**Intro**  
  
Narrated by Bede, the monk, who is intelligent, strict, straight, faithful, and mainly interested in history/religion and the book worm, who is wise, humorous, empathetic, imaginative, open-minded, and mainly into literature. When we first approach the central table of the library the book worm is engrossed in a book and tells us to wait quickly while it finishes the chapter. It sighs loudly, smiles at us, and proceeds to tell us the following:  
*“Literature is probably the human science that has developed the furthest. This is the case because human beings just love inventing stories and listening to stories. The eyes of any young child will lighten up instantly if you agree to tell it a story - even if it’s just about a bird that can’t sing, a girl that is always very untidy, or a mole that wants to find out which animal dared to defecate on its head. Mankind started inventing stories at the very beginning of time. Back in the Stone Age Babu and Habba (names freely invented) were probably already sitting about the campfire and telling each other stories about how they each killed a mammoth in highly impressive ways. The mammoth itself has sentience – it is able to experience pleasure and pain, the pain of being hunted down by Babu and Habba, but it can’t create pictures in its head on its inner screen of something, which is actually not there. This, by the way, is a useful definition of* ***fiction (l)*** *–* ***anything that deals with information or events that are not real, but rather imaginary or theoretical*** *- and it is also what sets us apart from the other creatures on this earth. And we all do it again and again. Writing stories about what would have been if we had acted differently, if we had chosen a different path, or what might be in the future. Anyway, while Babu and Habba – who are fictional characters themselves - might have painted pictures on cave walls, it took a while until the first rudimentary systems of writing developed. First writing systems were developed after hunter-gatherer societies had become more permanent agrarian encampments when it became necessary to count one’s property, whether it be parcels of land, animals or measures of grain. Writing was used to mark what belonged to whom. Even the famous Rosetta Stone that presented historians with one of the greatest riddles of all time and proved to be the key to reading the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptian civilization wasn’t about love or philosophy but about taxes. So, once more, about money and possessions. How disappointing. The good stuff, the stories we love to create in our heads, for example folk tales and riddles were passed on orally - with spoken words - from generation to generation by ingenious storytellers. The Exeter book, a manuscript you will find in the Old English section of the library is one of the rare exceptions to the general rule and contains some beautiful Old English poetry. The book was one of the few to survive the brutal Viking raids and became the source of most Anglo-Saxon lyric poetry we still have access to. Do you want to have a look at it? Do you feel like reading some riddles and the story of legendary hero Beowulf?”*   
In the Old English section, we find a poster with some of the most important historic dates from the dawn of time to the reign oft he Anglo Saxons. We can study it or simply listen to Bede, the monk, who is willing to give us a brief overview.  
  
**Dawn of Time to Anglo Saxons**  
  
*Bede: Babbu and Habba, seriously (rolls his eyes). My cherished colleague – a speaking worm carrying a pair of oversized reading glasses – is obviously a fictional character. He has been charged with teaching you about literature. It is now, however, time for some non-fictional professionalism. So, let me tell you where the Anglo-Saxons, the first to produce English literature, came from. Basically, the history of Britain (book worm: as we like to tell it to ourselves in order to boost our modern-day tribal pride) consists of one invasion by outsiders after the next. Each invasion brought bloodshed and tears, but each also brought a new people and a new culture. These many different people, in the end, created a nation. (book worm: Studying history is the best way to realize that racism is a near-synonym to stupidity as we all share ancestors from numerous different places. Britain’s history is a prime example of this.) 250’000 years ago, cave dwellers (book worm: like Babu and Habba) lived on the island of Britain. Invaders from modern Portugal and Spain overcame their culture about 4000 years ago, 2000 BC, creating a society developed far enough to erect Stonehenge – the famous circle of huge upright stones called megaliths – on Salisbury plain. Then a new group appeared: the Celts. Coming to Britain from further east the Celtic peoples spread throughout Europe before reaching the British Isles around 600 BC. The Celts built farms and villages. They used bronze, and later iron tools, and grew crops. Separate Celtic tribes, each with its own king, warred with each other and built timber and stone fortresses. Their priests, doctors, astronomers and wise men – called druids – worshipped and made sacrifice to nature gods and knew a lot about herbs and natural remedies. They also invented an alphabet where each letter is attributed to a tree. In 55 BC Rome, already dominating the Mediterranean world, first tried to conquer Britain. The Roman general Julius Caesar raided the land to punish the Britons for helping the Celts on the European mainland against the Romans. (Book worm: I can’t help thinking that that just might have been an excuse for more conquest, for further widening Rome’s empire and extending its power. Remember that history is written by the victor.) The narration (book worm: written by the victor, Julius Caesar, himself) of these raids marks the beginning of recorded history of Britain. De Bello Gallico is a detailed account of the battles complete with battle strategies like using the landscape, the higher ground to one’s advantage, ambush tactics etc. (Book worm: It’s a good read. You can also read Asterix and the Britons, which is also a good story, even if it is an even less reliable account of history – and hasn’t even been written at this point in history, so I really shouldn’t mention it. That’s the difference between* ***story*** *and* ***history****, between* ***fiction*** *and something approaching* ***non-fiction (l)****.) Nearly a hundred years after these first raids the Roman emperor Claudius successfully invaded the island. Despite the rebellion led a few years later by Boadicea, queen of one of the British tribes, the Romans eventually