

## Spring '24 Classic Collection Development

### *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* at the request of her publisher, who wanted a book for girls. Alcott had an ambivalent relationship with what she called “moral pap for the young.” She drew on her own childhood experiences and found that she and her sisters had gone through much of what the four March sisters experienced in their lives.

Femininity is the most obvious motif in *Little Women*. The book’s title has been the subject of rigorous and contradictory interpretations. This coming-of-age novel was later adapted numerous times for television, cinema, theater, and even musicals and operas. *Little Women* has inspired several other literary retellings by various authors.

### *Pride & Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Austen's Regency-era novel about life, liberty, and bonnets is one of world literature's most beloved classic books. First published in 1813, the book follows Elizabeth Bennet's character development. A serious situation can be filled with humor and comedy.

*Pride and Prejudice* has spawned numerous adaptations for movies and literary works. Jane Austen had a keen eye for social change, making this book one of the most detailed sources for sociological studies of early nineteenth-century British society.

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

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a classic novel by Zora Neale Hurston. This book soon became one of the leading feminist voices in American literature. The story revolves around a woman who refuses to live in sorrow, bitterness, fear, or foolish romantic dreams.

The language is poetic and powerful, and the storyline is profound and compelling with memorable, well-developed characters. Hurston wrote several influential books, though *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is perhaps her most memorable.

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

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the most successful coming-of-age novels in contemporary literature, which gained instant popularity. Harper Lee’s masterpiece remains a widely read classic book in the US.

With numerous parallel storylines, profound themes, and a genuinely enchanting narrative, you will undoubtedly experience the joy of reading a classic novel. Harper Lee won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and a handful of other notable awards.

### *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

*Great Expectations* is one of the greatest novels written in the Victorian era. Charles Dickens tells the life story of an orphan boy named Pip Pirrip, adopted by a poor family in England. The book inspired many writers and novelists and was adapted more than 30 times for TV shows, movies, and theater scripts.

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

The Great Gatsby is a 1925 novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald set in the vibrant backdrop of the Jazz Age in New York City. It took a decade for this classic book to find its place among readers, and now, it has stood the test of time after a century.

The Great Gatsby explores themes of life and death, making this masterpiece one of the most outstanding works of contemporary prose.

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

Books that revolve around a historical event run the risk of being forgotten after some time. John Steinbeck, however, succeeded in portraying the bitterness of the Great Depression decade with a timeless finesse.

The book won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and was cited as one of his most influential works when Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962.

### *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

Today, Frankenstein's name is more associated with the numerous film adaptations than with Mary Shelley's 1818 novel. But there is no doubt about Mary Shelley's profound influence on the evolution of Gothic horror and science fiction.

Frankenstein tells the story of a young man, Victor Frankenstein, who creates an intelligent creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment.

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

One Hundred Years of Solitude, a classic novel by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez is an exemplary work of magical realism. The book is a truly fascinating story about seven generations of the Buendía family in the town of Macondo.

William Kennedy in the New York Times Book Review called One Hundred Years of Solitude "the first piece of literature since the Book of Genesis that should be required reading for the entire human race."

### *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

When Jane Eyre was published under the pseudonym "Currer Bell" on October 16, 1847, many didn't know that the author was a woman. The psychological perspective and intimate first-person narrative fundamentally revolutionized prose fiction.

Brontë struggled with the vicissitudes of being a woman in Victorian English society and experienced firsthand the challenges an independent, intellectual woman faces. Jane Eyre is considered by many to be the first great feminist novel.

### *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopian social science fiction novel that describes a society terrorized by a totalitarian ideology. George Orwell had a brilliant and mind-blowing instinct in predicting the future, resulting from his deep understanding of social and political trends.

In addition to its literary influence, Nineteen Eighty-Four is also a social reflection on the dangers of the ever-growing dehumanization in modern society.

### *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

*Invisible Man* is a groundbreaking novel published by Random House shortly after World War II. This book was the only novel Ralph Ellison published during his lifetime.

The nameless narrator of *Invisible Man* symbolizes many intelligent young African Americans in the early twentieth century struggling to find their African American identity, to be recognized in a social hierarchy dominated by whites.

