society’s harsh laws or be broken by them? Ah, you will need to read the novel to find the answer as well as to find yourself. (Hint: neither one nor the other.)”

## On Becoming **a Person: a therapist’s view of psychotherapy by Carl Rogers**

“First published in 1961, what Rogers is after is what he calls ‘the fully functioning person’, and ‘the process of the good life – not a life for the faint-hearted’.”

## On Poetry **by Glyn Maxwell**

“It’s witty, erudite, provocative, opinionated and, through poetry, speaks subtly and with urgency about curiosity, desire and form – ‘creaturely life’, as Maxwell says. What the book states at its opening is true: it is ‘a book for anyone’.”

## Philosophical Investigations **by Ludwig Wittgenstein**

“It is not an easy book, even for professional philosophers, but if one reads it carefully, then it is very thought-provoking. Whether or not one agrees with Wittgenstein, one is left with a much more sophisticated view of language and thought, and how they relate to the external world.”

## Reborn: early diaries, 1947-1963 **by Susan Sontag**

“These diaries show Sontag uncertain, sometimes scared and yet intoxicated by the excitement of ideas and the possibility of life and sexuality. I loved them for the permission that they give to take risks and chase passion, and most of all for the permission that they give to not to know. All students starting out at university should remember this: that it’s OK not to have the answers, or know where you are going, or what you are doing, and that not having answers is, in fact, at the heart of scholarship and learning. As long as you keep asking questions.”

## Sapiens: a brief history of humankind **by Yuval Noah Harari**

“I wish I had been able to read Yuval Noah Harari’s Sapiens before I went to university, where I was (happily) trapped inside the humanities. Approachable and provocative, it is full of surprising information about our species and reaches across the disciplines, from history and archaeology to biology and engineering.”

## Surely You’re Joking, Mr Feynman: adventures of a curious character **by Richard Feynman**

“[I chose this] partly for the way in which the reluctant Nobel laureate conveys the sheer ebullience and joy of discovering new understanding and new ways of looking at the world, but also for the personal messages that it conveys for those setting out on their own journey to university and beyond. Think for yourself. Believe in yourself. Above all, remember that your responsibility is to yourself.”

## Talking to Strangers: anxieties of citizenship since Brown v Board of Education **by Danielle Allen**

“A powerful and sensitive account of segregation, sacrifice and misrecognition that, while focused on the US and the civil rights movement there, speaks directly to the current refugee crisis in Europe. It also provides criticism of the tradition of political theory from Hobbes to Habermas, utilising African-American literature, and ending with a manifesto for community action to redress injustices. It is not so much a manual for entry into university life, but for entry into the wider political life that should be entailed by university.”

## The Blandings stories **by PG Wodehouse**

“Time spent at university will be frenetic, immersive and chaotic – if you are doing it right – so it is good to have a private world to sneak away into when things get too weird. I found mine in the novels of PG Wodehouse, specifically the ‘Blandings stories’, such as Pigs Have Wings.”

## The Establishment: and how they get away with it **by Owen Jones**

“If I had had any flicker of understanding as a student of how I was part of a window of upward social mobility that has now closed, and that I would live in a society where ability matters less than inheritance and connections, then I might have spent less time shopping in Miss Selfridge, vogueing and campaigning against cruelty to guinea pigs. Still, that experience made me who I am today… ahem.”

## The History Man **by Malcolm Bradbury**

“Howard Kirk, the central character of Malcolm Bradbury’s novel, is a professor of sociology and a radical hero – but he’s also a bully, a lech and a fake. He’s a truly vile man. Alas, it’s not history.”

## The Secret History **by Donna Tartt**

“It offers a cautionary tale about both the in-crowd and the out-crowd at university. It’s set in a liberal arts college in Vermont and pulls no punches whatsoever about campus life, as well as being an incredibly clever, fast-paced and entertaining murder mystery.”

## The Invisible Gorilla: and other ways our intuition deceives us **by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons**

“An important part of university education is being trained to question your pre-existing views of things. This book illustrates the traps we can all fall into and how we need to learn to think and question, rather than just accumulating facts.”

## The Wind in the Willows **by Kenneth Grahame**

“This provides both a refuge from anxiety and valuable allegorical information about life. Different editions have had various illustrators, but I think that the drawings by Arthur Rackham (published in 1940) are the best, though those by Ernest Shepard (published in 1931) are more widely known.”

## The Women’s Room **by Marilyn French**

“The Women’s Room offers a vivid slice of social history while making the point that for some people – like the heroine Mira – being able to study at university is something that can never be taken for granted.”

## This Changes Everything: capitalism vs the climate **by Naomi Klein**

“Big questions, big problems and big solutions are explored in this book. It is an invaluable precursor for university life, where everything should be up for discussion, where established knowledges can be challenged, and where creative solutions are generated.”

## This is Water: some thoughts, delivered on a significant occasion, about living a compassionate life **by David Foster Wallace**

“It is actually a commencement speech, intended for college students who are on the edge of their professional careers. Its thesis is that a liberal arts education teaches us how to do the very important work of choosing what to think. It’s only 60 short pages – the perfect length to read on the bus or train to your next place, higher learning.”

## You Are Not So Smart: why your memory is mostly fiction, why you have too many friends on Facebook and 46 other ways you’re deluding yourself **by David McRaney**

“It highlights the cognitive biases that we all experience. In an era of ‘safe spaces’, where the very core of the university experience – open debate – is being challenged, we should perhaps encourage students to argue more about how they argue...”