

100 Books Every High School Student Should Read



November 15th, 2009

By Alvina Lopez

When preparing for college, one of the smartest moves a high schooler can make is to read, read, read. This is especially true of literary classics. Many of the books covered on this list also surface in university literature classes, so high school students can facilitate their college workloads by knowing the classics before they become required reading. Students should also keep in mind that classics are classics for a reason: they are good books about the nature of the human condition. They reveal something magical about the workings of the world. They are invaluable to the person attempting to become an academic. The following books encompass nearly every genre: the lighthearted tales of Johnathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travles* to the dark fate of George Orwell's 1984. Read one or read them all, but either way, enjoy and prepare to be enlightened.

1. [Lord of the Rings by JRR Tolkien](#): WH Auden thought this tale of fantastic creatures looking for lost jewellery was a "masterpiece".
2. [To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee](#): A child's-eye view of racial prejudice and weird neighbours in Thirties Alabama.
3. [The Home and the World by Rabindranath Tagore](#): A rich Bengali noble lives happily until a radical revolutionary appears.
4. [The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams](#): Earth is demolished to make way for a Hyperspatial Express Route. Don't panic.
5. [One Thousand and One Nights Anon](#): A Persian king's new bride tells tales to stall post-coital execution.
6. [The Sorrows of Young Werther by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#): Werther loves Charlotte, but she's already engaged. Woe is he!
7. [Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie](#): The children of poor Hindus and wealthy Muslims are switched at birth.
8. [Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy by John le Carre](#): Nursery rhyme provides the code names for British spies suspected of treason.
9. [Cold Comfort Farm by Stella Gibbons](#): Hilarious satire on doom-laden rural romances. "Something nasty" has been observed in the woodshed.
10. [The Tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki](#): The life and loves of an emperor's son. And possibly the world's first novel?
11. [Under the Net by Iris Murdoch](#): A feckless writer has dealings with a canine movie star. Comedy and philosophy combined.

12. [**The Golden Notebook by Doris Lessing**](#): Lessing considers communism and women's liberation in what Margaret Drabble calls "inner space fiction."
13. [**Eugene Onegin by Alexander Pushkin**](#): Passion, poetry and pistols in this verse novel of thwarted love.
14. [**On the Road by Jack Kerouac**](#): Beat generation boys aim to "burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles."
15. [**Old Goriot by Honore de Balzac**](#): A disillusioning dose of Bourbon Restoration realism. The anti-hero "Rastignac" became a byword for ruthless social climbing.
16. [**The Red and the Black by Stendhal**](#): Plebian hero struggles against the materialism and hypocrisy of French society with his "force diame."
17. [**The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas**](#): "One for all and all for one:" the eponymous swashbucklers battle the mysterious Milady.
18. [**Germinal by Emile Zola**](#): Written to "germinate" social change, Germinal unflinchingly documents the starvation of French miners.
19. [**The Stranger by Albert Camus**](#): Frenchman kills an Arab friend in Algiers and accepts "the gentle indifference of the world."
20. [**The Name of the Rose by Umberto Eco**](#): Illuminating historical whodunnit set in a 14th-century Italian monastery.
21. [**Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey**](#): An Australian heiress bets an Anglican priest he can't move a glass church 400km.
22. [**Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys**](#): Prequel to Jane Eyre giving moving, human voice to the mad woman in the attic.
23. [**Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll**](#): Carroll's ludic logic makes it possible to believe six impossible things before breakfast.
24. [**Catch-22 by Joseph Heller**](#): Yossarian feels a homicidal impulse to machine gun total strangers. Isn't that crazy?
25. [**The Trial by Franz Kafka**](#): K proclaims he's innocent when unexpectedly arrested. But "innocent of what?"
26. [**Cider with Rosie by Laurie Lee**](#): Protagonist's "first long secret drink of golden fire" is under a hay wagon.
27. [**Waiting for the Mahatma by RK Narayan**](#): Gentle comedy in which a Gandhi-inspired Indian youth becomes an anti-British extremist.
28. [**All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Remarque**](#): The horror of the Great War as seen by a teenage soldier.
29. [**Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant by Anne Tyler**](#): Three siblings are differently affected by their parents' unexplained separation.
30. [**The Dream of the Red Chamber by Cao Xueqin**](#): Profound and panoramic insight into 18th-century Chinese society.
31. [**The Leopard by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa**](#): Garibaldi's Redshirts sweep through Sicily, the "jackals" ousting the nobility, or "leopards."
32. [**If On a Winter's Night a Traveller by Italo Calvino**](#): International book fraud is exposed in this playful postmodernist puzzle.
33. [**Crash by JG Ballard**](#): Former TV scientist preaches "a new sexuality, born from a perverse technology."
34. [**A Bend in the River by VS Naipaul**](#): East African Indian Salim travels to the heart of Africa and finds "The world is what it is."

