

A-Level Philosophy – Suggested Preparation

Fiction

These books are all fiction books, some of them are connected with the topics that we study and some of them will just make you think hard, reflect on what it is to be human, what is real and what matters. You might wish to read some of these before starting the A Level or instead of your own reading for pleasure.

<u>Title/Author</u>	<u>Areas of the course</u>	<u>Central themes/issues</u>
Knowledge of Angels by Jill Paton Walsh	Philosophy – proving God's existence	It is the 15 th century – a feral child is discovered. Can the child be convinced of the existence of God?
Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder	Philosophy and Ethics	This book leads you through a history of the great philosophers' right through to the modern age. With Sophie, the reader is encouraged to question the world around themselves. The teacher-pupil structure enhances the plot, whose mysteries will keep you wondering to the last page.
Never Let Me Go By Kazuo Ishiguro	Ethics	Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewed version of contemporary England. Narrated by Kathy, now thirty-one, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> dramatizes her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world. A story of love, friendship and memory, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> is charged throughout with a sense of the fragility of life.
We Need To Talk About Kevin By Lionel Shriver	Ethics – free will Philosophy – problem of evil	Eva never really wanted to be a mother; certainly not the mother of the unlovable boy who murdered seven of his fellow high school students, a cafeteria worker and a teacher who tried to befriend him. Now, two years later, it is time for her to come to terms with marriage, career, family, parenthood and Kevin's horrific rampage in a series of startlingly direct correspondences with her absent husband, Franklyn. Uneasy with the sacrifices and social demotion of motherhood from the start, Eva fears that her alarming dislike for her own son may be responsible for driving him so nihilistically off the rails.
Life of Pi By Yann Martel	General	After the tragic sinking of a cargo ship, a solitary lifeboat remains bobbing on the wild, blue Pacific. The only survivors from the wreck are a sixteen year-old boy named Pi, a hyena, a zebra (with a broken leg), a female orang-utan and a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. The scene is set for one of the most extraordinary and best-loved works of fiction in recent years.
Under the Net By Iris Murdoch	Philosophy	Iris Murdoch's first novel is set in a part of London where struggling writers rub shoulders with successful bookies, and film starlets with frantic philosophers. Its hero, Jake Donaghue, is a drifting, clever, likeable young man who makes a living out of translation work and sponging on his friends. A meeting with Anna, an old flame, leads him into a series of fantastic adventures. Jake is captivated by a majestic philosopher, Hugo Belfounder, whose profound and inconclusive reflections give the book its title - under the net of language.

Non-Fiction

These books are all non-fiction books which raise issues to do with the topics that they study rather than focusing on scholars. You might wish to read some of these before starting the A Level or instead of your own reading for pleasure

<u>Title/Author</u>	<u>Areas of the course</u>	<u>Central themes/issues</u>
Can a Robot be Human?: 33 Perplexing Philosophy Puzzles By Peter Cave	Thinking skills – applicable to the whole course	In this fun and entertaining book of puzzles and paradoxes, Peter Cave introduces some of life's most important questions with tales and tall stories, reasons and arguments, common sense and bizarre conclusions. From speedy tortoises to getting into heaven, paradoxes and puzzles give rise to some of the most exciting problems in philosophy—from logic to ethics and from art to politics. Illustrated with quirky cartoons throughout, Can A Robot Be Human? takes the reader on a taster tour of the most interesting and delightful parts of philosophy
The Complete Philosophy Files By Stephen Law	Thinking skills – applicable to the whole course	Is there a God, should I eat meat, where does the universe come from, could I live for ever as a robot? These are the big questions readers will be wrestling with in this thoroughly enjoyable book. Dip into any chapter and you will find lively scenarios and dialogues to take you through philosophical puzzles ancient and modern, involving virtual reality, science fiction and a host of characters from this and other planets. The text is interspersed on every page with lively cartoons, and there is a list of philosophical jargon at the end.
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks By Rebecca Skloot	Ethics	Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. Born a poor black tobacco farmer, her cancer cells – taken without her knowledge – became a multimillion-dollar industry and one of the most important tools in medicine. Yet Henrietta's family did not learn of her 'immortality' until more than twenty years after her death, with devastating consequences . . .
A Little History of Philosophy By Nigel Warburton	Philosophy	Philosophy begins with questions about the nature of reality and how we should live. These were the concerns of Socrates, who spent his days in the ancient Athenian marketplace asking awkward questions, disconcerting the people he met by showing them how little they genuinely understood. This engaging book introduces the great thinkers in Western philosophy and explores their most compelling ideas about the world and how best to live in it. In forty brief chapters, Nigel Warburton takes us on a chronological tour of the major ideas in the history of philosophy. He provides interesting and often quirky stories of the lives and deaths of thought-provoking philosophers from Socrates, who chose to die by hemlock poisoning rather than live on without the freedom to think for himself, to Peter Singer, who asks the disquieting philosophical and ethical questions that haunt our own times. Warburton not only makes philosophy accessible, he offers inspiration to think, argue, reason, and question in the tradition of Socrates. "A Little History of Philosophy" presents the grand sweep of humanity's search for philosophical understanding and invites all to join in the discussion.
The Young Atheist's Handbook By Alom Shaha	General	The story of a man who lost his faith, but found much, much more. Growing up in a strict Muslim community in south-east London, Alom Shaha learnt that religion was not to be questioned. Reciting the Qur'an without understanding what it meant was simply a part of life; so, too, was obeying the imam and enduring beatings when he failed to attend the local mosque. But Alom was more drawn to science and its power to illuminate. As a teen, he lived between two worlds: the home controlled by his authoritarian father, and a school alive with books and ideas. In a charming blend of memoir, philosophy and science, Alom explores the questions