conquered most of Britain, driving the defeated tribes into the Highlands of Wales and Scotland. Early in the second century, the emperor Hadrian built a wall 73 miles long to protect the northern border. Roman Britain became a prosperous colony with a population of three to four million people. Over one hundred towns served as administrative centres. Some of these had large buildings - meeting halls, law courts, temples, amphitheatres, and public baths – as well as elaborate sanitation systems. (Book worm: in other words toilets) Next to a writing system, sanitation systems are probably one of the main characteristics of a developed society. Hygiene and health go alongside population growth. And mobility of course! Straight, well-made Roman roads connected the towns. The Romans ruled Britain for nearly four hundred years, but with the decline of Rome itself after the year 300, these peaceful and prosperous days slowly came to an end: Warriors from Ireland, Scotland, and Germany began to raid the coast. In 410 the city of Rome fell to an army of German barbarians, and the emperor Honorius sent a letter to the Roman Britons announcing that they had to see to their own defence. Weak and divided, Britain stood open to foreign aggression. To the east, across a relatively short span of sea, lay the coast of the European mainland, inhabited by a number of Germanic tribes, including the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. By 441 these skilled German seamen and warriors were spreading throughout eastern, central and southern Britain, driving the Celtic inhabitants before them and settling their own people on the conquered land. As had happened during the Roman occupation, the defeated fled west into the highlands of Wales. (Book worm: It is among these people that the legend of King Arthur and the round table arose. There are some great books about Chivalric romance in the medieval section, in case you’re interested in this juicy topic.) Anyhow, the Anglo-Saxon peoples may have managed to coexist with the Britons after the conquest in the north-eastern part of the country, but in the Southeast they chased away the former inhabitants altogether. By the middle of the sixth century most of the southern lowland part of the island was under the control of a people we now call – after the Angles – the English.*Monk bows his head and leaves solemnly. *(Book worm: Again, this version of history relies upon Bede’s writings. It contains an attractive and powerful origin myth, which has become all the more powerful because it has been recounted countless times by now. It serves to show that the English stem from tough Teutonic stock and helps set them apart from the “lesser” Celtic tribes… Contemporary research suggests a different explanation for the cultural shift that took place after the Roman withdrawal from Britain: A trickle of Anglo-Saxons brought the dominant Germanic cultures with them across the ocean. They established themselves as social leaders and intermarried with the British. No clear break to the Romano-British civilization has ever been proven. Again, we witness a mixture of fiction and non-fiction in historical texts… Often this happens because we need a coherent and well-told storyline to remember things. Everything is narration in the end.)*

Has this awakened your interest in visiting one of these ancient Anglo-Saxon warrior tribes and witnessing their customs and their verses first-hand? – Exeter Book.  
  
**Anglo Saxons to Middle Ages**  
  
*As you have witnessed first-hand when visiting Hrothgar’s mead hall, Anglo Saxon society   
was ruled by kings, unquestioned alpha males, who had to constantly and successfully lead war with other tribes to prevent their thanes, their more or less loyal followers, from getting restless. The king also needed constant battles to gain enough plunder and gold for his followers. As such the country was divided into a number of mercilessly warring kingdoms. The most successful kings slowly began to gain more territory, but unity and peace could never have been achieved without the growing influence of the Catholic church. (Book worm: This hi-story is based on Bede’s writings, the writings of a Roman monk and brilliant scholar. Don’t forget that he had his own agenda when writing down his accounts: He wanted to highlight the powerful influence of the Roman church on an unenlightened band of warriors. Keep this in the back of your mind while we continue with his version of hi-story.) Anglo-Saxon Britain remained pagan until 597, when St Augustine sent from Rome to convert England, established the first Bishopric at Canterbury. There is a famous and amusing little anecdote about future pope Gregory walking through the slave market and demanding to know about the origins of some blond children. When told that these were Angles, he cleverly replied “Not Angles, but angels” and decided to send some missionaries to convert the barbaric Anglo-Saxon tribes to the values of Christendom. During the next forty years missionaries were able to convert most of the Anglo-Saxon kings and their people to Christianity, which was crucial for the development of Anglo-Saxon culture. The church brought contact with the distant and ancient Mediterranean world. Most importantly it brought the most important skill for advanced culture to the German tribes – writing. Soon Anglo-Saxon monasteries were copying books from Rome and beginning to produce the* ***illuminated manuscripts*** *for which they are so famous. Decorations of the pagan warrior kings were combined with the Latin alphabet to form beautifully painted capital letters. Feel free to admire the Book of Kells and some other nice examples in glass cases in the Old English and medieval section. Anyway, these illuminated manuscripts are a wonderful symbol for the fusion of pagan and Christian culture and values. The Church also nudged the warrior kings towards unity and peace by trying to teach them new values: compassion and cooperation instead of arrogance and violence. (Bookworm: Most 21st century historians believe the influence of Augustine’s Roman monks to have been exaggerated by the few remaining historical accounts of the day and that they had actually encountered a flourishing Christian community when they crossed the short stretch of sea to the North of the European mainland.) Anyway, Anglo-Saxon culture reached its peak in the eighth century. From this era come most of the Anglo-Saxon poetry that have survived, among them Beowulf and the riddles presented to you by the scop. All the achievements of the 8th century were interrupted yet another wave of invaders – the Vikings. They crossed the North Sea from Denmark and Norway. At first