
A personal selection of the best books for curious minds.

FICTION

Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth Bennet is intelligent, opinionated, and determined not to marry for money. Mr Darcy is wealthy, proud, and equally determined to keep his distance. Their changing feelings for each other drive Austen's sharpest comedy of manners.

George Orwell

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Winston Smith lives under the surveillance of Big Brother in a totalitarian state where the past is rewritten daily and independent thought is a crime. Orwell's vision of the future has haunted readers since 1949.

Aldous Huxley

Brave New World

In the World State, babies are grown in bottles, citizens are kept content with a drug called soma, and the very idea of family has been abolished. When a man raised outside the system arrives, the cracks begin to show.

Yevgeny Zamyatin

We

In a future city made entirely of glass, mathematician D-503 begins a diary celebrating the perfectly rational state he lives in. Then he meets a woman named I-330, and everything he believed starts to unravel.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Great Gatsby

Narrator Nick Carraway moves to Long Island and becomes caught up in the world of his mysterious neighbour Jay Gatsby, who throws lavish parties in pursuit of Daisy Buchanan, the woman across the bay.

Muriel Spark

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

At a 1930s Edinburgh girls' school, the charismatic Miss Brodie selects a group of favourites and sets about moulding them according to her own passions. One of the girls will betray her.

J.D. Salinger

The Catcher in the Rye

Sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates the story of two days wandering New York City after being expelled from his fourth school. His voice — funny, angry, vulnerable — defined adolescent fiction.

Mikhail Bulgakov

The Master and Margarita

The Devil arrives in 1930s Moscow accompanied by a giant talking cat and proceeds to expose the corruption and cowardice of Soviet society. Interwoven with a retelling of the story of Pontius Pilate and Christ.

Joseph Conrad

Heart of Darkness

Marlow travels upriver into the Congo to find the brilliant, renegade ivory trader Kurtz. Conrad's novella about colonialism, moral darkness, and the limits of civilisation remains deeply unsettling.

E.M. Forster

A Room with a View

Young Lucy Honeychurch is torn between the conventional Cecil Vyse and the unconventional George Emerson, whom she first meets in a Florence pensione. Forster's comedy of Edwardian propriety and suppressed passion.

Kazuo Ishiguro

Never Let Me Go

Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy grow up at Hailsham, an apparently idyllic English boarding school. Only gradually do they — and the reader — come to understand the purpose for which they have been raised.

Ian McEwan

Atonement

On a hot summer day in 1935, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis witnesses something she misunderstands and makes an accusation that will change several lives forever. A novel about guilt, storytelling, and whether art can atone for real-world damage.

Andrea Levy

Small Island

In 1948, Jamaican immigrants Hortense and Gilbert arrive in London expecting the Mother Country and find something quite different. Their landlady, Queenie, has her own secrets. Told through four interlocking voices.

Khaled Hosseini

The Kite Runner

Amir and Hassan grow up together in Kabul — one the son of a wealthy man, the other the son of his servant. A childhood act of betrayal reverberates across decades and continents, from Afghanistan to America and back.

John Steinbeck

Of Mice and Men

George and Lennie, two displaced migrant workers in Depression-era California, dream of one day owning their own piece of land. Steinbeck's novella about friendship, dreams, and powerlessness.

Graham Greene

The Power and the Glory

In revolutionary Mexico, where the Church is outlawed, the last priest in the state is on the run. He drinks too much, has fathered a child, and is still the only one who can perform the sacraments.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Purple Hibiscus

Fifteen-year-old Kambili lives in a wealthy Nigerian household dominated by her father — devout, generous to others, and violent at home. A visit to her aunt's chaotic, loving household opens Kambili's eyes to a different way of living.

Albert Camus

The Outsider

Meursault, a French Algerian clerk, attends his mother's funeral, begins an affair, and kills a stranger on a beach. He is tried as much for his failure to show the expected emotions as for the killing itself.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Notes from Underground

An embittered, isolated man in St Petersburg addresses the reader directly, arguing against reason, progress, and everything the 19th century believed in. The first great novel of alienation and self-consciousness.

Franz Kafka

Metamorphosis and Other Stories

Gregor Samsa wakes one morning to find himself transformed into a giant insect. His family's reaction is as horrifying as the transformation itself. Kafka tells impossible stories in the most matter-of-fact prose.

Stefan Zweig

Chess

On an ocean liner, a world chess champion is challenged by a mysterious stranger who learned the game in extraordinary circumstances. Zweig's novella builds unbearable tension from a quiet premise.

John le Carré

Single and Single

A City of London finance house launders money from the post-Soviet underworld. When a partner is murdered, his estranged son must confront both the criminals and his own father. Le Carré at the intersection of finance and espionage.

Elizabeth Jane Howard

The Cazalet Chronicles

The Cazalet family gathers at their Sussex home in the summers of 1937 to 1947. Howard chronicles three generations of marriages, betrayals, and domestic detail with an Austenian eye for the things people don't say.

Abir Mukherjee

A Rising Man

Captain Sam Wyndham, newly arrived in 1919 Calcutta, investigates a murder that leads him through the social layers of British India — from the officer class to the nationalist movement. Crime fiction as a lens on empire.

