

Booklist-American Classics

A death in the family. James Agee.

A novel told through the perspectives of the wife, six year old son, and brother of Jay Follet, who has unexpectedly died in a car accident.

Little Women. Louisa May Alcott.

The classic story of the March family women and their lives in New England during the Civil. Poor, argumentative, loving, and optimistic, the March sisters struggle to supplement their family's meager income and realize their own dreams. This highly autobiographical novel shows us women who are strong-minded and independent in their determination to control their own destiny.

How the Garcia girls lost their accents. Julia Alvarez.

When their family moves from the Dominican Republic to the Bronx in the 1960s, four sisters are thrown into life in the big city.

Winesburg, Ohio. Sherwood Anderson.

A collection of short stories dealing with a small town in Ohio.

All God's children need traveling shoes. Maya Angelou.

An autobiographical work describing Maya Angelou's experiences in Ghana during the 1960's. The book captures the spirit of Africa during that time while comparing and contrasting the situation of African- Americans with black Africans.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Angelou, Maya.

Maya Angelou's vivid account of her childhood set in the American South in the 1930s where she had to face racism, injustice and abuse.

Caves of steel. Isaac Asimov.

Elijah Bailey, a detective in the future, is sent to the Outer Worlds to crack a murder case involving a "Spacer" who hails from another planet.

Go Tell It on the Mountain. James Baldwin.

Using as a frame the spiritual and moral awakening of 14-year-old John Grimes during a Saturday night service in a Harlem storefront church, Baldwin lays bare the secrets of a tormented black family during the depression. John's parents, praying beside him, both wrestle with the ghosts of their sinful pasts.

Herzog. Saul Bellow.

As his marriage disintegrates and his life crumbles around him, Moses E. Herzog fixes upon writing letters to a host of people.

Dandelion wine. Ray Bradbury.

In this calm, soothing look back at childhood, Douglas Spaulding is twelve years old growing up in the Midwest in 1928.

Fahrenheit 451. Ray Bradbury.

Guy Montag is a fireman in the future -- a future where firemen burn books. He loves his job until he meets a young woman who tells him about a time when people read books instead of destroying them. Suddenly, he's intent on saving books, but that's a dangerous job!

Bury my heart at Wounded Knee. Dee Alexander Brown.

The history of westward expansion is told from the perspective of Native Americans. This narrative begins with the Long Walk and culminates with the massacre at Wounded Knee.

The good earth. Pearl S. Buck.

Wang Lung's journey from peasant to wealthy land owner is presented in this look at life in China in the 1920's.

Naked lunch. William S. Burroughs.

The convoluted chronicle of a junky named Bill Lee who travels from New York to Tangiers and ultimately to a hallucination induced land called Interzone. Burrough's writing style, characterized by non-linear jumps in locale and concepts, made him a preeminent figure of the beat generation.

Breakfast at Tiffany's. Capote, Truman.

With her tousled blond hair and upturned nose, dark glasses and chic black dresses, Holly Golightly is top notch in style and a sensation wherever she goes. Her brownstone apartment vibrates with martini-soaked parties as she plays hostess to millionaires and gangsters alike. Yet Holly never loses sight of her ultimate goal - to find a real life place like Tiffany's that makes her feel at home.

In Cold Blood. Truman Capote.

Two two-time losers living in a lonely house in western Kansas are out to make the heist of their life, but when things don't go as planned, the robbery turns ugly. From there, the book is a real-life look into murder, prison, and the criminal mind.

Other voices, other rooms. Truman Capote.

After his mother dies, Joel is sent to live with his father's family. Joel soon learns that things are not always as they seem and that things don't always turn out the way we hope.

My Antonia. Willa Cather.

Set in Nebraska in the late 19th century, this tale of the spirited daughter of a Bohemian immigrant family planning to farm on the untamed land comes to us through the romantic eyes of Jim Burden. He is, at the time of their meeting, newly orphaned and arriving at his grandparents' neighboring farm on the same night her family strikes out to make good in their new country.

O' Pioneers. Willa Cather.

O Pioneers! tells the story of the Bergsons, a family of Swedish immigrants in the farm country near the fictional town of Hanover, Nebraska, at the turn of the 20th century. The main character, Alexandra Bergson, inherits the family farmland when her father dies, and she devotes her life to making the farm a viable enterprise at a time when other immigrant families are giving up and leaving the prairie.

