

Recommended Reading

*"They're on'y three book in th' wurruld worth readin',
--Shakespeare, th' Bible, an' Mike Ahearn's histhry iv Chicago."
-- Mr. Dooley*

From the Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies:

In the Fall of 1985, the instructional staff of the Department of English at the University of Kansas was informally asked to submit lists of about five or six books which they might wish that their undergraduate students had read prior to enrolling in their courses. It was understood that these students were not necessarily English majors, nor did the books have to be categorized as "classics" or "Great Books." The responses were tabulated, printed up, and distributed, on request, around the state. This list was revised slightly in 1987, in anticipation of the October English Conference, and again in the Spring of 1997, and is presented here. The first, shorter list consists of those works most often mentioned; the second list contains other works mentioned, with some deletions and revisions. A somewhat inchoate "General Reading" list has been eliminated.

We recommend them to teachers and their college-preparatory students for some systematic sampling, but with the following caveats:

1. This is not meant to be a magic list that will guarantee success at the University of Kansas, or anywhere else.
2. This is not intended to be a definitive list. We are not saying that a reading of these works and nothing else will make a student an educated person.
3. This list is not meant to have universal appeal. Most students will find at least some of it hard going. They may have to put a book down and come back to it later--sometimes much later, and just possibly not at all! Some of these books may be read several times, and all of them improve with rereading. But the point is, that the list will affect each interested student differently.
4. Nothing will replace the entire, unabridged work. The substitution of Reader's Digest abridgements and outlines like Cliff's Notes should be treated as abominations. Still, many paperback editions of entire works are widely available with helpful notes and introductions.
5. Students should be encouraged to pursue reading interests of their own, whether or not these interests are based on this list. This wider reading can include newspapers, magazines, current best-sellers, and "light summer reading." The fact is that almost all young people do not read nearly enough, maybe because outside of English classes it is not encouraged either by precept or example.
6. Our experience is that young people are woefully ignorant of the specific contents of the Bible, classical mythology (each a fertile source of literary allusion), American history, and even of contemporary culture, broadly interpreted, apart from television shows and popular music lyrics. We don't pretend to know why this is so, or how to reverse this trend, but any efforts you (i.e. teachers) can exert to alter this state of affairs would be much appreciated.

With these qualifications in mind, then, we pass these recommended works on to you. It is not an educational panacea, but rather a selection of works which we think you will find interesting.

I. Works Most Frequently Mentioned

- The Bible (The so-called "King James Version" is the traditional "literary" one, but such modern translations as the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, or the Jerusalem Bible are certainly acceptable. Specific books of the Bible mentioned are Genesis, Exodus, Judges, I & II Samuel, Job, Jonah, selected Psalms, and the Gospels, particularly Mark.)
- Homer, Iliad and Odyssey (recommended translations are those by Robert Fitzgerald and Richmond Lattimore.)
- Selected plays of Sophocles, especially Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone (tr. By Robert Fitzgerald).
- A collection or compendium of classical mythology (Edith Hamilton's Mythology and Thomas Keightley's collection are both good. Robert Graves' collection makes exciting reading, but his interpretations have been questioned.)
- William Shakespeare, selected plays (Those recommended specifically are Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, As You Like It, Midsummer Night's Dream, Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night, Tempest, Richard II, Henry IV, Part I. One respondent specified "any play besides Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello." Students should note particularly that we recommend here the entire play, in each instance, not a cut version or abridgement.)
- Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, and/or Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre.
- Charles Dickens, a novel--probably David Copperfield or Great Expectations or Oliver Twist or --and again the student is warned away from abridgements.
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (also short stories).
- Henry David Thoreau, Walden (also "Civil Disobedience").
- Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (also Tom Sawyer, if you (i.e. students) haven't already read it).
- Thomas Hardy, a novel, probably Far from the Madding Crowd, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, or Return of the Native.
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (also short stories).
- Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, The Old Man and the Sea, (also short stories).

II. Other Works Mentioned

Pre-History and Classical Antiquity

- Selected plays of Aeschylus
- Selected plays of Euripides
- Virgil, Aeneid (tr. by Robert Fitzgerald or Allen Mandelbaum).
- Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy; or Zeller's Outline of the History of Greek Philosophy.

- The Arabian Nights (especially Sinbad, Ali Baba, Aladdin).
- Grimm's Fairy Tales; or Keightley's Fairy Mythology.

Middle Ages and Renaissance

- Dante The Divine Comedy, especially the Inferno (tr. By John Ciardi or Allen Mandelbaum).
- Chaucer, The Caterbury Tales (The Middle English text makes for difficult reading, but most college-level editions have handy and helpful glossaries and notes).
- Cervantes, Don Quixote (Samuel Putnam's translation is as good as any).
- Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, Book I
- Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus.
- Ben Jonson, Volpone.
- John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi.
- John Milton, selected sonnets, Paradise Lost (Book I for starters), Areopagitica.