only a few boats came seeking to plunder monasteries and towns along the coast. Then entire armies appeared, with fleets of up to 250 ships, some of them decorated with dragon heads, commanded by Danish kings. Between 867 and 877 the Vikings invaded and took over most of the northeast and central portions of England. The most successful English opponent of the Vikings was Alfred the Great. He ruled the one surviving Anglo-Saxon kingdom, Wessex, in southern England. To prevent the Vikings from seizing England the way they had the rest of the Danelaw he built what was essentially the first English navy, a fleet of longboats, each manned by sixty oarsmen. England was of course later to become the dominant force on the world’s oceans about 700 hundred years later. So, this is where it all started. He somehow managed to force the Vikings to draw back into the confines of the Danelaw. So up to the tenth century England had been invaded by people from modern-day Spain and Portugal, by Celts from the far East, by the Romans, possibly by Angles, Saxons and Jutes from modern-day Germany and Denmark and by Scandinavians. All of these peoples had their share in creating the basis for what we now know as English or the English. There was, however, to be one last successful invasion of England and it was to mark the beginning of the medieval period: the Norman invasion.*

**Medieval Period**Bede is now wearing the armour of a Norman knight. He introduces himself as Sir Bedric the Brave aka Chevalier Bède, Cour de Lion. *The Medieval Period started with the famous Battle of Hastings between the Norman invaders led by William, Duke of Normandy, and the English led by Harold Godwinson. For some time England and the Normandy in northern France had had a close relationship. In 1002 King Aethelred of England married Emma, daughter of the duke of Normandy. Their son, Edward the Confessor was half Norman in blood but wholly Norman in terms of loyalty and style. Before becoming king of England in 1042 he had spent thirty years at the Norman court, learning the French language and customs and making French friends. As king he welcomed Norman courtiers and churchmen; he even introduced the Norman style of dress to his court. (Book worm: The French have always been incredibly fashionable.) When Edward died without an heir in 1066 his throne was claimed by both Harold Godwinson of England and William, Duke of Normandy. Godwinson was the choice of the Witan, the king’s council, but William said that Edward had declared him heir to the British throne. And the clever Normans waited just for the right moment to attack. This moment came when the hastily crowned Harold had to march north in order to fight off a large-scale Viking invasion led by Harold Hardrada of Norway, also known as Harold the Ruthless whom he defeated and killed with a surprise attack. (Bookworm: In a famous scene (knight: that probably stems from folklore) a gigantic muscular Norwegian axe man was blocking the English forces at Stamford Bridge where only one man could pass at a time and killed about forty Englishmen before one of them jumped into a barrel and floated under the bridge from where he pierced the Norwegian with a spear and enabled the rest of the English force to pass.) Anyway, William made the most of the situation and landed on England’s coast with an army of between 4000 and 7000 men: the sons of the Norman nobility and other well-born adventurers from all over Europe. While Harold was forced to march southwards quickly gathering new men after many had died in the victory over the Vikings, the Normans were able to prepare for battle. Again, Harold tried to surprise his opposition with ambush tactics but this time his force was detected by scouts. William was ready for him when he came and his forces not only outnumbered Harold’s but also consisted of bowmen, cavalry and infantry while the English troops were made up mostly of infantry troopers. Still, the Normans weren’t able to break the lines of the Englishmen who were courageously defending their home country, their wives and their children back home – until they pretended to flee and then charged the pursuing English army in the flanks with their cavalry. Harold was killed during the battle. Although he was dead, England was not subdued without a lengthy struggle, during which most of the Anglo-Saxon nobility was wiped out. Claiming that every single bit of England belonged to him, William gave land formerly belonging to 4000-5000 members of the Anglo-Saxon nobility to around 180 of his followers in exchange to an oath of loyalty to him and a promise of military service. Under this system, known as* ***feudalism****, all the landowners in England became vassals (tenants) of the king. Landowners were selected by the king personally. They were chosen from among his most important nobles, barons and bishops. The lowest class was made up of peasants. In exchange for living and working on his land, which consisted of the castle, the church, the village, and the surrounding farmland the landlord offered his peasants protection.*

*In order to set up an efficient taxation system William made a survey of his entire kingdom. Naturally, this annoyed his English subjects greatly. William’s agents recorded all the land in England, together with the name of its owner, its size, its value, the number of workers employed on it and so on in the so-called* ***Domesday Book - i****t can be bought as an additional ornament for your library in the Medieval section. There was no piece of land, no ox, no cow, not even a chicken that wasn’t counted and noted. The power of the written word granted him full control of his underlings. He also wasted no time in building the tower of London, a military stronghold, to defend that city, and Canterbury Cathedral, a religious stronghold built in the Norman style, to cement religious authority. Religion was very important in those days, when many people just lived their life in the hope of acquiring a spot in heaven by toiling away and working hard. So, it doesn’t really come as a surprise that England became involved in the first crusade in 1095. Christian knights and peasants alike undertook the long and dangerous journey to Palestine to fight the Moslem Turks, who held places where Christians could worship God. Yes, Religion definitely played an important role in medieval times.*I would recommend you reading Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury tales next, which is about a pilgrimage to Canterbury and provides a great insight into life in the middle ages as its cast nicely represents the population of those times. You will also learn more about the legendary medieval knights.

