



National Council of  
Teachers of English®

## Bringing the Great American Read into the Classroom

In April, PBS released a list of America's 100 most-loved books (based on popular vote) as part of [The Great American Read](#). NCTE and ReadWriteThink.org have resources related to many titles on the list. Be sure to check them out for inspiration on how to bring the Great American Read into your classroom.

### ***1984* by George Orwell**

In [this mini-lesson](#), which could be a great introduction or follow-up to the novel, students explore the dystopian characteristics and symbols presented in the "1984" Macintosh commercial and analyze the comments that it makes about contemporary society.

### ***A Separate Peace* by John Knowles**

The author of "[A Separate Peace: The Fall from Innocence](#)" discusses the three sets of symbols which he thinks provide the basic structure of the novel.

### ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain**

In [this lesson](#), students analyze similarities and differences among depictions of slavery in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, and nineteenth-century photographs of slaves. Students formulate their analysis of the role of art and fiction, and attempt to reliably reflect social ills, in a final essay.

### **Alex Cross Mysteries (Series) by James Patterson**

Read more about James Patterson's route to writing in [his testimonial](#) for the National Day on Writing.

### ***Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll**

Lewis Carroll is the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, best known as the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. *Alice in Wonderland* was written to entertain Alice Liddell, the daughter of a friend. [Learn more](#) from ReadWriteThink.org.

### ***Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery**

["Let's Hear It for the Girls: Resilient and Remarkable Women in Today's YA Literature"](#) looks at books with female characters. The women represented in the literary worlds of these novels are not limited to archetypes or stereotypes; they are fully developed and entertaining.

### ***Beloved* by Toni Morrison**

In ["More Yesterday than Anybody"—A Beloved Project](#), a recent blog post from the Engage Now! Secondary Section blog series, Joshua Cabat shares a lesson plan in which students connect history and literature by researching primary source documents.

### ***Bless Me Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya**

Adolescent readers may already be familiar with the important roles mentors play in their own lives and in some narratives and movies. Tap into teen and preteen readers' interest in adolescent-mentor relationships with [these book recommendations](#) from ReadWriteThink.org.

### ***The Call of the Wild* by Jack London**

The author of "[Answering the Call of the Wild](#)" shares how a comic version of *The Call of the Wild* allowed him to be "coerced into a close encounter with 'serious literature.'"

### ***The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger**

In "[Playlist for Holden: Character Analysis with Music and Lyrics](#)," students compile a playlist of 10 songs representing a literary character and explain their choices based on the book's dialogue, plot, conflict, and resolution.

### ***Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White**

In the lesson plan "[Charlotte is Wise, Patient, and Caring: Adjectives and Character Traits](#)," students find examples of adjectives in a shared reading. Then students "become" major characters in a book and describe themselves and other characters, using powerful adjectives.

### ***The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah**

"To reflect on the experiences of William Shakespeare's Juliet, Sandra Cisneros's Esperanza, or Sister Souljah's Winter is to reflect on self." Read more in [Writing in the Dialogical Classroom](#).

### ***The Color Purple* by Alice Walker**

Carol Jago offers readers a [handy guide](#) for bringing this celebrated author's work into the classroom, including biographical information, ideas for literature circles using Walker's short stories, sample writing lessons using Walker's poems, suggestions for teaching *The Color Purple*, and a wealth of resources for further investigation of Alice Walker and her work.

### ***Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley**

["Developing the Hospitable Imagination through Disruption of Stereotypical Representations"](#) uses *Frankenstein* to explain a pedagogical approach to consider ways in which the curriculum can explicitly disrupt one-dimensional, stereotypical depictions of the other.

### ***Ghost* by Jason Reynolds**

In [this episode](#) of the *Voices from the Middle* podcast, the teacher panelists speak with author Jason Reynolds. The conversation covers topics such as Jason's writing process with Brendan Kiely, social media's impact on the families of the victims of police brutality, breaking stereotypes in YA, as well as the ways in which schools can foster spaces for teens to feel safe and cared for.

### ***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**

Using *The Giver*, students discuss the importance recorded history. This provides context for descriptive writing of students' own history in [a lesson](#) that integrates personal writing, research, and literary response.

### ***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck**

Using *The Grapes of Wrath* as a backdrop, students conduct research on issues that the novel addresses, publishing their findings in a multigenre museum exhibit. [Learn more.](#)

### ***Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens**

Students immerse themselves in a character in this archived [Classroom Notes Plus lesson](#) on Dickens's *Great Expectations*, including creating character dossiers and comparing novel and film versions.

### ***The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

In this [NCTE text](#), veteran high school English teacher David Dowling demonstrates how teachers can help students connect *The Great Gatsby* to the value systems of the twenty-first century, offering active reading and thinking strategies designed to enhance higher-level thinking and personal responses to fiction.

In [this lesson plan](#), students explore *The Great Gatsby's* allusion to art and its use of visual imagery and conclude their study by designing their own cover for the novel.

### ***Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift**

Use Dr. Seuss's *The Butter Battle Book* as an [accessible introduction to satire](#). Reading, discussing, and researching this picture book paves the way for a deeper understanding of *Gulliver's Travels*.

### ***The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood**

Students work in small groups to examine Margaret Atwood's use of and observations about language in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Through [this activity](#), students discover and articulate overarching thematic trends in the book and then extend their observations about official or political language to examples from their own world.

### **Harry Potter (Series) by J.K. Rowling**

The mayhem at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry inspires fun and valuable ELA activities in ["Celebrating Multiple Literacies with Harry Potter"](#) from *English Journal*.