One of Ours. Willa Cather.

It tells the story of the life of Claude Wheeler, a Nebraska native around the turn of the 20th century. The son of a successful Midwestern farmer and an intensely pious mother, he is guaranteed a comfortable livelihood. Nevertheless, Wheeler views himself as a victim of his father's success and his own inexplicable malaise.

The Awakening. Kate Chopin.

Set in New Orleans and the Southern Louisiana coast at the end of the nineteenth century, the plot centers around Edna Pontellier and her struggle to reconcile her increasingly unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century South.

Cisneros, Sandra. Caramelo.

It was inspired by her Mexican heritage and childhood in the barrio of Chicago, Illinois. The main character, Lala, is the only girl in a family of seven children and her family often travels between Chicago and Mexico City.

The Deerslayer. James Fennimore Cooper.

Set in the 1740's just as the French and Indian wars have begun, the novel opens as Natty Bumppo—known as Deerslayer—and his friend Hurry Harry travel to Tom Hutter's house in upstate New York. Hurry plans to marry Tom's beautiful daughter Judith, while Deerslayer has come to help his close friend Chingachgook save his bride-to-be, Wah-ta-Wah, from the Huron Indians. When war breaks out, and Hurry and Tom are captured by Indians, Deerslayer must go on his first warpath to rescue them.

The Pathfinder. James Fennimore Cooper.

Here is the gripping original Western that set the standard for the genre. Natty Bumppo is the quintessential Western hero, a faultless arbiter of wilderness justice. But he finds his love divided between the woman he has pledged to protect and the untouched forest.

The Spy. James Fennimore Cooper.

This historical novel is Cooper's paean to the Revolutionary War, as protagonist Harry Birch finds himself wrongly accused of selling vital information to the British. The book incorporates several real characters, including George Washington.

The Pioneers. James Fennimore Cooper.

The first volume in the famous Leatherstocking Tales, *The Pioneers* introduces Natty Bumppo, the quintessential American hunter and frontiersman who struggles to defend his cherished freedom.

Maggie, a Girl of the Streets. Stephen Crane.

Crane's novel chronicles the life of Maggie Johnson, the daughter of a cruel father and drunken mother, who finds work in a collar factor and is seduced by her brother's menacing friend, Pete. Disowned by her mother, Maggie becomes a prostitute and, ultimately, a victim of despair.

The Red Badge of Courage. Stephen Crane.

Henry Fleming is eager to demonstrate his patriotism in a glorious battle, but when the slaughter starts, he is overwhelmed with fear and flees the battlefield. Ironically, he receives his "red badge of courage" when he is slightly wounded by being struck on the head by a deserter. He witnesses a friend's gruesome death and becomes enraged at the injustice of war. The courage of common soldiers and the agonies of death cure him of his romantic notions. He returns to his regiment and continues to fight on with true courage and without illusions.

I heard the owl call my name. Margaret Craven.

Mark, a young vicar, goes to live in British Columbia with the Kwakiutl Indians. Mark learns the ways of the Kwakiutl and becomes engrossed in their culture and ideas.

Waterlily. Ella Cara Deloria.

The story of Waterlily, a Sioux woman, follows her from her own birth through the birth of her first child.

Deliverance. James Dickey.

Four suburbanites find themselves pitted against dangerous locals when they canoe down a river in rural Georgia. How do the civilized respond when their lives are threatened?

Sister Carrie. Theodore Dreiser.

Sister Carrie tells the story of a rudderless but pretty small-town girl who comes to the big city filled with vague ambitions. She is used by men and uses them in turn to become a successful Broadway actress, while George Hurstwood, the married man who has run away with her, loses his grip on life and descends into beggary and suicide.

The Invisible Man. Ralph Ellison.

The narrator is expelled from his Southern Negro college for inadvertently showing a white trustee the reality of black life in the south, including an incestuous farmer and a rural whorehouse. The narrator moves north to New York City, where he becomes a spokesman for a mixed-race band of social activists called "The Brotherhood" and believes he is fighting for equality.

Love Medicine. Louise Erdrich.

Tells the story of two families, the Kashpaws and the Lamartines. Written in Erdrich's uniquely poetic, powerful style, it is a multi-generational portrait of strong men and women caught in an unforgettable drama of anger, desire, and the healing power that is love medicine.

As I Lay Dying. William Faulkner.

