

Objective To improve your reading and listening skills.

Think about it Have you read any good books lately? What were they? What were some of the best books you read last year?

Exams This reading and listening activity will help prepare you for English exams such as CAE, IELTS and TOEFL.

WHY ARE THESE TWO BOOKS SO POPULAR?

Fifty Shades of Grey and A Game of Thrones are two best-selling books. But why are they so successful?

Fifty Shades of Grey

Fifty Shades of Grey was written by English author E.L. James, and was **self-published** in 2011. It's about the relationship between a young businessman (Christian Grey) and a **college graduate** (Anastasia Steele). It's become the bestselling book in British history, beating the *Harry Potter* and *The Da Vinci Code* books in terms of sales.

So, why's it so popular? The one-word answer is simple... sex! "These stories focus on female desire and **what's in it for** the woman, and there's not a lot of that in **mainstream** culture," said Jaclyn Friedman, author of *What You Really Really Want**

Many believe the **book cover** has also helped. Instead of using a **raunchy** picture, the publishers have an image of a grey **tie**. "We felt that **discreet**, tasteful covers would bring in new readers who may not have

bought the books with more **explicit** covers," Vintage Books spokesman Russell Perreault said. Others have pointed to the fact that as the book is available on Kindle, people can read it in public without everyone else knowing what they're reading.

Book extract

[Ana] "You're a **sadist**?"

[Christian] "I'm a **Dominant**."

*His eyes are a **scorching** gray, intense.*

*"What does that mean?" I **whisper**.*

*"It means I want you to **willingly surrender yourself to me**, in all things."*

*I **frown** at him as I try to **assimilate** this idea.*

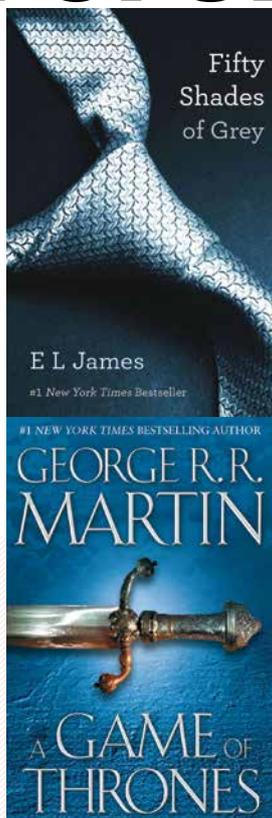
"Why would I do that?"

*"To please me," he whispers as he cocks his head to one side, and I see a **ghost of a smile**. Please him! He wants me to please him! I think my mouth drops open. Please Christian Grey. And I realize, in that moment, that yes, that's exactly what I want to do. I want him to be **damned delighted** with me. It's a **revelation**."*

— E.L. James, *Fifty Shades of Grey*

A Game of Thrones

A Game of Thrones (1996) is a fantasy novel by American author George R. R. Martin. It's one of several books of the series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and it's about the **struggle** for power in an imaginary land. So, why has it done so well?



Firstly, although it's a fantasy novel, the book focuses on human topics such as greed, power and corruption. There are magical, fantasy elements, but the book is mostly character-driven, with realistic, **gritty** personalities. Secondly, the stories are difficult to predict as there are lots of **twists** and turns. And thirdly, it's benefited hugely from the popularity of the TV series: *Game of Thrones*, which

is based on the books. With quality actors, incredible **sets**, stunning costumes and a captivating **script**, the TV series has really helped promote the books.

Book extract

*Nine days they had been riding, north and northwest and then north again, farther and farther from the **Wall**, hard on the track of a band of **wildling raiders**. Each day had been worse than the day that had come before it. Today was the worst of all. A cold wind was blowing out of the north, and it made the trees **rustle** like living things. All day, Will had felt as though something were watching him, something cold and **implacable** that loved him not. Gared had felt it too. Will wanted nothing so much as to **ride hellbent for the safety of the Wall**, but that was not a feeling to share with your commander. Especially not a commander like this one. **

*What You Really Really Want: The Smart Girl's Shame-Free Guide to Sex & Safety.

GLOSSARY

- self-published** *adj* if a book is "self-published", the author has printed the book, not a publishing company
- college graduate** *n* someone who has been to university or college (the US word for university)
- what's in it for (me)** *exp* what can I get from it? what can I gain from it?
- mainstream** *adj* ideas or activities that are "mainstream" are very popular and typical
- book cover** *n* the front page of a book, often with a picture and the title of the book
- raunchy** *adj* a "raunchy" book has sex in it
- tie** *n* a long piece of cloth you wear around the neck with formal shirts
- discreet** *adj* something "discreet" is done quietly and carefully
- explicit** *adj* if something is "explicit", it's shown clearly and openly (it isn't hidden)
- sadist** *n* someone who enjoys causing pain and hurting other people
- scorching** *adj* burning; very intense; hot
- to whisper** *vb* to speak in a quiet voice so others can't hear you
- willingly** *adv* if you do something "willingly", you agree to do it because you want to do it
- to surrender yourself to someone** *exp* if you "surrender yourself to someone", you do what that person wants
- to frown** *vb* when you "frown", lines appear on your forehead because you're angry, etc.
- to assimilate** *vb* to learn new ideas or to adapt to them
- the ghost of something...** *exp* a faint impression of something — it's so weak that it's hard to see
- damned** *adj inform* this word is used for emphasis
- delighted** *adj* if you're "delighted" with something, you're very pleased about it
- revelation** *n* a surprising and interesting fact that you didn't know before
- struggle** *n* a long and difficult attempt to achieve something; a fight
- gritty** *adj* "gritty" characters are realistic because they're shown in a real way
- twist** *n* an unexpected event in a book that surprises the reader, etc.
- set** *n* the "set" for a film or TV series refers to the furniture / scenery used to create a scene in a film / TV series, etc.
- script** *n* a written version of a film or television programme
- the Wall** *n* in the book, the Wall is a barrier between civilisation and the wilderness
- wildling raider** *n* in the book, a "wildling raider" is a savage man or woman who lives in the area behind the Wall
- to rustle** *vb* when something "rustles", it makes a soft crackling sound as it moves
- implacable** *adj* if someone is "implacable", they have very strong feelings and ideas and won't think or act differently.
- to ride hellbent for** *exp* if people "ride hellbent for" an area, they travel there by horse very quickly

Answers on page 44

1 Pre-reading

What makes a book a bestseller? Think of as many ideas as you can.

2 Reading I

Read the reviews of the two books. Which one would you like to read? Why?

3 Reading II

Read the article again. Then, write a short summary explaining why each book is popular.