



Finding a Good Read

A column to help you find intriguing books

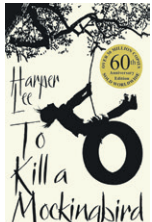
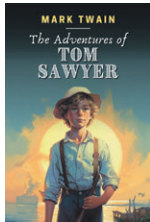
Erin

American Classics

The debate about what is, or could be, 'The Great American Novel' has raged for over 150 years. What, or who, could represent a country so big and diverse?

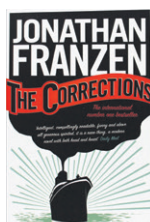
Fights with giant sea creatures; Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, small town judgement; Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, absurdist war satire; Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and a young woman's descent into mental illness; Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* show the hugely varied topics of just a few of the most famous contenders. There are so many more!

Some of the older books contain outdated, insensitive cultural depictions and racist language as used when the books were written or set, highlighting some of the complexities of the US's history.



Younger readers

Younger doesn't always mean simpler! Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* mix childhood excitement with satire. Coming-of-age traditions overlap with wider social and political issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *Little Women* (Louisa May Alcott), *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (Mildred D. Taylor), *The Outsiders* (S. E. Hinton) and *Catcher in the Rye* (J. D. Salinger).



Complex families

Following generations of families (and friends) is a clever way to show social change over time. *The Corrections* (Jonathan Franzen), *American Wife* (Curtis Sittenfeld), *The*

Dutch House (Ann Patchett) and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Jennifer Egan) all do this well.

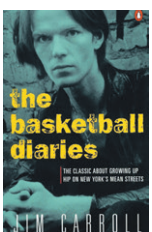
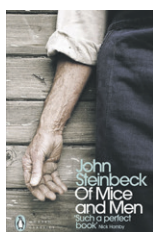


Race and immigration

Since the US declared independence, it has been known as a nation of immigrants. *Americanah* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), *Brooklyn* (Colm Toibin) and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (Ocean Vuong) examine some of those contemporary experiences.

The country's early growth had many costs - to indigenous populations and to those brought against their will to build and farm. *Killers of the Flower Moon* (David Grann) covers the murders of Osage Nation people, who were killed for their land and resources.

Uncle Tom's Cabin (Harriet Beecher Stowe), *Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison), *Between the World and Me* (Ta-Nehisi Coates) and *Beloved* (Toni Morrison) look in different ways at slavery and its ongoing impacts.



Not the American dream

Dreams of freedom, equality and opportunity brought millions to the US over the years. Not everyone's dream comes true.

Stories of poverty, addiction and violence have made great literature including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men* and *East of Eden* (John Steinbeck), and *The Colour Purple* (Alice Walker). *Revolutionary Road* (Richard Yates) depicts a quieter but devastating middle-class life of disappointment and frustration.

More hope and optimism is found in candid memoirs *The Glass Castle* (Jeannette Walls), *The Basketball Diaries*

(Jim Carroll) and *Hillbilly Elegy* (JD Vance), and in recently-celebrated *Demon Copperhead* (Barbara Kingsolver) and *Where the Crawdads Sing* (Delia Owens).

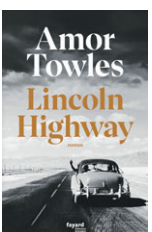
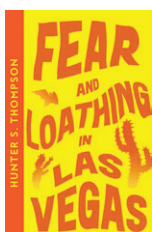
Dystopia

When real-life misery isn't enough, imagining a post-apocalyptic US can take things to a new level. *The Road* (Cormac McCarthy), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood), *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury) and *The Plot Against America* (Philip Roth) all show worlds lacking freedom and joy.



Jazz age

Remembered for Prohibition-busting parties, fabulous outfits and some mobsters, the jazz age showcased joy. *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and Damned* (F. Scott Fitzgerald) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Anita Loos) highlight the darker, funnier sides of the era. *The Sun Also Rises* (Ernest Hemingway) shows the post-War lives of the period's Paris-inspired authors.



Road trips

A road trip is a classic stereotype of American culture and a great device to take readers around the country. *On The Road* (Jack Kerouac), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Hunter S. Thompson) and *Lincoln Highway* (Amor Towles) combine scenery with countercultural reflections.

With thanks to PRG and Give a Book volunteer, Erin.

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 100 groups in over 70 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.