In the story, the members of the Bundren family must take the body of Addie, matriarch of the family, to the town where Addie wanted to be buried. Along the way, we listen to each of the members on the macabre pilgrimage, while Faulkner heaps upon them various flavors of disaster.

Light in August. William Faulkner.

Joe Christmas does not know whether he is black or white. Faulkner makes of Joe's tragedy a powerful indictment of racism; at the same time Joe's life is a study of the divided self and becomes a symbol of 20th century man.

The Sound and the Fury. William Faulkner.

The story features the dissolution of the Compsons, one of those august old Mississippi families that fell on hard times and wild eccentricity after the Civil War. His rich, dark, scandal-ridden story of squandered fortune, incest (in thought if not in deed), madness, congenital brain damage, theft, illegitimacy, and stoic endurance is told in the interior voices of three Compson brothers.

The Beautiful and the Damned. F. Scott Fitzgerald.

It tells the story of Anthony Patch (a 1920s socialite and presumptive heir to a tycoon's fortune), his relationship with his wife Gloria, his service in the army, and alcoholism. The novel provides an excellent portrait of the Eastern elite as the Jazz Age begins its ascent, engulfing all classes into what will soon be known as Café Society.

The Great Gatsby. F. Scott Fitzgerald.

A portrait of the Jazz Age in all of its decadence and excess, *Gatsby* captured the spirit of the author's generation and earned itself a permanent place in American mythology. Self-made, self-invented millionaire Jay Gatsby embodies some of Fitzgerald's--and his country's--most abiding obsessions: money, ambition, greed, and the promise of new beginnings.

Tender is the night. F. Scott Fitzgerald.

While resting on the French Riviera in the 1920s, Rosemary Hoyt, a young actress, becomes enamored with Dick Driver, a wealthy psychiatrist. Dick, who is already married to another woman, finds himself torn between his obligations to his wife and his interest in Rosemary.

This Side of Paradise. F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The book examines the lives and morality of post-World War I youth. Its protagonist, Amory Blaine, is an attractive Princeton University student who dabbles in literature and has the book's theme of love warped by greed and status-seeking.

Alas, Babylon. Pat Frank.

It was one of the first apocalyptic novels of the nuclear age and remains popular fifty years after it was first published. The novel deals with the effects of a nuclear war on the small town of Fort Repose, Florida.

Ordinary people. Judith Guest.

A family struggles to regain normalcy after the accidental boating death of a son and brother, Buck. Relationships between mother, Judith and father, Cal are especially strained after their other son, Conrad, attempts to commit suicide.

Death be not proud. John Gunther.

Johnny was just seventeen years old when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Johnny's father wrote this moving book that chronicles Johnny's struggle to survive cancer.

Snow falling on cedars. David Guterson.

When Kabuo Miyamoto is accused of murder, Ishmael Chambers is sent into the courtroom as a reporter. Chambers, who once dated Kabuo's wife, Hatsue, reflects back on the relationship. Set in Washington state in the 1950's, following the internment of Japanese Americans by the US government.

House of Seven Gables. Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The story of the Pyncheon family, residents of an evil house cursed by the victim of their ancestor's witch hunt and haunted by the ghosts of many generations.

The Scarlet Letter. Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The novel is set in a village in Puritan New England. The main character is Hester Prynne, a young woman who has borne an illegitimate child. Hester believes herself a widow, but her husband, Roger Chillingworth, returns to New England very much alive and conceals his identity. He finds his wife forced to wear the scarlet letter A on her dress as punishment for her adultery. Chillingworth becomes obsessed with finding the identity of his wife's former lover.

Catch-22. Joseph Heller.

Like many soldiers, Yossarian finds himself unable to get out of the war and always attempting to break free of the circular logic that forces him to keep fighting even though he'd much rather be back at home. An alternately hilarious and devastating look at war.

A Farewell to Arms. Ernest Hemingway.

Set in Italy during wartime, it tells the difficult and bittersweet story of love between a soldier and a nurse.

For Whom the Bell Tolls. Ernest Hemingway.

For Whom the Bell Tolls begins and ends in a pine-scented forest, somewhere in Spain. The year is 1937 and the Spanish Civil War is in full swing.

The Old Man and the Sea. Ernest Hemingway.

Story of an old fisherman's struggle against natural obstacles that hinder the catch of a huge marlin.

