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The Top 25 Reading List

Great books for thoughtful high school readers, organized by tradition: American, British, and World literature.

★ Frequently cited on the AP English Literature exam's open essay question.

American Literature

1 ***The Scarlet Letter*** · Nathaniel Hawthorne ★
Sin, guilt, and grace in Puritan New England.

2 ***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*** · Frederick Douglass
A powerful firsthand account of slavery and the freedom that comes with literacy.

3 ***Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*** · Mark Twain ★
A boy, a river, and a hard look at conscience and freedom.

4 ***The Red Badge of Courage*** · Stephen Crane
What courage really means, seen through the eyes of a young Civil War soldier.

5 ***The Pearl*** · John Steinbeck
A short parable about greed, family, and the true cost of fortune.

6 ***The Great Gatsby*** · F. Scott Fitzgerald ★
Wealth, longing, and the limits of the American Dream.

7 ***Fahrenheit 451*** · Ray Bradbury
A future where books are burned, and one man who begins to read.

8 ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** · Harper Lee
Justice, conscience, and courage in a Depression-era Southern town.

British Literature

9 ***Great Expectations*** · Charles Dickens ★

An orphan's rise in the world, and what truly makes a gentleman.

10 ***Jane Eyre*** · Charlotte Brontë ★

A young woman's search for love without surrendering her integrity.

11 ***Wuthering Heights*** · Emily Brontë ★

Passion and revenge across two generations on the Yorkshire moors.

12 ***Heart of Darkness*** · Joseph Conrad ★

A journey up the Congo River into the darkness of the human heart.

13 ***King Lear*** · William Shakespeare ★

A king's folly, and the cost of mistaking flattery for love.

14 ***Macbeth*** · William Shakespeare ★

Ambition, guilt, and the unraveling of a soul.

15 ***Pride and Prejudice*** · Jane Austen ★

Wit, first impressions, and the humility it takes to love well.

16 ***Frankenstein*** · Mary Shelley ★

A creator, his creation, and the responsibility that binds them.

17 ***A Tale of Two Cities*** · Charles Dickens ★

Sacrifice and redemption against the backdrop of the French Revolution.

World Literature

18 ***The Odyssey*** · Homer
The great journey home that later literature keeps returning to.

19 ***Oedipus Rex*** · Sophocles ★
Fate, pride, and the terrible cost of seeing the truth.

20 ***Antigone*** · Sophocles ★
Divine law versus human law, and the courage to choose.

21 ***Crime and Punishment*** · Fyodor Dostoevsky ★
A crime, a guilty conscience, and the long road to redemption.

22 ***Anna Karenina*** · Leo Tolstoy ★
Love, family, and the search for meaning in Russian society.

23 ***Things Fall Apart*** · Chinua Achebe ★
A proud Igbo leader and a way of life facing colonial change.

24 ***The Cherry Orchard*** · Anton Chekhov ★
A family clings to the past as the world around them changes.

25 ***Don Quixote*** · Miguel de Cervantes
A knight, his squire, and the power and folly of imagination.

Read great books together.

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