**Renaissance***I have now laid down my armour and have dressed in the attire of one of the most famous poets of the early renaissance period. You may call me Francesco Bedarca. The renaissance period signalled the end of knights in shining armour and even castles, as muskets and cannons had been invented which could pierce even the thickest armour or castle wall respectively. (Book worm: Sitting behind castle walls loses much of its appeal when they can be blown to smithereens.) On a more positive note, many more important advances in art, literature, religion, philosophy and science had also been made. This all started in 14th century Italy when many documents from ancient Greece and Roman were found and studied in monasteries and libraries. The Renaissance – the rebirth of classical learning and philosophy – and with it the realization of human potential for development spread across all of Europe. Michelangelo’s great paintings and sculptures, Leonardo da Vinci’s many inventions and Rembrandt van Rijn’s visual art all stem from this period are still greatly admired for their beauty, style and artistic innovation. Among others they have coined the term “Renaissance man” which is still used for people who are good at many different disciplines. Hygiene and health improved thanks to the widespread introduction of toothbrushes and toilets. Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1476, together with improved methods of manufacturing paper, made possible the rapid spread of new knowledge. It is estimated that by 1530 more than half the population of England was literate. Education was slowly being made accessible to the members of the lower classes. Queen Elizabeth established one hundred free grammar schools in all parts of the country. These schools were open to both sexes of all ranks. Eager to educate their children many people took advantage of the free schools; this may well have been one of the reasons for England’s advancement. Education equals power after all. At university level humanism was introduced at Oxford University and Cambridge Universities with the aim of teaching grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy to its students and to turn them into eloquent and virtuous men – and women! – inspiring others to follow their example. In science, Nikolaus Copernicus, in Poland, claimed that the earth was not the centre of the universe, and in Italy, Galileo conducted astronomical investigations with a new invention – the telescope. Their discoveries made people question traditional worldviews and the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The Renaissance spirit brought about the Protestant Reformation, including the founding of the Lutheran church and the Church of England. In England, the Reformation was initiated by Henry VIII. (Bookworm: a handsome playboy whose life is worthy of any soap opera.) He spent the first years of his life learning various languages, writing books in Latin, training martial arts, and engaging in many other pastimes reserved to the nobility in those days – another example of a “Renaissance man”. His guardians had, however, not prepared him for the duties of a king, as his brother – who died of a fatal wound suffered in a jousting tournament – was supposed to inherit the throne. He was married to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of a Spanish king - and his brother’s former wife - to improve the relationship between England and the mighty Spain. But by 1527 Henry wanted his marriage to Catherine - which instead of blessing him with a son, a true Tudor heir, had only given him a daughter, Mary – ended. (Bookworm: Also so that he could marry the young pretty, wild and highly flirtatious Anne Boleyn.) The pope forbade him to get divorced. Henry, however, also had an eye on seizing the riches of the English churches for himself. So, for both political and personal reasons he overthrew the pope’s power in England and had himself declared head of the church of England. England had become a protestant nation. Catholics who refused to swear an oath to Henry as both head of Church and State were executed. The problem of producing a male heir to the throne continued to haunt poor Henry. Anne Boleyn (Bookwrom: next to enchanting the entire court, including Henry), only gave him one child, Elizabeth, before she was executed for adultery, supposedly for having affairs with various people at court. Her successor, Jane Seymour, died in childbirth, leaving a sickly son, Edward, who didn’t survive long enough to become a decent king. Next came a marriage after seeing the photograph of a German princess, Anne of Cleves (Bookworm: of whom Henry said that she looked like a horse when he saw her in reality). This marriage remained childless and the next contestant Catherine Howard was again executed on the grounds of adultery. Finally, Catherine Parr managed to survive her equally tyrannical and intellectual husband and was widowed at his death. In order to remember the six wives of Henry there is a pithy saying “divorced, beheaded and died, divorced, beheaded, survived.” (Bookworm: What a gruesome and entertaining life…) After Henry’s death Queen Mary soon took over from the deceased Edward and proved the be just as ruthless as her father had been. As a devout Catholic, it was now her turn to burn 280 protestants at the stake. This has earned her the nickname Bloody Mary (Book worm: the taste of the modern alcoholic beverage reflects her deeds – horrible!). Her reign only lasted five years. Elizabeth – beautiful Anne Boleyn’s daughter – took over and lead England into its most glorious age. She restored order and adopted a policy of middle-of-the-road Protestantism, neither persecuting Catholics or offending the growing number of Puritan extremists. A master politician, wise in the choice of her counsellors, Elizabeth established a strong central government that received the loyal support of her subjects. During Elizabeth’s reign, England began to gain supremacy on the seas. Riches came from ventures such as those of the pirate-patriot Sir Francis Drake, whom Elizabeth ordered to intercept Spanish trading ships on the high seas. Drake’s voyage around the world resulted in his returning to England with a treasure taken from the Spanish – much of which went to swell Elizabeth’s treasury. On Drake’s return the Queen herself went aboard his ship, the Golden Hind, and knighted him then and there. King Philip II of Spain was, naturally, displeased and, determined to strike back, sent an invasion fleet called the Armada. There had already been bad feelings because of the treatment of Catherine of Aragorn and her daughter between the two sea powers. Elizabeth’s words upon that occasion are noteworthy: “I know I have the body of a weak feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king – and a king of England, too and think foul scorn that Spain or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm.” In turn she dispatched the English navy whose defeat of the Armada in 1588 meant that England would remain Protestant and that it would emerge as dominant sea power. Elizabeth’s reign was an age of courtiers, and many of the men of her court - such as Sir Philip Sidney who wrote the famous sonnet cycle “Astrophil and Stella” – lived up to the Renaissance ideal of soldier, scholar, and poet (points at himself): they were, again, Renaissance men. Educated in both classical and modern languages, Elizabeth was herself a poet. In one of her poems she goes on about her own great beauty, how she had thousands of suitors knocking on her door, which she resolutely kept shut. (Bookworm: The poem ends in regret at having said “no” so often and being old now.) The poem nicely reflects her politics as she made great use of her state as a bachelorette by playing with the hopes of foreign kings who aspired to gain her hand in marriage. It was one of many tricks up her fancy political sleeves. Elizabeth proved to be such a great ruler that they had the entire age named after her: the Elizabethan age!*If you feel like visiting the great bard Shakespeare himself – he also wrote an entire cycle of sonnets - and seeing the globe theatre, grab the First Folio of his tragedies, comedies and histories. Oh, and don’t forget to ask him who was the very first famous renaissance sonneteer! (Book worm: spoiler alert. It was his alter ego Franceso Petrarca.)