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

- John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress, Book I.
- A novel by Daniel Defoe, probably Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders.
- Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels.
- A novel by Henry Fielding, probably Tom Jones.
- Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography (and one respondent added, "Some authentic historical documents, like Lewis and Clark's Journals, Francis Parkman, etc.")
- Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights
- William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience.

Nineteenth Century

- A novel by Jane Austen, probably Pride and Prejudice.
- Lord Byron, Don Juan.
- Thomas Carlyle, Heroes and Hero Worship.
- Kate Chopin, The Awakening
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.
- Emily Dickinson, the Final Harvest poems.
- Fyodor Dostoyevski, Crime and Punishment (tr. by David Magarshack) and/or Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace (tr. by the Maudes). The latter, though a "block-buster," is probably more manageable than the former.
- A novel by George Eliot, probably Middlemarch or Adam Bede (several respondents warned against including Silas Marner).
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Essays, especially "Self-Reliance," "American Scholar."
- Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (tr. By Francis Steegmuller; inclusion here has been questioned by some respondents).
- Henrik Ibsen, A Doll's House.
- Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.
- John Keats, selected poetry, especially "Eve of St. Agnes," the odes, the sonnets.

- Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.
- Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* or *Typee*.
- Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (or better, one of the Scottish novels, such as *The Heart of Midlothian*).
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*.
- William Wordsworth, selected poetry (especially "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and others.)

Twentieth Century and Modern Times

- James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.
- Kurt Anderson, *The Real Thing*.
- Thomas Berger, *Little Big Man*.
- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*; also short stories.
- Pearl S. Buck, *Rainbow*.
- Willa Cather, *O Pioneers*, *My Antonia*.
- Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, *Nigger of the "Narcissus"*
- Robert Cormier, *The Chocolate War*.
- Isak Dinesen, *Out of Africa* (perhaps one should be careful about the influence of the film upon one's understanding of the book).
- William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished*, *Intruder in the Dust*.
- Robert Frost, selected poetry.
- Nicholas Gage, *Eleni*.
- William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*.
- Robert Graves, *I, Claudius*.
- David Grubb, *The Night of the Hunter*.
- Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*.
- Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit*.
- Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter*.
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- James Joyce, *Dubliners*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
- Franz Kafka, selected short stories.
- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
- Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith*.
- *A Little Treasury of Modern Verse*.
- Carson McCullers, *Member of the Wedding*, short stories.
- Any of the books by Milton Meltzer. (This is a good place to mention outstanding books for adolescents by such writers as S. E. Hinton.)
- Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*.
- N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*.
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, *The Bluest Eye*.
- Gordon Parks, *The Learning Tree*.
- Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country*.
- Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.
- Maxine Kinston Rawlings, *The Yearling*.

- J. D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*.
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*.
- James Welch, *Fools Crow*.
- Eudora Welty, *Selected Stories*.
- Edith Wharton, *House of Mirth*, *Age of Innocence*.
- E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web*; also selected essays.
- Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
- Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *Heaven's my Destination*, *The Ides of March*. Also a play, such as *The Skin of Our Teeth*.
- Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*.
- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*.
- Richard Wright, *Native Son*.

High school students don't read nearly enough plays, beyond the mandatory Shakespeare. Therefore, we recommend in particular such contemporary playwrights as Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*; Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Eugene O'Neill, the S. S. Glencairn plays, *The Hairy Ape*, *Desire under the Elms*; William Inge, *Bus Stop* or *Come Back, Little Sheba*; Thornton Wilder, already mentioned above; August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson* or *Fences*; Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*; Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*; Sam Shepard, *True West*; and William Saroyan, *Time of Your Life*. Students should likewise make use of every opportunity to see these or any other significant dramas performed, either on the stage or on television.

Miscellaneous

- Leon Edel, *Writing Lives*.
- Louis Fischer, *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*.
- S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*.
- Strunk and White, *Elements of Style* (but take the usage dicta with a grain of salt).
- The *Harbrace Handbook*, or any college composition handbook.
- Stephen Potter, *The Complete Upmanship*.
- Woody Allen, *Getting Even*.
- P. G. Wodehouse, any of the Jeeves novels or the Mr. Mulliner stories.
- Some good modern essays (even a regular reading of *Time* or *Newsweek*--or the editorial and op-ed columns of a daily newspaper--would be useful). Particularly recommended is *The Penguin Book of Contemporary American Essays* (ed. Maureen Howard).
- A collection of contemporary short stories: in addition to such authors as Hemingway and Fitzgerald, already mentioned before, the student should be aware of significant contemporary writers who specialized in this genre--Flannery O'Connor, Tillie Olsen, Frank O'Connor, John Cheever, and John Updike, to name only a few.