

These are written by American authors and usually express some artistic quality--an expression of life, truth, and beauty. It is a classic that stands the test of time, is usually considered to be a representation of the period in which it was written, and merits lasting recognition.

Angelou, Maya

### **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**

The memoir follows Angelou during her youth as she survives soul-crushing racism, a brutal sexual assault, and finally her hard-won independence as she becomes a young woman. Her poetic prose continues to influence and inspire generations today.

Bradbury, Ray

### **Fahrenheit 451**

set in a dystopian future where literature (and all original thought) is on the brink of extinction. Guy Montag is a fireman whose job is to burn printed books as well as the houses where they're hidden. But when his wife commits suicide and a young neighbor who introduced him to reading disappears, Guy begins hoarding books in his own home.

Chopin, Kate

### **The Awakening**

Edna Pontellier, a Victorian-era wife and mother, is awakened to the full force of her desire for love and freedom when she loses herself in an extramarital affair and yearns for independence from her husband and children.

Cisneros, Sandra

### **The House on Mango Street**

For Esperanza, a young girl growing up in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago, life is an endless landscape of concrete and run-down tenements, and she tries to rise above the hopelessness.

Dickinson, Emily

### **Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson**

Though an introvert and recluse, Dickinson had a profound understanding of the human condition, and was able to write with a knowledge that one would not expect from a woman who later in life refused to leave her room. Today, she is known as one of the greatest poets in history

Gaines, Ernest

### **A Lesson Before Dying**

Set in a small Cajun community in the late 1940s. Jefferson, a young illiterate African American man is an unwitting party to a liquor store shoot out in which three men are killed; the only survivor, he is convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

Heller, Joseph

### **Catch 22**

At the heart of Catch-22 resides the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a United States airman attempting to survive the lunacy and depravity of a World War II airbase.

Hemingway, Ernest

### **Old Man and the Sea**

the story of an old Cuban fisherman and his supreme ordeal: a relentless, agonizing battle with a giant marlin far out in the Gulf Stream. The battle for his catch becomes one of survival against a band of marauding sharks.

Irving, John

### **A Prayer for Owen Meany**

Eleven-year-old Owen Meany, playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire, hits a foul ball and kills his best friend's mother. Owen doesn't believe in accidents; he believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul is both extraordinary and terrifying. At moments a comic, self-deluded victim, but in the end the principal, tragic actor in a divine plan, Owen Meany is the most heartbreaking hero John Irving has yet created.

James, Henry

### **Portrait of a Lady**

When Isabel Archer, a beautiful, spirited American, is brought to Europe by her wealthy Aunt Touchett, it is expected that she will soon marry. But Isabel, resolved to determine her own fate, does not hesitate to turn down two eligible suitors. She then finds herself irresistibly drawn to Gilbert Osmond, who, beneath his veneer of charm and cultivation, is cruelty itself.

Knowles, John

### **A Separate Peace**

Set at a boys boarding school in New England during the early years of World War II, *A Separate Peace* is a harrowing and luminous parable of the dark side of adolescence. Gene is a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas is a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happens between the two friends one summer, like the war itself, banishes the innocence of these boys and their world.

# American Classics Fiction

Rand, Ayn  
**Atlas Shrugged**

Set in a fictional dystopian United States where all the world's movers and shakers have abandoned society, leaving the world and the remaining people in a state of flux. The decisions of a few industrial leaders shake the roots of capitalism and reawaken man's awareness of himself as an heroic being.

Steinbeck, John  
**East of Eden**

Set in the rich farmland of California's Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel.

Steinbeck, John  
**Of Mice and Men**

The tragic story of the friendship between two itinerant ranch hands on the run—one is the lifelong companion to the other, a developmentally disabled man.

Upton, John  
**The Jungle**

A documentary novel portraying industry's conditions at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Sinclair's novel prompted public outrage which led President Theodore Roosevelt to demand an official investigation. This eventually led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug laws.

Williams, Tennessee  
**A Streetcar Named Desire**

The story famously recounts how the faded and promiscuous Blanche DuBois is pushed over the edge by her sexy and brutal brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski.

Walker, Alice  
**The Color Purple**

In this Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award for Fiction-winner, Walker paints the horrifying yet realistic account of a young black woman named Celie who faces disturbing abuse — both physical, mental, and incestuous — at the hands of the men in her life.

Wharton, Edith  
**The House of Mirth**

The story of class hierarchies in America through Lily Bart, a woman who sabotages all her possible opportunities for a wealthy marriage in the hopes of marrying for love, but refuses to marry for love because she is unable to give up her love of money.

White Betty  
**A Tree Grows in Brooklyn**

The story of young, sensitive, and idealistic Francie Nolan and her bittersweet formative years in the slums of Williamsburg, a poignant and moving tale filled with compassion and cruelty, laughter and heartache, crowded with life and people and incident.

Whitman, Walt  
**Leaves of Grass**

A collection of quintessentially American poems, that Walt Whitman spent his entire life revising and re-writing until his death. the seminal work of one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth century.



At the  
Mount Vernon  
City Library