



SOCIOLOGY

SUMMER READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACHING STAFF 2026

Introductions to sociology, social science, social theory		
Title	Author(s)	Comments
Foundations of Sociology: Towards a Better Understanding of the Human World	Richard Jenkins	A very accessible introduction to the field and why it matters. What is society, how is it different from 'culture', and what is the relationship between the 'human' and the 'natural world'?
Sociology: A Very Short Introduction	Steve Bruce	Emphasises the search for evidence, and the basic relationship between individuals and society.
The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology	Dorothy E. Smith	Smith's book is concerned with delineating an alternative sociology, a feminist sociology concerned with the conceptual practices of power as part of institutionalised relations of ruling in social life, and continues to have contemporary relevance.
Power in the 21 st Century: Conversations with John A. Hall	Michael Mann	Hall interviews leading historical sociologist Michael Mann, engaging him on contemporary issues such as militarism, the power of states, the search for agency, and climate change.
Social Theory	William Outhwaite	A compact introduction to the big themes of social theory.
The Sociological Imagination	C. Wright Mills	A classic book in which Mills defends the humanistic project of locating individual human experience within an account of history, society and change.
Being Sociological	Matthewman, S; Curtis, B and D. Mayeda	A textbook that takes a more global approach and is well written and edited.



Non-fiction and accessible academic work		
Title	Author(s)	Comments
Women on the Line	Miriam Glucksmann	A vivid ethnographic account of a culturally diverse group of women assembly line workers, examining the interactions of gender, work and ethnicity.
Respect: the Formation of Character in an Age of Inequality	Richard Sennett	A critical and humane examination of how social inequality limits our capacity for mutual recognition, contributing to prejudices against the poor and the value of the welfare state.
Radicals: Outsiders Changing the World	Jamie Bartlett	An engaging and accessible overview of groups and ideas that are seeking to change the world. The book emphasises the importance of radicalism in questioning taken-for-granted norms and ways of doing things.
Undercover: The True Story of Britain's Secret Police	Paul Lewis and Rob Evans	A gripping expose of secret police operations against environmental activists in the UK. It charts the emotional turmoil, psychological challenges and human cost of such methods and asks whether such tactics can ever be justified.
Second-Hand Time	Svetlana Alexievich	This is oral history but without any academic theorising or citation. Brilliant insight into life in a social system that was completely different to anything most students will have experienced (the Soviet Union), and what happens when such a system abruptly falls apart. Told (via the author) by those who live/lived the experience.
The Hidden Injuries of Class	Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb	A classic study of how class-based social roles and expectations get internalised through the process of education.
So You Think You Know About Britain?	Danny Dorling	Dorling debunks many assumptions about British society with unexpected facts and surprising correlations. Housing, population, immigration, work, retirement, transportation and more are used to reveal hidden aspects of our social relations.
The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America	John Demos	The story of a white girl kidnapped by the Iroquois in colonial New York, who grows up and chooses to remain with her Iroquois family, despite her original family's attempts to 'redeem' her. A fascinating real-life study of identity, ethnicity, gender & religion.



Dead white men and other important people.	Bancroft, A. and Fevre, R.	This is a textbook with a twist. Written as a novel, from the perspective of Mila, a student new to sociology, it is a brilliantly engaging introduction to the discipline and to the fundamental questions that have exercised the minds of the most important sociological thinkers.
Novels/Fiction		
Title	Author(s)	Comments
Fahrenheit 451	Ray Bradbury	In this dystopian novel 'fireman' Guy Montag works with a crew whose job it is to discover and burn books, which have been outlawed by the state. He starts to have doubts. Themes of censorship and conformity run through the book.
The 'Neapolitan Novels', starting with: My Brilliant Friend	Elena Ferrante	Autobiographical or semi-autobiographical fiction which as well as providing a compelling account of a lifelong female friendship also illustrates sociological themes such as class and gender. Although the context is post-War Italy, a lot of the material has wider sociological value.
The Man Without Qualities	Robert Musil	Set in the last days of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1913 Vienna, this long book explores values of truth and opinion as its protagonist Ulrich, the 'man without qualities' searches for meaning in the cast of characters around him, representing diverse views of life and society.
Istanbul	Orhan Pamuk	Evocative and panoramic, Pamuk's memoir examines the collective experience of imperial decline in this great city.
Middlemarch	George Eliot	Sociology is supremely about the processes of social change - and so is this novel. Its concerns are social change and the development of capitalism, urbanisation, secularisation, class and an increasingly sharp gender divide, located in a rapidly growing British Midlands town in the mid 19th century. The novel is engrossing, while the BBC series on DVD is equally brilliant and easier to digest.
Red Mars	Kim Stanley Robinson	Sometimes described as an unsurpassable work of science fiction, Red Mars is also a contribution to economic, political and social theory. It tells the story of the human colonisation of Mars and the struggles that emerge between 'greens' (those that want to terraform the planet as quickly as possible) and 'reds' (conservationists who want to preserve Mars as it is).



The Magic Mountain	Thomas Mann	One of the great darkly comic novels of the 20th century, a complex study of illness, of mind, body and spirit. In a Swiss sanatorium that is a microcosm of pre-WWI European society, protagonist and patient Hans Castorp searches for higher meaning through suffering.
Neuromancer	William Gibson	From the Matrix trilogy of films to terms such as “cyberspace”, this science fiction novel set the terms for how we have imagined high-tech futures. It conjures an integrated world of information that established the genre of cyberpunk and painted a vision of a world of technological immersion that resonates strongly with the digitally-saturated present.
1984	George Orwell	The classic dystopian novel of a totalitarian future (when it was written!) that gave us terms such as ‘Big Brother’, ‘newspeak’ and ‘thought police’.
Changing Places, Small World, Nice Work (A Trilogy of novels)	David Lodge	A satire of academic life in the US and the UK, as institutional mores and human foibles mix in comic combinations.
The Handmaid’s Tale	Margaret Atwood	Try watching the TV series of The Handmaid’s Tale if you don’t have time (yet) for the novel. Superb TV with a lot of sociologically relevant content, perhaps most obviously re gender, religion and power.
Disgrace	J M Coetzee	This novel concerns a white male academic guilty of sexual misconduct in terms of his (fictitious) university's code of practice and required to leave academia. Living on a farm, eventually violence erupts from local black men. Including the rape of his daughter. Should those who did it be seen as fully responsible, does white guilt for apartheid's evils require acceptance, or is there another way to redemption? Dealing with difficult issues that people of all colours, including academics and students, live out in South Africa, Disgrace puts the liberal values of the academy on the line.
Hard Times	Charles Dickens	His classic story of class relations in a northern English mill town, woven through a story of loves and families.
Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street (The Cairo Trilogy)	Naguib Mahfouz	Traces three generations of the same family, and their diverging values, across turbulent social changes in Egypt in the 20th century.