35. [**Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoyevsky**](#): Boy meets pawnbroker. Boy kills pawnbroker with an axe. Guilt, breakdown, Siberia, redemption.
36. [**Dr. Zhivago by Boris Pasternak**](#): Romantic young doctor's idealism is trampled by the atrocities of the Russian Revolution.
37. [**The Cairo Trilogy by Naguib Mahfouz**](#): Follows three generations of Cairenes from the First World War to the coup of 1952.
38. [**The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson**](#): This famous novella has been adapted for movies, opera and plays.
39. [**Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift**](#): Swift's scribulous satire on travellers' tall tales (the Lilliputian Court is really George I's).
40. [**My Name Is Red by Orhan Pamuk**](#): A painter is murdered in Istanbul in 1591. Unusually, we hear from the corpse.
41. [**One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez**](#): Myth and reality melt magically together in this Colombian family saga.
42. [**London Fields by Martin Amis**](#): A failed novelist steals a woman's trashed diaries which reveal she's plotting her own murder.
43. [**The Savage Detectives by Roberto Bolaño**](#): Gang of South American poets travel the world, sleep around, challenge critics to duels.
44. [**The Glass Bead Game by Herman Hesse**](#): Intellectuals withdraw from life to play a game of musical and mathematical rules.
45. [**The Tin Drum by Gnter Grass**](#): Madhouse memories of the Second World War. Key text of European magic realism.
46. [**Austerlitz by WG Sebald**](#): Paragraph-less novel in which a Czech-born historian traces his own history back to the Holocaust.
47. [**Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov**](#): Scholar's sexual obsession with a prepubescent "nymphet" is complicated by her mother's passion for him.
48. [**The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood**](#): After nuclear war has rendered most sterile, fertile women are enslaved for breeding.
49. [**The Catcher in the Rye by JD Salinger**](#): Expelled from a "phony" prep school, adolescent anti-hero goes through a difficult phase.
50. [**Underworld by Don DeLillo**](#): From baseball to nuclear waste, all late-20th-century American life is here.
51. [**Beloved by Toni Morrison**](#): Brutal, haunting, jazz-inflected journey down the darkest narrative rivers of American slavery.
52. [**The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck**](#): "Okies" set out from the Depression dustbowl seeking decent wages and dignity.
53. [**Go Tell It On the Mountain by James Baldwin**](#): Explores the role of the Christian Church in Harlem's African-American community.
54. [**The Unbearable Lightness of Being by Milan Kundera**](#): A doctor's infidelities distress his wife. But if life means nothing, it can't matter.
55. [**The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie by Muriel Spark**](#): A meddling teacher is betrayed by a favourite pupil who becomes a nun.
56. [**The Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet**](#): Did the watch salesman kill the girl on the beach? If so, who heard?
57. [**Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre**](#): A historian becomes increasingly sickened by his existence, but decides to muddle on.