Pat Barker

The Silence of the Girls

The story of the Iliad retold from the perspective of Briseis, the captive woman at the centre of the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. The women who were written out of the epic finally speak.

Iain Pears

An Instance of the Fingerpost

Oxford, 1663. A woman is accused of murder. Four narrators give four conflicting accounts of what happened. Pears weaves together science, religion, espionage, and philosophy in Restoration England.

Robert Harris

Pompeii

Marcus Attilius, the engineer responsible for the great aqueduct that serves the Bay of Naples, notices that the water supply is failing. It is August AD 79, and Vesuvius is about to erupt.

Hans Fallada

Alone in Berlin

Based on a true story. In 1940s Berlin, an ordinary couple — Otto and Anna Quangel — begin a quiet campaign of resistance against the Nazi regime, dropping handwritten postcards across the city.

Donna Tartt

The Secret History

Six classics students at an elite Vermont college, under the influence of a charismatic professor, commit a murder and then attempt to conceal it. Tartt reverses the whodunit: we know who did it from the start.

Toni Morrison

The Bluest Eye

Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl in 1940s Ohio, prays every night for blue eyes. Morrison's first novel examines how racism poisons self-image, told through the voices of Pecola's community.

WAR & CONFLICT

Pat Barker

Regeneration

Siegfried Sassoon, the war poet and decorated officer, is sent to Craiglockhart military hospital after making a public protest against the war. There he meets psychologist Dr Rivers — and Wilfred Owen.

Sebastian Faulks

Birdsong

Stephen Wraysford's love affair in pre-war France is followed by his descent into the trenches of the Somme. Faulks's depictions of tunnel warfare beneath no man's land are among the most powerful passages in modern fiction.

Erich Maria Remarque

All Quiet on the Western Front

A group of German schoolboys, encouraged by their teacher, volunteer for the front in 1914. What they find there bears no resemblance to what they were promised. First published in 1929, it has been banned repeatedly.

Joseph Heller

Catch-22

Captain Yossarian, a US bombardier in the Second World War, wants to stop flying missions. But there's a catch: if you're sane enough to ask to be grounded, you're sane enough to fly. Heller's comic masterwork on the logic of war.

Art Spiegelman

Maus

Spiegelman tells the story of his father's survival of the Holocaust in graphic novel form, with Jews drawn as mice and Nazis as cats. Alongside the wartime narrative runs the difficult present-day relationship between father and son.

Primo Levi

If This Is a Man

Levi's account of his year in Auschwitz, written with extraordinary clarity and restraint. He documents the camp's systematic dehumanisation while insisting on the humanity of its victims.

Tim O'Brien

The Things They Carried

A collection of linked stories about a platoon of American soldiers in Vietnam. O'Brien blurs the line between fact and fiction, asking what it means to tell a true war story.

John Hersey

Hiroshima

Originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1946, Hersey's account follows six survivors of the atomic bomb through the hours, days, and years after the explosion.

POETRY

Wilfred Owen

Collected Poems

Owen was killed one week before the Armistice in 1918. His poems — *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *Futility* — are the most powerful indictment of war in the English language.

Seamus Heaney

Selected Poems

From his early poems about rural Derry to his later meditations on language, history, and the Troubles, Heaney's work is rooted in the physical world — soil, water, iron, and stone.

Ted Hughes

Birthday Letters

Published in 1998, just before Hughes's death, these poems address his marriage to Sylvia Plath directly for the first time. A sequence that is by turns tender, anguished, and mythic.

Carol Ann Duffy

The World's Wife

Mrs Midas, Queen Herod, Mrs Lazarus, Medusa — the women behind, beside, and overlooked by famous men finally get their say. Duffy is witty, angry, and formally inventive.

Philip Larkin

The Whitsun Weddings

The title poem follows a train journey through England on a Saturday afternoon, passing wedding parties on every platform. Larkin captures the texture of post-war English life with unmatched precision.

Derek Walcott

Selected Poems

Born in Saint Lucia, educated in the English tradition, writing about the Caribbean — Walcott synthesised these influences into poetry of extraordinary richness and range. He won the Nobel Prize in 1992.

John Keats

The Complete Poems

Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, To Autumn, and La Belle Dame sans Merci — all written before Keats died of tuberculosis at twenty-five. His command of sound and sensory detail is unsurpassed.

Kae Tempest

Brand New Ancients

A book-length narrative poem about ordinary South London lives told in the register of Greek myth. Tempest performed it live to sold-out audiences before it was published. Urgent, contemporary, and deeply felt.

Frank O'Hara

Lunch Poems

Poems written on O'Hara's lunch breaks in Manhattan, full of the sights, sounds, and people of New York in the 1950s and 60s. Casual in tone, precise in observation, and joyful.

NON-FICTION & ESSAYS

George Orwell

Down and Out in Paris and London

Orwell lived as a plongeur in Parisian restaurant kitchens and as a tramp in London doss-houses, then wrote about it. A raw, unsentimental account of poverty in two great cities.