**Age of Reason**May I introduce myself? My name is Sir Francis Bedon. I am (book worm: his alter ego, Sir Francis Bacon) a philosopher and statesman of utmost importance for the Age of Reason as I invented scientific method, also called empiricism, that all scientific research should be based upon inductive reasoning and the close observation of natural phenomena. But first things first. *King Charles I (Book worm: Charles the first first) was an elegant, intelligent man also interested in science, mathematics, painting, and drama. His favourite kind of drama says a lot about his outlook on the world, though. In the drama performances he staged and watched while seated on his throne in a magnificent banqueting hall, the stage would usually be plagued by chaos and the forces of darkness until some king-and-god-like figure was lowered onto the stage to bring light and peace and a happy ending. The royal government has returned to restore order and drive out rebellion and disobedience. (Book worm: At this point the audience had to shout: God bless your majesty! In literature this is known as deus ex machina.) In reality, rebellion and disobedience were indeed stirring in his kingdom. In an era of scientific progress and discoveries, religious and secular authorities were being questioned. Even more so as King Charles had ruled for eleven years without the help of parliament, which he was supposed to consult on delicate matters of state on a regular basis. Seeing that Charles also had the habit of spending extravagant amounts of money, he was forced to recall parliament to get them to approve of new taxes. Parliament, however, wanted to address other matters: They were angry at the way the king was raising fines for non-existent crimes, by, for example, demanding money for not appearing in time to be awarded Knighthood… The Puritan majority in parliament also didn’t like the idea of Charles being married to Henrietta Maria, a beautiful* ***Catholic*** *French princess. The king was outraged by the disobedience of his unerlings and decided to storm parliament with 400 men to arrest the troublemakers. In a famous scene, the speaker of the House of Commons refuses to tell the king where they had fled to. This is the beginning of the English Civil War between the Royalist Cavaliers and the parliament’s Roundheads. The Civil War lasted for four terrible years, from 1642 to 1646. Finally, the Royalist armies were defeated by the armies of Parliament led by one Oliver Cromwell, a viciously ruthless master tactician. In 1646 King Charles decided to surrender. The army, not the Parliament was now the real power in the land. And people like Cromwell didn’t believe that the King could be trusted in any promise that he would make. The only solution, to them, was to charge the king with waging war on his own people and bring him to trial. The trial took place in the great medieval hall at Westminster where, ironically, Guy Fawkes and others had been tried for attempting to murder the previous king, James, in the Gunpowder plot less than fifty years earlier. And the king was sentenced to death for being a tyrant, murderer, public enemy and traitor by chopping his head off. The king didn’t even defend himself and refused to answer the charges as he didn’t accept the court as lawful as it was clearly against the will of God. He died with great style, without showing any sign of fear and impressive last words: “I go from an imperfect world to a perfect one”. Some people fainted, some rushed forward to dip their handkerchiefs in royal blood, while the executioner held up the king’s head triumphantly shouting: “Behold the head of a traitor!” So, the monarchy was abolished, and Cromwell, who was a staunch Puritan, assumed control of the new English Commonwealth. As a Puritan he thought that the theatres, (Book worm: yes, the magnificent drama of the Renaissance period, can you believe it?!) had a bad influence on the morals of the public. The theatres were closed, and drama was banned. He also was fanatically anti-Catholic. In Ireland he massacred ten thousands of Catholics and deported the survivors to the Caribbean Colonies. He treated the uprising in Scotland with similar violence until the Scots eventually decided to proclaim Charles II as their new king. Cromwell immediately marched north and took Edinburgh with his usual brutal force. Ruthless and megalomaniac as ever, Cromwell proceeded to dissolve parliament a grand total of three tomes and even introduced a new constitution which transformed England, Scotland and Ireland into a protectorate with Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. He was, in his own not so humble opinion, the only person fit to rule the kingdom… Ironically, he now had the same power as the king before him to call and dissolve parliament at will. He had become the new tyrant of the kingdom. He was even offered the crown by Parliament, after some military and economic successes, which he refused. (Book worm: Probably would have been a little bit too obvious…) He finally died in 1658 of Malaria and kidney infection. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Richard, who was forced to flee to France in the next year with the restoration of the monarchy and the crowning of Charles II, the son of Charles I. The kingdom had learnt a lesson from Cromwell senior’s tyrannical reign and restored the power to the crown. The King, however, could no longer rule as an autocrat. Charles II became king of a more democratic realm with his power cut back and a strong parliament. On behalf of King Charles II, Oliver Cromwell was posthumously convicted of treason, and his body was dug up and hanged from the gallows at Tyburn. Later on, his severed head was displayed at Westminster. (Book worm: yuck, a lot of resentment against that man seems to have existed.) When in 1660 the Puritan regime was toppled and King Charles II returned triumphantly to the throne, it was to an England generally delighted to have its monarchy restored. The Restoration brought many changes to England. Once again, the Anglican Church became the established church, and Puritans had to leave both government and church positions. (Book worm takes over: Most importantly though, Charles permitted the theatres, closed by the Puritans, to reopen soon after his return, and he himself sponsored an acting company, called the King’s Players. With the reopening of the theatres, drama underwent several changes. The boy actors who had played female roles in Elizabethan drama were replaced by actresses, although some members of the clergy and upper classes still considered acting an unsuitable career for a woman. Accompanying this change was the development of the comedy of manners, or Restoration comedy, a type of drama with multiple plots involving intrigue and infidelity. In that sense can be seen as the first modern-day sitcom (Grab William Wycherly’s The Country Wife in the shelf to your right for some bawdy Age of Reason entertainment). It is also an entertainment form which satirizes the manners and affectations of the upper class. Speaking of which: For me, satire is the defining literary genre of the age. If you would like to look into one of the most famous pieces of satiric writing, grab Jonathan Swift’s wonderful Gulliver’s Travels from the shelf over there. It also contains commentary on the important scientific and philosophical developments of the age.)***Romantic Age**

Welcome, my name is Lord Bydon. As you can see, I am strikingly handsome, I am a pleasure seeker whose aim in life is to exhaust all possibilities of excitement. Let us, however, talk about some slightly less exciting topics first.