58. [**The Rabbit books by John Updike**](#): A former high school basketball star is unsatisfied by marriage, fatherhood and sales jobs.
59. [**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain**](#): A boy and a runaway slave set sail on the Mississippi, away from Antebellum "civilisation."
60. [**The Hound of the Baskervilles by Arthur Conan Doyle**](#): A drug addict chases a ghostly dog across the midnight moors.
61. [**The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton**](#): Lily Bart craves luxury too much to marry for love. Scandal and sleeping pills ensue.
62. [**Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe**](#): A Nigerian yam farmer's local leadership is shaken by accidental death and a missionary's arrival.
63. [**The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald**](#): A mysterious millionaire's love for a woman with "a voice full of money" gets him in trouble.
64. [**The Warden by Anthony Trollope**](#): "Of all novelists in any country, Trollope best understands the role of money," said WH Auden.
65. [**Les Miserables by Victor Hugo**](#): An ex-convict struggles to become a force for good, but it ends badly.
66. [**Lucky Jim by Kingsley Amis**](#): An uncommitted history lecturer clashes with his pompous boss, gets drunk and gets the girl.
67. [**The Big Sleep by Raymond Chandler**](#): "Dead men are heavier than broken hearts" in this hardboiled crime noir.
68. [**Clarissa by Samuel Richardson**](#): Epistolary adventure whose heroine's bodice is savagely unlaced by the brothel-keeping Robert Lovelace.
69. [**A Dance to the Music of Time by Anthony Powell**](#): Twelve-book saga whose most celebrated character wears "the wrong kind of overcoat."
70. [**Suite Francaise by Irene Nemirovsky**](#): Published 60 years after their author was gassed, these two novellas portray city and village life in Nazi-occupied France.
71. [**Atonement by Ian McEwan**](#): Puts the "c" word in the classic English country house novel.
72. [**Life: a User's Manual by Georges Perec**](#): The jigsaw puzzle of lives in a Parisian apartment block. Plus empty rooms.
73. [**Tom Jones by Henry Fielding**](#): Thigh-thwacking yarn of a foundling boy sewing his wild oats before marrying the girl next door.
74. [**Frankenstein by Mary Shelley**](#): Human endeavours "to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" have tragic consequences.
75. [**Cranford by Elizabeth Gaskell**](#): Northern villagers turn their bonnets against the social changes accompanying the industrial revolution.
76. [**The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins**](#): Hailed by TS Eliot as "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels."
77. [**Ulysses by James Joyce**](#): Modernist masterpiece reworking of Homer with humour. Contains one of the longest "sentences" in English literature: 4,391 words.
78. [**Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert**](#): Buying the lies of romance novels leads a provincial doctor's wife to an agonising end.
79. [**A Passage to India by EM Forster**](#): A false accusation exposes the racist oppression of British rule in India.
80. [**1984 by George Orwell**](#): In which Big Brother is even more sinister than the TV series it inspired.

81. [Tristram Shandy by Laurence Sterne](#): Samuel Johnson thought Sterne's bawdy, experimental novel was too odd to last. Pah!
82. [The War of the Worlds by HG Wells](#): Bloodsucking Martian invaders are wiped out by a dose of the sniffles.
83. [Scoop by Evelyn Waugh](#): Waugh based the hapless junior reporter in this journalistic farce on former Telegraph editor Bill Deedes.
84. [Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy](#): Sexual double standards are held up to the cold, Wessex light in this rural tragedy.
85. [Brighton Rock by Graham Greene](#): A seaside sociopath mucks up murder and marriage in Greene's novel.
86. [The Code of the Woosters by PG Wodehouse](#): A scrape-prone toff and pals are suavely manipulated by his gentleman's gentleman.
87. [Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte](#): Out on the winding, windy moors Cathy and Heathcliff become each other's "souls." Then he leaves.
88. [David Copperfield by Charles Dickens](#): Debt and deception in Dickens's semi-autobiographical Bildungsroman crammed with cads, creeps and capital fellows.
89. [Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe](#): A slave trader is shipwrecked but finds God, and a native to convert, on a desert island.
90. [Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen](#): Every proud posh boy deserves a bratty, prejudiced girl.
91. [Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes](#): Picaresque tale about quinquagenarian gent on a skinny horse tilting at windmills.
92. [Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf](#): Septimus's suicide doesn't spoil our heroine's stream-of-consciousness party.
93. [Disgrace by JM Coetzee](#): An English professor in post-apartheid South Africa loses everything after seducing a student.
94. [Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte](#): Poor and obscure and plain as she is, Mr. Rochester wants to marry her. Illegally.
95. [In Search of Lost Time by Marcel Proust](#): Seven-volume meditation on memory, featuring literature's most celebrated lemon cake.
96. [Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad](#): "The conquest of the earth," said Conrad, "is not a pretty thing."
97. [The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James](#): An American heiress in Europe "affronts her destiny" by marrying an adulterous egoist.
98. [Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy](#): Tolstoy's doomed adulteress grew from a daydream of "a bare exquisite aristocratic elbow."
99. [Moby Dick by Herman Melville](#): Monomaniacal Captain Ahab seeks vengeance on the white whale that ate his leg.
100. [Middlemarch by George Eliot](#): "One of the few English novels written for grown-up people," said Virginia Woolf.