The Sun Also Rises. Ernest Hemingway.

Jake Barnes, Hemingway's narrator with a mysterious war wound that has left him sexually incapable, is the heart and soul of the book. Brett, the beautiful, doomed English woman he adores, provides the glamour of natural chic and sexual unattainability. Alcohol and post-World War I anomie fuel the plot: weary of drinking and dancing in Paris cafés, the expatriate gang decamps for the Spanish town of Pamplona for the "wonderful nightmare" of a week-long fiesta.

The Turn of the Screw. James Henry.

The story starts conventionally enough with friends sharing ghost stories 'round the fire on Christmas Eve. One of the guests tells about a governess at a country house plagued by supernatural visitors. Only the young governess can see the ghosts; only she suspects that the previous governess and her lover are controlling the two orphaned children (a girl and a boy) for some evil purpose.

Their Eyes Were Watching God. Zora Neale Hurston.

The main character, an African American woman in her early forties named Janie Crawford, tells the story of her life and journey via an extended flashback to her best friend, Pheoby, so that Pheoby can tell Janie's story to the nosy community on her behalf. Her life has three major periods corresponding to her marriages to three very different men.

World according to Garp. John Irving.

Garp, a middle-aged novelist, tells the story of his life, with its unusual but believable cast of characters.

The Cider House Rules. John Irving.

Homer Wells was raised at an orphanage in Maine and taken under the wing of the orphanage's resident doctor. Wally and Candy, a young and wealthy, couple, bring the nearly grown Homer to their house, where his life takes some unexpected twists.

The Bean Trees. Barbara Kingsolver.

Feisty Marietta Greer changes her name to "Taylor" when her car runs out of gas in Taylorville, Ill. By the time she reaches Oklahoma, this strong-willed young Kentucky native with a quick tongue and an open mind is catapulted into a surprising new life. Taylor leaves home in a beat-up '55 Volkswagen bug, on her way to nowhere in particular, savoring her freedom. But when a forlorn Cherokee woman drops a baby in Taylor's passenger seat and asks her to take it, she does.

The Poisonwood Bible. Barbara Kingsolver.

The year is 1959 and the place is the Belgian Congo. Nathan, a Baptist preacher, has come to spread the Word in a remote village reachable only by airplane. To say that he and his family are woefully unprepared would be an understatement. In addition to poisonous snakes, dangerous animals, and the hostility of the villagers to Nathan's fiery take-no-prisoners brand of Christianity, there are also rebels in the jungle and the threat of war in the air.

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girl Haunted by Ghosts. Maxine Hong Kingston.

A pungent, bitter, but beautifully written memoir of growing up Chinese American in Stockton, California. Maxine Hong Kingston distills the dire lessons of her mother's mesmerizing "talk-story" tales of a China where girls are worthless, tradition is exalted and only a strong, wily woman can scratch her way upward.

A Separate Peace. John Knowles.

When Gene Forester returns to the boarding school he attended after twenty years, he looks back at his relationship with his best friend and roommate, Phineas, and the accident that forever changed Phineas' life.

On the Road. Jack Kerouac.

Dean Moriarty, recently released from prison, meets Sal Paradise, a writer, and the two embark on a series of trips that bring them across America's many regions and in touch with some interesting characters.

Monkey Bridge. Lan, Cao.

Just months before the Communists roll into Saigon in 1975, Mai Ngyuen, the young Vietnamese narrator of *Monkey Bridge*, is packed off to the U.S. Her sorrowing mother escapes in the final hours, leaving Mai's grandfather behind. Now it's Mai who plays the elder, navigating a rude, incomprehensible culture that makes possible a sudden twist in life.

The Call of the Wild. Jack London.

Life is good for Buck in Santa Clara Valley, where he spends his days eating and sleeping in the golden sunshine. But one day a treacherous act of betrayal leads to his kidnap, and he is forced into a life of toil and danger. Dragged away to be a sled dog in the harsh and freezing cold Yukon, Buck must fight for his survival.

White Fang. Jack London.

London tells the story of a wolf-dog who endures great cruelty before he comes to know human kindness.

The Natural. Bernard Malamud.

Roy Hobbs wishes to be the best baseball player and his wish is granted. With his trusty bat Wonderboy, Roy thinks he can do anything. But Roy is human and pride, greed, and other vices stand in his way.

Angela's ashes. Frank McCourt.