*As its name suggests – you remember that a Romance is an adventure of a heroic individual, usually a knight, including a love story somewhere along the lines – the Romantic Age brought a more daring, individual, and imaginative approach to both literature and life. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many of the most important English writers turned away from the values and ideas characteristic of the Age of Reason. In the Age of Reason writers were concerned with creating a more moral society – often by writing witty satirical essays and pamphlets. The* ***individual****, rather than society, was at the centre of the Romantic vision. The impact of the* ***French Revolution*** *in 1789 upon the writers of the age was immense. For a time, almost every important British writer believed in the slogan* ***“Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.”*** *William Wordsworth was planning to move to France and join the revolutionaries but he was barred from leaving the country. Whereas the writers of the Age of Reason – probably influenced by Puritanism and Calvinism – tended to regard evil as a basic part of human nature, the Romantic writers generally saw humanity as naturally good, but corrupted by society and its institutions of religion, government, and education. They tended to be optimists who believed in the possibility of progress and social and human reform. Thus, the French Revolution gave life and breath to the dreams of some Romantic writers for a society in which there would be liberty and equality for all. It also contributed later to a sense of disillusionment following the Reign of Terror in France, during which the oppressed classes became as violent and corrupt as their former rulers, thereby paving the way for Napoleon’s rise to power.(Book worm: It seems to me that people need to have an egocentric streak and a certain cold-bloodedness to rise to power and they are then, generally, further corrupted by it, as they turn into power-junkies, needing more and more of it. They only way I, personally, can see out of this vicious circle of power is education. If you can come up with any alternative solutions, be my guest. I have a lot of faith in your generation.)*

*On a more positive note, the slow but steady application of the principles of democracy was one of the most significant aspects of nineteenth-century English life. After various Cromwells and Charles England emerged from the 18th century a parliamentary state in which the monarchy largely had a mere representative function. The English parliament was far from a truly representative body, however, until, after years of popular unrest, Parliament finally passed* ***the First Reform Bill of 1832****, which allowed more men of lower classes to vote. (Book worm: I’m afraid women were still left by the political sidelines.) The* ***Industrial Revolution*** *took place in England from 1750-1850. During this period England changed from an agricultural society to an industrial society and from home manufacturing to* ***factory production****. So, whereas a carpenter might have had his workbench in the garage of his little family home before, he was now moved into a factory to enable mass production and create synergies by working with other carpenters. As the Industrial Revolution gathered force, towns became cities; more and more villagers, forced by poverty to seek work in the growing factories, huddled together in filthy slums. Workers – men, women, and children – laboured from sunrise to sunset for low wages. A child able to pull a cart in the suffocating coal mines or to sweep a floor in the textile factories was considered old enough to work by many employers and some parents. Children were especially great as chimney sweeps as they were small enough to climb into the dirtiest and most clogged-up chimneys… For the children of the poor, religious training, medical care, and education were practically non-existent. As champions of democratic ideals, the Romantics sharply attacked all forms of tyranny and the spreading evils of industrialism, such as a polluted environment, and the alienation of people from nature and one another. Writers of the Age of Reason exposed the follies of society with satire, a sophisticated form of attack; the youthful Romantics* ***spoke out in a voice of anger and outrage****. This is the perfect moment to introduce some Romantic writers to you:* ***Percy Bysshe Shelley*** *and* ***Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.*** *Grab the 2nd edition of the lyrical ballads to find out more about many of the main individuals of the Romantic Age.***Victorian Age***Hello, my name is Mr Beddet. I am a Victorian gentleman. My daughter Mary reads ALL the time. (Book worm: Again, not his daughter, but his alter ego Mr Bennet’s daughter.) This is no coincidence, as the Victorian Age was the period where literature reached its peak of popularity. Famous writers like Charles Dickens and Lord Alfred Tennyson were able to make a fortune with their pens. Most middle-class people were avid readers who borrowed books from newly opened libraries or read them bit by bit printed in periodicals. An abundance of masterclass novels was written: Wuthering Heights, Great Expectations, Jane Eyre, and last but not least: Pride and Prejudice in which I myself make a humble appearance. Literature was highly contemporary: the great authors of the time exchanged ideas and gave each other feedback. You could meet Dickens in the centre of London and then go back home to read one of his books. Pride and Prejudice is contemporary in an additional way: It is one of the first books about the life of the Victorian middleclass. Where the Romantics like to write poetry or wild, fantastic books about vampires, Gothic castles, speaking horses, cannibals etc., the typical literary genre of the Victorian Age was the realistic novel. In the Age of Reason injustice had been addressed by sophisticated indirect satire; the Romantics cried out passionately and directly against the vices of their time; the Victorians try to hold up a mirror to their compatriots by realistically depicting the life of the Victorian Age. In the great debate whether to listen to your feelings or your head, the Age of Reason would have chosen the head, while the Romantics would have listened to their feelings. The Victorians weren’t entirely decided on the matter. If you would like to learn more about the plight of female writers in the Victorian Age, about the life of a Victorian middle class family, and the struggle between reason and feelings, do not hesitate to open up Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen in the shelf behind me.   
