

## BOOK CLUB

FASHION DESIGNER AND ENVIRONMENTALIST **VIVIENNE WESTWOOD**, 75, SHARES THE BOOKS THAT HAVE SHAPED HER LIFE

Words **Bibby Sowray**



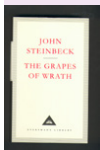
Fashion designer Vivienne Westwood

### The Grapes Of Wrath

by John Steinbeck

This book is about love and helping each other. It's beautiful and monumental, and it follows the people who were ruined by the Dust Bowl – a period of severe drought and dust storms in the US during the Thirties. Steinbeck travelled and lived with the migrants and wrote their stories down within six months. It tells you so much about the US at that time, the suffering of the people and how they were exploited.

I love the characters in this book. The protagonist Tom Joad is a real hero for me: he's willing to sacrifice everything for the people because he sees how they're being treated and he believes in democracy. The lesson I take from it is the potential to grow with your experience, to be open to it and up for it, and to stick your neck out.



### The Devils Of Loudun

by Aldous Huxley

To me, Huxley is the greatest English writer of the 20th century. He made me change intellectually. I would never have become the person I am or have the mind that I have had I not read his work.

This is a riveting account of politics in 17th-century France: anybody who wants to know what Europe's about should read it. You

have to be a fit reader but don't let that put you off. Often when I'm reading I don't quite absorb the message, but I carry on and try to work it out.



**'THE LESSON I'VE TAKEN FROM THE GRAPES OF WRATH IS TO GROW WITH YOUR EXPERIENCE, BE OPEN TO IT AND UP FOR IT, AND TO STICK YOUR NECK OUT'**

### The Master And Margarita

by Mikhail Bulgakov

This is the last full book I read. It has a Faustian theme to it, which I enjoyed because I want to rework Faust to explain climate change – how Mephistopheles, the fabled Faustian demon, would be in the media – so at the moment my reading is focused on that.

It's about a time in Russia when people disappeared without a reason and nobody asked where they went. It's also about magic and the devil; it's stunning but hilarious as well.



### Stoner by John Williams

My husband Andreas is a great reader. He recommends things to me that I probably wouldn't choose and he bought me *Stoner*. It was written in the Sixties but unexpectedly became a bestseller in 2013.

Some people think it's sad that the protagonist, a farm boy who goes on to have an undistinguished career as a teacher, doesn't recognise his full potential, but he does because he was absolutely true to himself throughout his life.

It is the most amazing account of a human being and I've never seen such a testimony to the genius of the human race. It's easy reading but still incredibly important and profound.



### The Story Of The Stone

by Cao Xueqin



This was my most important reading

experience. It's as if I have lived two lives – my own and those of the characters. I read it until I fell asleep whenever I had the time.

It's one of China's four great classic novels and was written in the 18th century. It charts the decline of an illustrious Chinese Buddhist family. At the centre is Jia Baoyu, who is born with a magical jade in his mouth, but it also contains probably the most romantic heroine of all time, his love interest Lin Daiyu. The things they say to each other and the things that they do!

*Get A Life: The Diaries Of Vivienne Westwood is out now (Serpent's Tail, £16.99)*

### THE FIRST WORD AUTHOR TO WATCH

As Features Editor at *Slate Magazine*, debut novelist **Jessica Winter** is no stranger to glorious observational writing. Her first book *Break In Case Of Emergency* (out now) is one of the smartest stories about friendship you're likely to read this year. Jen, the protagonist, is on the brink of an early mid-life crisis and abandons a painting career to take a job at a feminist non-profit where she's surrounded by passive-aggressive colleagues and an egomaniac boss. Winter takes in feminism and fertility issues while skewering celebrity philanthropy and celebrating friendship; it's brilliantly funny and hugely moving.