McCourt's memoirs of his childhood in Ireland and in New York City looks at his difficult, poverty stricken upbringing with humor and grace.

Foxfire: confessions of a girl gang. Joyce Carol Oates.

Five teenage girls band together against a world of sexism and conformity.

A good man is hard to find. Flannery O'Connor.

A collection of short stories set in the rural south that exposes some of the recurrent themes in southern life.

The chosen. Chiam Potok.

Reuven Malther and Danny Saunders, two Jewish boys with different religious backgrounds, are brought together by chance in the 1940's in New York. This presentation of the friendship of the two boys examines spirituality and relationships between friends, fathers and sons.

Bless Me Utlima. Anaya, Rudolfo.

Ultima, a *curandera*, one who cures with herbs and magic, comes to Antonio Marez's New Mexico family when he is six years old, and she helps him discover himself in the magical secrets of the pagan past.

Franny and Zooey. J. D. Salinger.

Franny Glass is an intelligent teen who has a nervous breakdown. Her older brother Zooey tries to help her with her problems and ends up dealing with some of his own.

The killer angels. Michael Shaara.

A revealing look at the Battle of Gettysburg filled with intricate detail and riveting action.

Arrowsmith. Sinclair Lewis.

The book follows the life of Martin Arrowsmith, a rather ordinary fellow who gets his first taste of medicine at 14 as an assistant to the drunken physician in his home town. It is Leora Tozer who makes Martin's life extraordinary. With vitality and love, she urges him beyond the confines of the mundane to risk answering his true calling as a scientist and researcher.

Babbitt. Sinclair Lewis.

Prosperous and socially prominent, George Babbitt appears to have everything. But when a personal crisis forces the middle-aged real estate agent to reexamine his life, Babbitt mounts a rebellion that jeopardizes everything he values.

Main Street. Sinclair Lewis.

Carol Milford is a liberal, free-spirited young woman, reared in the metropolis of St. Paul. She marries Will Kennicott, a doctor, who is a small-town boy at heart. When they marry, Will convinces her to live in his home-town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Carol is appalled at the backwardness of Gopher Prairie. But her disdain for the town's physical ugliness and smug conservatism compels her to reform it.

The Assistant. Bernard Malamud.

Set in a working-class neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, it explores the situation of first- and second-generation Americans in the early 1950s, as experienced by three main characters and the relationships between them: an aging Jewish refugee from Tsarist Russia who owns and operates a failing small grocery store, a young Italian American drifter trying to overcome a bad start in life by becoming the grocer's assistant, and the grocer's daughter, who becomes romantically involved with her father's assistant despite parental objections and misgivings of her own.

The Fixer. Bernard Malamud.

Set in Czarist Russia, *The Fixer* is the story of the strains and anxieties that beset a man who finds himself a stranger in his community and a victim of irrational prejudice as a wave of anti-Semitic hysteria engulfs a town after the murder of a boy.

Billy Budd. Herman Melville.

The plot follows Billy Budd, a seaman impressed into service aboard HMS *Bellipotent* in the year 1797, when the Royal Navy was reeling from two major mutinies and was threatened by the Revolutionary French Republic's military ambitions.

Typee. Herman Melville.

Typee is writer Herman Melville's first book, partly based on his actual experiences as a captive on Nuku Hiva (which Melville spelled as Nukuheva) in the South Pacific Marquesas Islands.

Little Women. Margaret Mitchell.

This classic story of the March family women and their lives in New England during the Civil War has remained enduringly popular since its publication in 1868. Poor, argumentative, loving, and optimistic, the March sisters struggle to supplement their family's meager income and realize their own dreams.

House Made of Dawn. M. Scott Momaday.

A young Native American, Abel has come home from a foreign war to find himself caught between two worlds. The first is the world of his father's, wedding him to the rhythm of the seasons, the harsh beauty of the land, and the ancient rites and traditions of his people. But the other world -- modern, industrial America -- pulls at Abel, demanding his loyalty, claiming his soul, goading him into a destructive, compulsive cycle of dissipation and disgust. And the young man, torn in two, descends into hell.

Beloved. Morrison, Toni.

In the troubled years following the Civil War, the spirit of a murdered child haunts the Ohio home of a former slave.

The Bluest Eye. Morrison, Toni.