		<p>about faith and the afterlife that we all ponder. This is a book for anyone who wonders what they should believe and how they should live. It's for those who may need the facts and the ideas, as well as the courage, to break free from inherited beliefs. In this powerful narrative, Alom shows that it is possible to live a compassionate, fulfilling and meaningful life without God.</p>
<p>A History of God By Karen Armstrong</p>	<p>Philosophy and Christianity</p>	<p>The idea of a single divine being - God, Yahweh, Allah - has existed for over 4,000 years. But the history of God is also the history of human struggle. While Judaism, Islam and Christianity proclaim the goodness of God, organised religion has too often been the catalyst for violence and ineradicable prejudice. In this fascinating, extensive and original account of the evolution of belief, Karen Armstrong examines Western society's unerring fidelity to this idea of One God and the many conflicting convictions it engenders. A controversial, extraordinary story of worship and war, <i>A History of God</i> confronts the most fundamental fact - or fiction - of our lives</p>
<p>Everything I Know I Learned From TV: Philosophy For the Unrepentant Couch Potato: Philosophy Explained Through Our Favourite TV Shows By Mark Rowlands</p>	<p>Philosophy and Ethics</p>	<p><i>Everything I Know I Learned From TV</i> uses characters we all know and love and their TV worlds to explain the great questions of philosophy. The only qualifications you need to join in are ownership of a sofa, a remote control, a sense of humour and an enquiring mind. The philosophy discussed is very much 'life' philosophy, answering the questions we all want to know: How do you define what is a good life to lead? The Simpsons disagree over the right way to live with Nietzsche and Diogenes on hand to take sides. What is real happiness? Aristotle fights Descartes for the heart and mind of <i>Sex and the City's</i> Carrie Bradshaw. Can a good person do a bad thing? Kant and Socrates pay a call on Tony Soprano and his latter-day Mob to talk moral philosophy. Where does love end and friendship begin? Rachel and Ross ask Plato about the philosophy of emotions and wonder if they're just good friends. Is the pursuit of self-knowledge a good thing? Socrates helps Niles and Frasier Crane and their dad deal with the relative merit of the examined and the unexamined life. And much more</p>

Useful Websites, Podcasts and Clips

<u>Link</u>	<u>Description</u>
https://ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/religious-studies-h173-h573-from-2016/	Exam board website. Useful for specifications and past papers.
http://thepanpocast.com/episodes-by-category/	A collection of Podcasts that are regularly updated, mostly suited to Philosophy and Ethics
http://www.rrevision.com/content/index.htm	A collection of revision materials – not exam board specific and so you need to check which information is relevant.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qyk1	In our Time is a Radio 4 programme which looks at influential ideas and people. It often takes complex ideas and makes them easy to understand. As well as watching out for new episodes the archives are useful. There is a religion section and philosophy section.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09v6xx3	The Moral maze is particularly useful for Ethics and Theology. Each week a panel discusses an ethical issue. The archives are full of useful episodes.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0066p6/episodes/player	Beyond Belief is radio 4's weekly programme that looks at faith in the modern world.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b007zpll?suggid=b007zpll	The Big Questions is on every Sunday morning, an audience discuss moral issues.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/ethics	The ethics section of the Guardian website has some really interesting articles to read, even if they are not all directly related to content we cover in lessons.

Some Useful Questions

In order to fully prepare for some of the topics we will cover during our A-Level, attempt to answer each of the following questions below reflecting your own opinions as closely and as eloquently as possible.

A key skill in A-Level Philosophy is being able to consider both sides of an argument. So, maybe try and answer the questions from the opposing viewpoint to your own.

What is the meaning of life?	Is there such a thing as right and wrong?	Will we ever universally agree on things?	Who has the right to decide when we die?
Am I free to do as I please?	Does it make sense to rely on a nearly 2000-year-old religion?	How do we know if we are being lied to?	Is this world perfect?
What makes the 'perfect' human?	Is this world merely an illusion?	Are we all equal as human beings?	What is the point of following the rules?