The Victorian era also marks the climax of England’s rise to economic and military power. In the Nineteenth-century England became the first, modern, industrialized nation. It ruled the most widespread empire in world history, embracing all of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, and many smaller countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. England’s economic power further extended the nation’s dominance – many independent countries were virtually colonies, mainly trading with the English and using the English pound as international currency. This economic power was, however, built on the backs of the poor. The industrial revolution was still in full swing, thanks to the efforts of a working class consisting of men, women and children, who, formerly used to the working habits of farms and small towns found themselves working sixteen hours a day, six days a week, in factories without any governmental safety regulations. The work was monotonous. It turned people into hands (Book worm: a telling synecdoche – a pars pro toto name), as the factory owners called their anonymous workers – probably to feel less guilty. These hands had no control over their lives and were hired and fired by the owner according to the market’s demands. Some parents sent their kids to work because they did not have enough money to support the family. Kids were being paid lousy wages. If there was no work available at the factory kids would just go back to the farm, or others would end up on the streets and become prostitutes. Most prostitutes were between the ages of 15 and 22 years during the Industrial Revolution. If you feel like witnessing the life of a poor orphan and learning more about class hierarchies and crime in the Victorian Age, you will find Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens in the shelf behind me.   
After huge pressure the public government finally made an effort at change. In 1884 a series of voting reforms made it possible for every man to vote, regardless of his rank or class, thus effectively creating popular democracy in England. (Book worm: Of course, women still had to wait a couple of years…) The most important development, however, was the Education Act of 1891, which brought about free schools for everyone up to the age of twelve. So, while there had been crucial developments regarding social justice at home, horrible crimes were being committed to expand and defend the mighty British Empire. With the appearance of new commercial rivals in the form of a united Germany and the United States who had slowly recovered from their own Civil War the notion of a worldwide confederation of nations under British control, and hence ready markets for British goods, became popular. Sometimes through so-called gunboat diplomacy (Book worm: the policy of threatening weaker nations with military power or demonstrating it or just beating them into submission with it), sometimes through negotiation, England further expanded its empire, gaining control over territories that are now Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Sudan. Some of those promoting expansion perceived in the British Empire a strain of high idealism. Lord Salisbury, a prime minister in the 1880s and 1890s, argued that colonialism could be, for those savage people “a great civilizing, Christianizing force.” In Britain, people, led astray by idealistic rousing speeches by politicians, generally believed that they were helping other nations make advances in medicine, religion, technology and education and thus saving people from starvation, illness, hell and ignorance by allowing them to join the empire. (Book worm: Joseph Conrad, speaking through his narrator Marlow, would not have agreed with them as a passage from his novella Heart of Darkness suggests: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it, is the idea only. An idea at the back of it […] something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to… “ An ideal, a theory to create a better world, will always create bloodshed and suffering of thousands instead if blindly followed by a person in a position of power. You can probably all think of some examples for this basic truth – Hitler, Stalin, the Jihad, the Crusades…*

*If you’re interested in joining Marlow on a journey into the heart of the Congo, of darkness, and of colonialism, feel free to peruse the novella Heart of Darkness behind me.***Modernism/Postmodernism**Told by the Beedle (rock star with sunglasses). For a 21st century mind like yours it is probably hard to wrap itself around the atrocities of World War I. From 1914 to 1918 the Central Powers around Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey fought the Allied Powers Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States. These battles had very little in common with traditional romanticized ideas of heroic battles. They were ugly and futile bloodbaths fought from muddy trenches and underground tunnels. Generals calculated before each attack how many men would be sacrificed on the altar of their nationalism. Nothing in the history of Europe, not even the Black Death itself, had produced anywhere near as many corpses… The feeling that a new start had to be made, in politics and society as much as in art, was fuelled by the war and its immediate aftermath. The rulers of post-war Europe and America met at Versailles in order to untie the historical, geographical, religious, and racial knots in Europe. As with the famous Gordian knot – which was humourlessly cut apart by Alexander the Great – it was easier to sever these knots than to carefully unravel them. It is no wonder that a sense of fragmentation, which was as much geographical and historical as it was cultural and psychological, haunted the experimental texts of the early modernist period. For many – excluding the author himself – T.S. Eliot’s poems *The Wasteland* and *The Hollow Men* perfectly articulated post-war disillusion and fragmentation. Many students delightedly quoted lines like “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”, “This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper”, or “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”. Well, for modern-day readers the poem does seem to mainly consist of fragments brilliantly forged together to evoke a desert which is both physical and figuratively about a selection of historical and present-day cities (Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and, above all, London). The author becomes a poetic archaeologist exploring urban corruption and broken civilizations. However, this wasteland also functions as a landscape in which spiritual healing, fertility, and meaning are pursued. If you would like to read the mind-boggling but powerful verses of The Wasteland, you will find it in the shelf to my left. The fragments that make up The Wasteland are taken from various different languages: Italian, Greek, English, and French, among others, reflecting a world that had become increasingly more international with the introduction of new means of transport and communication: Television became widespread after World War II; World travel, forced, at first, by the transportation of troops to different countries during the two world wars, continued to increase as people exposed themselves to different cultures. Styles in clothing, automobiles, architecture, literature, and so on, were no longer confined within national boundaries.   