There are far uglier things in the world than, well, ugliness, and poor Pecola is subjected to most of them. She's spat upon, ridiculed, and ultimately raped and impregnated by her own father. No wonder she yearns to be the very opposite of what she is--yearns, in other words, to be a white child, possessed of the blondest hair and the bluest eye.

Jazz. Morrison, Toni.

Jazz embraces the vibrant music and lifestyle of 1920s Harlem, an urban renaissance of opportunity and glamour. A novel of murder, hard lives, and broken dreams, *Jazz* sways with a lyric medley of voices and human consciousness.

Paradise. Morrison, Toni.

The novel tells the story of the tension between the men of Ruby, Oklahoma (an all-black town founded in 1950) and a group of women who lived in a former convent seventeen miles away.

Song of Solomon. Morrison, Toni.

Morrison narrates for three hours and lays out before us the complex lives and backgrounds of four generations of black family life in the south. Central is the character Milkman--an unfortunate nickname owed to his lengthy nursing period and delayed coming of age. Although a late starter, Milkman develops into a fundamentally strong person, who eventually learns to cherish his family and the importance of his roots.

Sula. Morrison, Toni.

Sula revolves around the relationship between two little girls growing up in a poor, black neighborhood nestled high in the hilltops. "The Bottom," as the barrio came to be known, is brimming with eccentric residents but sadly deprived of human warmth. However, out of this bitter, abrasive environment grows a beautiful friendship between Sula and Nel.

Tar Baby. Morrison, Toni.

Jadine Childs is a black fashion model with a white patron, a white boyfriend, and a coat made out of ninety perfect sealskins. Son is a black fugitive who embodies everything she loathes and desires. As Morrison follows their affair, which plays out from the Caribbean to Manhattan and the deep South, she charts all the nuances of obligation and betrayal between blacks and whites, masters and servants, and men and women.

Jasmine. Bharati Mukherjee.

This novel relates both the odyssey and the metamorphosis of a young immigrant from rural India. Her story is often shocking: the violence of the rape that greets her on her first night in America is certainly no greater than that of the crazed Sikh extremists who made her a widow at age 17 in India.

The Burning Plain. Michael Nava.

Gay Mexican American lawyer Henry Rios has fought bigotry and prejudice; battled alcoholism; and watched his lover die from AIDS. Now he's wrongly accused of murder after a male prostitute he spent an evening with is savagely murdered.

Black Water. Joyce Carol Oates.

In a plot shocking for its blatant familiarity, a figure identified as The Senator tipsily drives a young woman away from a party and off of a dock.

Blonde. Joyce Carol Oates.

Dramatic, provocative and unsettlingly suggestive, *Blonde* is as much a bombshell as its protagonist, the legendary Marilyn Monroe. Writing in highly charged, impressionistic prose, Oates creates a striking and poignant portrait of the mythic star and the society that made and failed her.

We Were the Mulvaneys. Joyce Carol Oates.

A profound and darkly realistic chronicle of one family's hubristic heyday and its fall from grace. The wealthy, socially elite Mulvaneys live on historic High Point Farm, near the small upstate town of Mt. Ephraim, N.Y. Before the act of violence that forever destroys it, an idyllic incandescence bathes life on the farm.

What I Lived For. Joyce Carol Oates.

Corky Corcoran is a cocky, Irish Catholic, alcoholic, self-made millionaire as well as a city council member in Union City, New York. The turning point for Corky comes with the suicide of Marilee Plummer, a beautiful, politically ambitious black woman who had recently accused a black city council member of raping her.

The Bell Jar. Sylvia Plath.

The Bell Jar tells the story of a gifted young woman's mental breakdown beginning during a summer internship as a junior editor at a magazine in New York City in the early 1950s.

Ship of Fools. Katherine Porter.

The story takes place in the summer of 1931, on board a cruise ship bound for Bremerhaven, Germany. The passenger list is long and portentous, and includes a Spanish noblewoman, a drunken German lawyer, an American divorcee, a pair of Mexican Catholic priests, and a host of others. This ship of fools is a crucible of intense experience, out of which everyone emerges forever changed.

Why She Left Us. Rhna Reiko Rizzuto.

Why She Left Us revolves around an intriguing mystery: a Japanese American woman's abandonment of her illegitimate child during World War II.

Empire Falls. Richard Russo.

