American Literature

Many of the texts on this list are available in the following anthologies, as are many suitable substitutes for the readings:


Texts or authors with asterisks beside their names must be included in any modified list. For purposes of substitutions to the list, consider three poets, four-five short stories or essays, or three plays the equivalent of one book.

We encourage students to read the relevant criticism before the primary texts. The criticism aims to provide a basic knowledge of the periods and genres of American literary history, an introduction to different theoretical approaches to American literature, and an introduction to some of the key paradigm shifts and controversies in American literary criticism. Many of the works will serve more than one function, i.e., Eve Sedgwick’s criticism of Billy Budd stands as both an example of a queer critical approach to American literature and a challenge to more traditional accounts of Melville and the American Renaissance.

Criticism: Classic Criticism/History of American Literary Criticism


2. Fiedler, Leslie. “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey” Partisan Review (1948)


Criticism: Colonial and Early National Period


Criticism: Mid-Nineteenth Century


**Criticism: Realism and Naturalism**


**Criticism: Modernism**


**Criticism: Postmodernism**


**Criticism: African-American Literature and Criticism**


**Criticism: Ethnic Literature**


**Criticism: U.S. Imperialism**

Criticism: Transnationalism and Globalization


Criticism: Period and Genre Overviews


Colonial Literature


47. de Crevecoeur, J. Hector St. John. Letters from an American Farmer (1782)

48. de Vaca, Alvar Nunez Cabeza. Excerpts from Relation of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (1542) in Norton or Heath anthologies

49. Edwards, Jonathan. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (delivered 1741)

50. Equiano, Olaudah. Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)

51. Occom, Samson. “A Short Narrative of My Life” (written 1768, 1st publ. 1982)

52. Rowlandson, Mary. A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682)

53. Wheatley, Phillis. “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773), “To His Excellency General Washington” (1776)

54. Winthrop, John. “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)
Early National to Mid-Nineteenth Century


56. Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Pioneers* (1823) or *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)


59. Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)


63. Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

64. Jefferson, Thomas. “Declaration of Independence” (1776)

65. *Melville, Herman.* *Moby Dick* (1851); *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1891) or “Benito Cereno” (1855)


68. Sedgwick, Catherine Maria. *Hope Leslie* (1827)

69. Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852-3)


71. Tyler, Royall. *The Contrast* (1787)


Realist-Modernist Period


75. Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* (1913) or *My Ántonia* (1918)
76. Chesnutt, Charles. Marrow of Tradition (1901) and “The Goophered Grapevine” (1887)

77. Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening (1899)

78. Crane, Hart. From The Bridge (1930); “To Brooklyn Bridge,” “Ave Maria,” “The Tunnel,” “Atlantis”

79. Crane, Stephen. Maggie (1893)


82. Dreiser, Theodore. *Sister Carrie (1900)

83. Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)


85. Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man (1947)

86. *Faulkner, William. Any one of the following: The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Light in August (1932), Absalom, Absalom! (1936)


89. Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)


91. *Hemingway, Ernest. The Sun Also Rises (1926); “Big Two-Hearted River,” Parts 1 & 2 (1924) or “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927)

92. Howells, William Dean. The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885)


94. Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

95. *James, Henry. Portrait of a Lady (1881)

96. Jewett, Sarah Orne. The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896)

97. Larsen, Nella. Passing (1929)


100.  *Pound, Ezra. “The Seafarer” (1911), “Portrait d’une Femme” (1912), “In a Station of the Metro” (1913), The Pisan Cantos (1948); Homage to Sextus Propertius (1919) or Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920)


102.  Steinbeck, John. Grapes of Wrath (1939)


104.  Toomer, Jean. Cane (1923)

105.  Turner, Frederick Jackson. Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893)

106.  Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

107.  Washington, Booker T. *Up from Slavery* (1901)

108.  *Wharton, Edith. The House of Mirth* (1905) or *Custom of the Country* (1913)

109.  Williams, Tennessee. Any one of the following: *Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Glass Menagerie* (1944)


111.  Wright, Richard. *Native Son* (1940)

**Contemporary Literature**


121. Kingston, Maxine Hong. Woman Warrior (1976)
129. O’Connor, Flannery. “Good Country People” (1955) and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (1953)
132. Reed, Ishmael. Mumbo Jumbo (1972) or Flight to Canada (1976)
140. Wilson, August. Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (1982)