George Orwell

Politics and the English Language

Orwell's 1946 essay argues that sloppy language enables sloppy thinking, and that political writing is designed to make lies sound truthful. Essential reading for anyone who writes.

Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own

Based on two lectures given at Cambridge in 1928, Woolf's extended essay argues that women need financial independence and private space in order to write. A founding text of feminist literary criticism.

James Baldwin

Notes of a Native Son

Baldwin's first collection of essays, published in 1955, addresses race in America with the force of a novelist and the cadence of a preacher. His essay on his father's death is one of the finest in American literature.

Christopher Hitchens

Letters to a Young Contrarian

Addressed to a fictional student, Hitchens offers advice on thinking independently, resisting consensus, and arguing effectively. Part polemic, part instruction manual for intellectual courage.

Zadie Smith

Changing My Mind

Essays on E.M. Forster, Kafka, Hollywood films, her father's death, and the experience of writing. Smith thinks on the page with an honesty and range that make each essay feel like a conversation.

Sathnam Sanghera

Empireland

Sanghera examines how the British Empire continues to shape modern Britain — from architecture and language to attitudes about race. Drawing on his own family history, the book is personal, accessible, and provocative.

Joshua Foer

Moonwalking with Einstein

Foer, a science journalist, covers the US Memory Championship and ends up competing in it. Along the way, he explores the history and science of memory, and what it means to remember.

Ryszard Kapuściński

The Shadow of the Sun

Twenty-five years of Kapuściński's reporting from across Africa, from coups in Nigeria to travels in the Sahara. Part journalism, part travel writing, part meditation on the continent.

NATURE WRITING

Robert Macfarlane

The Wild Places

Macfarlane journeys to the wildest landscapes of Britain and Ireland — a Cumbrian valley, a Hebridean island, an Essex saltmarsh — asking whether true wildness still exists in a crowded country.

Roger Deakin

Waterlog

Deakin set out to swim through Britain, crossing rivers, lakes, lidos, and the sea. His account of the journey is a celebration of water, landscape, and the particular freedom of swimming outdoors.

J.A. Baker

The Peregrine

Over a single winter in the Essex countryside, Baker followed peregrine falcons almost daily, recording their hunts, flights, and kills. His prose is dense with observation and strangely exhilarating.

Nan Shepherd

The Living Mountain

Written in the 1940s but not published until 1977, Shepherd's account of walking in the Cairngorms is less about reaching the summit than about the experience of being in the mountain — its water, light, air, and rock.

Henry David Thoreau

Walden

In 1845, Thoreau built a cabin by Walden Pond in Massachusetts and spent two years living simply. His account of the experiment is part nature journal, part philosophical argument for deliberate, examined living.

BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Maya Angelou

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Angelou's account of her childhood in the American South — raised by her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, she faces racism, displacement, and trauma, but also finds poetry, community, and her own voice.

Barack Obama

Dreams from My Father

Written before he entered politics, Obama's memoir traces his search for identity — from his childhood in Hawaii, to his work as a community organiser in Chicago, to a journey to meet his Kenyan family.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

We Should All Be Feminists

Adapted from Adichie's TEDx talk, this short essay draws on her own experience growing up in Nigeria to argue that feminism matters for everyone — men included — and to show how gender expectations limit us all.

Primo Levi

The Periodic Table

Twenty-one chapters, each named after a chemical element, weaving together Levi's life as a chemist, his experiences as an Italian Jew under fascism, and his time in Auschwitz.

Laurie Lee

As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning

In 1934, the nineteen-year-old Lee walked from his Cotswold village to London, then sailed to Spain, where he lived by playing his violin in the streets — until the Spanish Civil War overtook him.

Alexandra Fuller

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight

Fuller grew up on farms in Rhodesia, Malawi, and Zambia during the wars and upheavals of the 1970s and 80s. A memoir of Africa that is unflinching about her family and deeply attentive to the landscape.

Edmund de Waal

The Hare with Amber Eyes

De Waal, a ceramicist, inherits a collection of 264 Japanese netsuke (miniature carvings) and traces their journey from 19th-century Paris to Vienna and Tokyo, through war, occupation, and survival.

Helen Macdonald

H is for Hawk

After her father's sudden death, Macdonald trains a goshawk — one of the most difficult birds to work with — and finds herself drawn into the story of T.H. White, who tried the same thing and failed.

Malala Yousafzai

I Am Malala

Malala grew up in Pakistan's Swat Valley and campaigned for girls' education under Taliban rule. In 2012, a Taliban gunman shot her on the school bus. She survived and became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Jon Krakauer

Into the Wild

In 1992, Chris McCandless abandoned his possessions, gave his savings to charity, and walked into the Alaskan bush. His decomposed body was found four months later. Krakauer retraces his journey and tries to understand why.

Svetlana Alexievich

Voices from Chernobyl

Oral testimonies from survivors of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster — firefighters, evacuees, widows, scientists, and soldiers. Alexievich lets the witnesses speak in their own words.

Katherine Boo

Behind the Beautiful Forevers

Boo spent three years in Annawadi, a Mumbai slum beside the international airport, documenting the lives of its residents. Narrative non-fiction that reads like a novel but is entirely reported.

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