A small, fictional mill town in Maine called Empire Falls, though once booming in industry, is quickly deteriorating. Dominated by the powerful Whiting family, the town can no longer sustain itself. Seen through the eyes of Miles Roby, the manager of the Empire Grill, which is also owned by Mrs. Whiting, his struggles with family, including his divorce and the life of his teenage daughter, Christina.

The Catcher in the Rye. J. D. Salinger.

Holden narrates the story of a couple of days in his sixteen-year-old life, just after he's been expelled from prep school, in a slang that sounds edgy even today and keeps this novel on banned book lists.

Ceremony. Leslie Marmon Silko.

Tayo, a World War II veteran of mixed ancestry, returns to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation. He is deeply scarred by his experience as a prisoner of the Japanese and further wounded by the rejection he encounters from his people. Only by immersing himself in the Indian past can he begin to regain the peace that was taken from him.

The jungle. Upton Sinclair.

When immigrant Jurgis Rudkus and his family first move to Chicago they're excited. But when Jurgis gets a job in the meat industry, the whole family suffers from the terrible conditions and wages. This book launched investigations and eventual change in labor laws and in food production.

A Thousand Acres. Jane Smiley.

Aging Larry Cook announces his intention to turn over his 1,000-acre farm--one of the largest in Zebulon County, Iowa--to his three daughters, Caroline, Ginny and Rose. A man of harsh sensibilities, he carves Caroline out of the deal because she has the nerve to be less than enthusiastic about her father's generosity. While Larry Cook deteriorates into a pathetic drunk, his daughters are left to cope with the often grim realities of life on a family farm--from battering husbands to cutthroat lenders.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. Betty Smith.

Francie Nolan, avid reader, penny-candy connoisseur, and adroit observer of human nature, has much to ponder in colorful, turn-of-the-century Brooklyn. She grows up with a sweet, tragic father, a severely realistic mother, and an aunt who gives her love too freely--to men, and to a brother who will always be the favored child. Francie learns early the meaning of hunger and the value of a penny.

Cannery Row. John Steinbeck.

Peopled by stereotypical good-natured bums and warm-hearted prostitutes living on the fringes of Monterey, Calif., the picaresque novel celebrates lowlifes who are poor but happy.

East of Eden. John Steinbeck.

Spanning the period between the American Civil War and the end of World War I, the novel highlights the conflicts of two generations of brothers; the first being the kind, gentle Adam Trask and his wild brother Charles.

The Grapes of Wrath. John Steinbeck.

Set during the Great Depression, it traces the migration of an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family to California and their subsequent hardships as migrant farm workers.

The pearl. John Steinbeck.

After Kino finds a giant pearl, he and his wife envision a better life for their son. But the pearl seems to have an awful effect on everyone near it.

Tortilla Flat. John Steinbeck.

The book portrays with great sympathy and humour a group of *paisanos* - literally, countrymen - a small band of errant friends enjoying life and wine in the days after the end of the Great War.

Uncle Tom's cabin. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Set before the Civil War, this book looks at the treatment of slaves in the United States. A propaganda piece written by an abolitionist, the book presents the radical notion that blacks are people with feelings and deserve to be free.

The joy luck club. Amy Tan.

Four women who have recently moved from China in the 1940's meet and share their pasts and their dreams with one another over dim sum in San Francisco. The kitchen God's wife is the sequel to this book.

The bonesetter's daughter. Amy Tan.

Ruth Young, a Chinese-American woman, is surprised to find two lists written by her mother, LuLing, who suffers from Alzheimer's Disease. The lists, titled Things I know are true and Things I must not forget, chronicle LuLing's life in China, which she never shared with Ruth.

The mosquito coast. Paul Theroux.

The Fox family, led by their father, moves from the United States to the jungles of Honduras in order to get away from the negative aspects of American society. As told from the perspective of Charlie Fox, one of the children, the family soon realizes that their father's ideas for a new society may not be as perfect as they had once thought--but can their dad be stopped?

My Life and Hard Times. James Thurber.

James Thurber looks back at his own life growing up in Columbus, Ohio, with the same humor and sharp wit that defined his famous sketches and writings. In *My Life and Hard Times*, first published in 1933, he recounts the delightful chaos and frustrations of family, boyhood, youth odd dogs, recalcitrant machinery, and the foibles of human nature.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court. Mark Twain.

Hank Morgan, a 19th century New Englander, is transported through time and space to England in 526, where he tries to introduce modern inventions like telephones and trains. Hijinks ensue.