The revolution in poetry had its counterpart in fiction. The novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had written realistic novels within a defined social context to an audience that shared similar values and beliefs. Modernist writers tried to capture the plethora of stimuli threatening to overwhelm the senses and the mind of an individual in a modern metropolis. They took it as their task to illuminate individual experience. Influenced by the work of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, novelists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf attempted to capture and reproduce the authentic character of human subjectivity, by implementation of the so-called stream of consciousness technique. For a sneak-peak at Virginia Woolf’s Miss Dalloway grab the illuminated book in the shelf to your right.   
After World War I humiliated Germany via some other political experiments slowly shifted gears towards National Socialism, while formerly conservative Russia turned a bright shade of red after the October Revolution of 1917. Many authors of the time saw Communist Russia as the only political antidote to anti-democratic systems arising in Italy, Germany and Fascist Spain. Several of them – including George Orwell - took up arms against fascist General Franco and fought alongside the Spanish leftist government. After being wounded he returned to England, disillusioned by the brutality of communist purges in Spain. Orwell remained a socialist but also often chastised the left. Animal Farm (1945) was inspired by his lifelong hatred of totalitarianism. It is a satire on Stalinist Russia in the form of a fable. For Orwell, Stalin had betrayed a human ideal. Working-class strength and good nature prove to be meaningless in the face of human greed and thirst for power. If you want to find out more about attempted Communism on a farm, feel free to grab the highlighted book to your left.  
World War II, with the fear of a German invasion and the aerial bombardment of heavily industrialized areas, united England, weakened class barriers, and resulted in a landslide victory for the Labour Party in the post-war election. The new government consolidated the welfare state introduced in the years after World War I and even expanded the social services. The National Health Service Act was passed, providing for the nationalization of hospitals and free medical care for the whole population. Academic education at grammar schools was also made accessible for all children irrespective of their social background. England’s other great post-war achievement was the peaceful liquidation of its once mighty empire. It melted into the Commonwealth, a loosely associated fellowship of independent former colonies like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The imperial loss forced Britain to seek closer ties with Europe: It made a belated entry to the European community. The 1960s and 70s are often called decades of “New Morality”. Some of the more rigid shackles of official censorship and public prudery were definitely broken and the female contraceptive known simply as “the pill” had a liberating effect on the sexual behaviour of the population. The constant threat of nuclear bombs during the Cold War and the misguided and ill-fated American campaign in Vietnam led to a resurgence of idealist pacifism and many rallies against atomic weapons. A new generation, impatient with the sins of their forefathers and, to a lesser extent, foremothers, optimistically believed they might forge a new and much improved social order in which human beings are treated as equals regardless of background or gender. However, capitalism not only lead to material prosperity – television, stereos, holidays abroad suddenly became virtual necessities – but also to consumerism and laziness. This text is being written in the year 2020 by an average teacher at a grammar school in the hope of awakening interest in the world of literature in his pupils. Wait! What did I just say? (Book worm: That’s the person who is creating this virtual literature app. Our “god” if you like, although he doesn’t seem to be very godlike at all.) I am now going to inform you about the present, well aware that it makes us arrogant about its value and blind to its and our real position in history. Consumerism and laziness have, in my humble opinion, further increased. A “free” (as in free of charge) search engine, followed by various forms of “free” social media, has innocuously, step by step brought a massive data kraken into the world which somehow – opposed to all the basic right of human beings – is allowed by governments worldwide to collect all imaginable kind of data about its users. This data is sold to the companies willing to pay most and used for personalised marketing with the aim of turning us into even better and lazier consumers. Weak-minded human beings like myself are eagerly giving away their personal freedom and privacy in exchange for access to useful apps and gadgets. To loosely quote T.S. Eliot one more time: “I will show you fear in a cloudful of data”. The values of the enlightenment period are at stake. Human beings are currently being mistaken for mathematical equations of added-up data. George Orwell would have been disgusted at and terrified by this development. His second world-famous novel second is a dystopia, a grimly realistic account of a future society in which all freedom has been extinguished and surveillance cameras are everywhere. For a look at this masterpiece grab the book glowing in eager anticipation of a reader to your left.   
The future, dear reader and student, is yours to mould: Will an algorithm tell us exactly what we want to do every day? Will it not even matter because we have managed to make our planet inhospitable? Will we limit the power of the multinational corporations and return it to democratically elected politicians? Will robots and machines do most of our work for us and enable us to pursue the arts, research ways to combat climate change, and improve the quality of life for our fellow human beings – as Oscar Wilde envisioned in 1891 in his text on the soul of man? Whatever happens, I have great faith in your generation.