

ACADEMIC LITERACY

Educational research has demonstrated that curriculums that emphasize depth tend to prepare students more effectively than those that emphasize breadth. Within such a curriculum, for example, students read fewer novels in school but spend more time on each, thus improving their reading skills without overwhelming them with content. However, such an approach does have a major drawback: students who lack a broad foundation of important literature are put at a disadvantage in higher education when compared to students who have read extensively on their own or through a rigorous college preparatory program. Additionally, college professors may assume students possess a knowledge of many of the more important “canonical” texts.

Some educational and literary philosophers (e.g., E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and Harold Bloom) have listed numerous texts which they feel are important for students who want to achieve “cultural literacy” (c.f. Hirsch) or read the major works of literary history (c.f. Bloom). In the interest of providing additional literary opportunities to students who feel their background in literature is lacking, I have listed some important works that helped shape contemporary literary development. The list is by no means exhaustive; it is merely supposed to represent a jumping-off point for students who want to expand their literary horizons but do not know where to begin.

The texts below have been selected to provide a broad literary base for students. Some are important because they influence modern literary or political thought, others deal with critical themes that help us gain a better understanding of American culture, while still others provide a foundation for further reading or are the source of myriad allusions and references in all literary genres. I have tried also to include works from a variety of important authors. As with any list of this nature, most who peruse it will likely find that I have excluded a work or author they consider of great significance. This is inevitable and unavoidable. One of my primary considerations was that this list should be manageable for an academically-motivated high school student. (But let me know if you would like to recommend an addition to the list; I will certainly entertain your suggestion for future revisions.) A last word: I have not included poetry, epic poems notwithstanding. That list is for another day.

MUST READ (50)

Austen, Jane *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*
Beowulf
Bradbury, Ray *Fahrenheit 451*
Bronte, Charlotte *Jane Eyre*
Bronte, Emily *Wuthering Heights*
Carroll, Lewis *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
Chaucer, Geoffrey *Canterbury Tales* (General Prologue, Miller's Tale, Pardoner's Tale)
Conrad, Joseph *The Heart of Darkness*
Crane, Stephen *The Red Badge of Courage*
Dickens, Charles *A Christmas Carol*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*
Ellison, Ralph *Invisible Man*
Fitzgerald, F. Scott *The Great Gatsby*
Golding, William *Lord of the Flies*
Hawthorne, Nathaniel *The Scarlet Letter*
Heller, Joseph *Catch-22*
Hemingway, Ernest *The Old Man and the Sea*
Homer *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
Huxley, Aldous *Brave New World*
Joyce, James *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
Kerouac, Jack *On the Road*
Lee, Harper *To Kill a Mockingbird*
Machiavelli, Niccolo *The Prince*
Mallory, Sir Thomas *Le Morte d'Arthur*
Milton, John *Paradise Lost*
Morrison, Toni *Beloved*
Orwell, George *1984* and *Animal Farm*
Rand, Ayn *Anthem*
Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*
Shakespeare, William *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*
Shelley, Mary *Frankenstein*
Sinclair, Upton *The Jungle*

Steinbeck, John *Of Mice and Men*
Stevenson, Robert Louis *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Treasure Island*
Stoker, Bram *Dracula*
Stowe, Harriet Beecher *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Swift, Jonathan *Gulliver's Travels* (Part 1: A Voyage to Lilliput)
Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*
Twain, Mark *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
Weisel, Elie *Night*
Wright, Richard *Native Son*

EXTRA CREDIT (25)

Alighieri, Dante *Divine Comedy (Inferno)*
Burgess, Anthony *A Clockwork Orange*
de Cervantes, Miguel *Don Quixote*
Dostoevsky, Fyodor *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Crime and Punishment*
Eliot, George *Middlemarch*
Faulkner, William *The Sound and the Fury*
Flaubert, Gustave *Madame Bovary*
Hemingway, Ernest *A Farewell to Arms*
Hugo, Victor *Les Miserables*
Hurston, Zora Neale *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Joyce, James *Ulysses*
Kesey, Ken *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*
Marquez, Gabriel Garcia *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
Melville, Herman *Moby Dick*
Nabokov, Vladimir *Lolita*
Pirsig, Robert *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
Pope, Alexander *Essay on Criticism* and *Essay on Man*
Proust, Marcel *Swann's Way (Remembrance of Things Past)*

Rand, Ayn *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*
Steinbeck, John *The Grapes of Wrath*
Wharton, Edith *The Age of Innocence*
Woolf, Virginia *To the Lighthouse*