Tom Sawyer. Mark Twain.

Perhaps the best-loved nineteenth-century American novel, Mark Twain's tale of boyhood adventure overflows with comedy, warmth, and slapstick energy. It brings to life an array of irresistible characters, including the awesomely self-confident Tom and his best buddy Huck Finn.

The Centaur. John Updike.

In a small Pennsylvania town in the late 1940s, schoolteacher George Caldwell yearns to find some meaning in his life. Alone with his teenage son for three days in a blizzard, Caldwell sees his son grow and change as he himself begins to lose touch with his life.

Rabbit Redux. John Updike.

Harry Angstrom--known to all as Rabbit, one of America's most famous literary characters--finds his dreary life shattered by the infidelity of his wife. How he resolves--or further complicates--his problems makes a compelling read.

Rabbit Run. John Updike.

Harry Angstrom was a star basketball player in high school and that was the best time of his life. Now in his mid-20s, his work is unfulfilling, his marriage is moribund, and he tries to find happiness with another woman.

Cat's Cradle. Kurt Vonnegut.

It explores issues of science, technology, and religion, satirizing the arms race and many other targets along the way.

Slaughter-house five. Kurt Vonnegut.

Billy Pilgrim is held captive in a museum-type diorama on the planet Tralfamadore. As he sits on the distant planet, he recalls fragments of his life, including being a P.O.W. during the second world war.

The Color Purple. Alice Walker.

Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she is being abused and raped by her father and attempting to protect her sister from the same fate, and continuing over the course of her marriage to "Mister," a brutal man who terrorizes her.

Jubilee. Margaret Walker.

As Vryr, the daughter of a plantation owner and a slave, grows into adulthood, the political landscape of the South changes dramatically. Vryr experiences life as a slave, then the Civil War and Reconstruction period. Throughout, she is remarkably strong.

Losing Battles. Eudora Welty.

Three generations of Granny Vaughn's descendants gather at her Mississippi home to celebrate her 90th birthday. Possessed of the true storyteller's gift, the members of this clan cannot resist the temptation to swap tales.

The Optimist's Daughter. Eudora Welty.

The optimist in question is 71-year-old Judge McKelva, who has come to a New Orleans hospital from Mount Salus, Mississippi, complaining of a "disturbance" in his vision. To his daughter, Laurel, it's as rare for him to admit "self-concern" as it is for him to be sick, and she immediately flies down from Chicago to be by his side. The subsequent operation on the judge's eye goes well, but the recovery does not.

The Ponder Heart. Eudora Welty.

The narrator of the story is Miss Edna Earle Ponder, one of the last living members of a once-prominent family, who manages the Beulah Hotel in Clay, Miss. She tells a traveling salesman the history of her family and fellow townfolk.

The Bridge of San Luis Rey. Thornton Wilder.

The plot centers on five travelers in 18th-century Peru who are killed when a bridge across a canyon collapses; a priest interprets the story of each victim in an attempt to explain the workings of divine providence.

The Man Who Cried I Am. John Williams.

Through the eyes of journalist Max Reddick, and with penetrating fictional portraits of Richard Wright and James Baldwin, among other historical figures, John A Williams reveals the hope, courage, and bitter disappointment of the civil-rights era.

The Age of Innocence . Edith Wharton.

Depicts the bygone era of 1870s New York upper class society. The novel is the story of Newland Archer, a lawyer and heir to one of New York's most prominent families. Newland is planning to marry the young, beautiful and sheltered May Welland, however when May's exotic thirty-year-old cousin, the Countess Ellen Olenska, appears on the scene he begins to question these plans.

Ethan Frome. Edith Wharton.

Frome and Zeena marry after she nurses his mother in her last illness. Although Frome seems ambitious and intelligent, Zeena holds him back. When her young cousin Mattie comes to stay on their New England farm, Frome falls in love with her. But the social conventions of the day doom their love and their hopes.

Black Boy. Richard Wright.

Richard Wright grew up in the woods of Mississippi, with poverty, hunger, fear, and hatred. He lied, stole, and raged at those around him; at six he was a "drunkard," hanging about taverns. Surly, brutal, cold, suspicious, and self-pitying, he was surrounded on one side by whites who were either indifferent to him, pitying, or cruel, and on the other by blacks who resented anyone trying to rise above the common lot.