### ***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

In [this article](#) from *English Journal*, the author shares activities developed with a focus on the theme of alienation and derived identity, using the following works: Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and a Zora Neale Hurston short story, "Sweat."

### **The Hunger Games (Series) by Suzanne Collins**

With movie versions of *The Hunger Games* out, Suzanne Collins' story of a dystopian world where children are forced to fight to the death on live television is reaching an even broader audience. Tune in to [this podcast episode](#) to hear about the seeds for *The Hunger Games* story, themes that distinguish the series as an important work of literature, and what the books have to offer teen readers.

### ***Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison**

The vintage *English Journal* article [“Ellison’s Ambitious Scope in \*Invisible Man\*”](#) investigates the epic qualities of this novel.

### ***Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë**

As part of their study of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, students read selected sections of the novel closely and compare their representation in the text to representations in the PBS Masterpiece adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. They use the concepts of time/pacing, character, and theme to focus their analysis and to plan an adaptation of a scene of their choice. [Learn more.](#)

### ***The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan**

[Amy Tan in the Classroom: “The art of invisible strength”](#) offers high school teachers an activity-based approach to teaching the works of Amy Tan, especially *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Opposite of Fate*.

### ***The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

[“Breaking Down Literature Boxes While Traveling with the \*Little Prince\*”](#) shares how labels on literature restrict our ability to offer students opportunities to encounter texts that may seem to fall “outside” the accepted curriculum, and as a result, we may miss the chance to introduce or reintroduce our students to the precise texts they need at the exact moments that they need them.

### ***Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott**

Introduce students to fundamental ideas of critical literacy through [a reading and critical analysis](#) of two pieces of literature from the 1800s, focusing on each author’s intent and intended audience. Students first read and discuss two chapters from a story by Louisa May Alcott. Each student then chooses a literary piece for individual analysis from the online archives of a popular magazine from that era. After reading and studying the two selections, students write an essay in which they compare each author’s purpose and voice.

### ***Looking for Alaska* by John Green**

Though John Green is too humble to say it, he’s one of the best authors writing for teens today. In the novels he’s written so far, John provides readers with smart characters, humorous situations, and deeply philosophical themes. Tune in to [this podcast episode](#) from ReadWriteThink.org to hear John discuss why he writes for teens, what he believes readers can gain from their English classes, and some of the thinking behind his books.

### ***The Lord of the Rings* (Series) by J.R.R. Tolkien**

In [this activity](#) from ReadWriteThink.org, students compare the film versions of *The Lord of the Rings* and Tolkien’s novels. Students then imagine the filming of a scene in a current novel that they are reading.

### ***Moby Dick* by Herman Melville**

In [this article](#) from *English Journal*, William David Ross, Alyce Hunter, and Leon Chazanow describe a unique high school literary event: an all-day read-aloud of *Moby Dick*, organized and run by the students. The authors discuss the challenges and benefits of undertaking such a project.

### ***One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Márquez**

One of the most popular Latin American authors, García Márquez was raised by his grandparents in a house in Colombia which was always overflowing with relatives and stories. His novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is known as a quintessential use of magical realism. [Learn more here.](#)

### ***The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton**

[Engaging American Novels: Lessons from the Classroom](#) provides educators with specific lessons written by classroom teachers who have successfully taught each of the 10 novels featured in the book, including *The Outsiders*.

### ***Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen**

In [this article](#) from *College English*, Arthur E. Walzer looks at the role rhetoric and gender play in Jane Austen's works.

### ***Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse**

From *English Journal*: To encourage creative thinking, high school teacher Kelly Courtney-Smith asked her students for creative responses to *Siddhartha*, using a technique she learned from coauthor Michael Angelotti. Students painted or wrote poems interpreting their reading, then responded to the creations of their classmates. [Read the full article here.](#)

### ***The Sirens of Titan* by Kurt Vonnegut**

["The Pros and Cons of Discussion"](#) has students work in groups to answer the question, "Are people equal?," analyzing all sides of the response, forming a consensus, and presenting it to the class. Students then read "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and use supporting details to complete another discussion web that looks at whether people are equal in the story.

### ***The Stand* by Stephen King**

In [this interview](#) with Stephen King, he shares his thoughts on writing, reading, stories, and more.

### ***The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway**

In [this article](#) from *College English*, Gay Wilentz examines anti-semitism as a thematic device in *The Sun Also Rises*.

### ***Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston**

[This book from NCTE](#) offers a practical approach to Hurston using a range of student-centered activities for teaching Hurston's nonfiction, short stories, and the print and film versions of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

### ***Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe**

["Things Come Together with Things Fall Apart"](#) states that the work of Chinua Achebe is a provocative illustration of tragedy. The bonus accompanying this work is that it allows a class to engage in a mini-lesson on the history of the colonization of Africa, specifically of Nigeria, and provides a look at a culture unfamiliar to Westerners.

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**

[This book](#) examines ways of engaging students as they study Harper Lee's novel. Included are collaborative learning, discussion, writing, and inquiry-based projects as well as activities related to the film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**The Twilight Saga (Series) by Stephenie Meyer**

Using the character of Edward Cullen from the Twilight series, [this lesson](#) introduces the Byronic hero and asks students to compare the Byronic hero to the traditional hero and villain.

***War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy**

["Classics Reconsidered: Tolstoy in the Middle School Classroom"](#) argues that classic authors can and should still be kept at the center of the literature curricula in the middle school, and uses Leo Tolstoy as an example to point out works that are especially appropriate for early middle school readers, later middle schoolers of average reading ability, and the most able middle school readers.

***Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë**

This [vintage article](#) from *English Journal* provides an analysis with the sources of the novel's "extraordinary force."