### *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's 1958 debut novel depicts pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and the British invasion in the late 19th century. The critically acclaimed African Trilogy begins with *Things Fall Apart*, the first of three novels by Chinua Achebe.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe masterfully portrays the discrepancy between African norms, values, beliefs, and traditions and the Christianity that came to Africa during colonization.

### *White Fang* by Jack London

*White Fang* is the story of a half-dog, half-wolf becoming domesticated. The book first appeared as a serialized novel in *Outing* magazine and was then published in book form in October 1906. *White Fang* is a companion piece to London's best-known work, *The Call of the Wild*, one of the most profound and moving allegorical tales.

Jack London was a prolific writer, a social activist, and an international celebrity, well-known and quite influential in his generation.

### *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

Being a Ghost Story of Christmas, commonly known as *A Christmas Carol*, is an 1843 novella by Charles Dickens. Dickens's famous novella deals with several themes, including poverty, greed, generosity, and time.

While writing this book, Charles Dickens was influenced and inspired by the parliamentary reports on the catastrophic conditions of child labor in 19th century England.

### *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath

*The Bell Jar* was Plath's debut novel, written in 1963. The book is a psychological autobiographical novel that reflects her mental health struggles. *The Bell Jar* is a metaphor showing that Esther (the main character) is trapped inside her own head and cannot escape her insecure thoughts.

Plath's unsparing honesty in criticizing social mechanisms combined with a poetic and well-developed style earned her the 1982 Pulitzer Prize.

### *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

No reading list of classic books can be complete without mentioning Fyodor Dostoevsky, the 19th-century Russian author. Born in Moscow in 1821, Dostoevsky had a difficult and eventful life. The depth of his thought is evident in all his writings.

Dostoevsky's *Idiot* is a rich tapestry of philosophical thought that requires more than one reading. Dostoevsky practically takes you into characters' minds, and after a while, you will be feeling and thinking like them. He is often considered one of the greatest psychologists of the literary world.

### *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells

The Time Machine is a science fiction novella published in 1895 when time-travel stories were popular. The Time Traveler goes to the year 802,701 when humanity has split into two species: capitalists (Eloi) and laborers (Morlocks).

Wells' symbolic depiction of the future civilization later attracted scholars' attention and appeared in scientific journals and books.

### *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

The Color Purple is a 1982 epistolary novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker. Her parents grew up in the American South, and their experiences with oppression and racism profoundly influenced Walker's writing.

The epic 1985 coming of age drama, *The Color Purple*, directed by Steven Spielberg, was inspired by the book.

### *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

Polish-English novelist Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* in 1899. In his classic book, Conrad criticizes British colonialism and shows how humans can rationalize anything.

*Apocalypse Now* (1979), directed by Francis Ford Coppola, is based on *Heart of Darkness* but set in the jungles of Vietnam.

### *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

The *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a postcolonial novel and prequel (or simply a response) to Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*. The book was published in 1966, almost 120 years after the initial publication of *Jane Eyre*. It would be good to read Brontë's novel first since they share most characters and storylines.

### *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

Melville's epic novel is set in the 19th century. It follows the voyage of the *Pequod*, a whaling ship piloted by the monomaniacal Captain Ahab. At times, the book's passages may be unsettling, and its language may sound antiquated. Nevertheless, *Moby Dick* has proven to be a literary masterpiece.

Since its first publication in 1851, *Moby Dick* has influenced many writers and artists. In his 2017 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, American songwriter Bob Dylan mentioned that he was inspired by *Moby-Dick*.

### *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf

*To the Lighthouse* is a 1927 modernist novel centered on the Ramsay family and their visits to the Isle of Skye in Scotland between 1910 and 1920. The use of run-on sentences and lyrical prose is not what one would expect in a novel of the 1930s. Nevertheless, Woolf undoubtedly succeeded in developing her own unique style of writing and thinking.

### One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey

A classic novel that tells the story of Randle Patrick McMurphy, a boisterous, brawling, fun-loving rebel who battles the stereotypes of madness in a mental asylum.

Ken Kesey has been called the literary figure who bridged the gap between the Beat movement of the 1950s and the counterculture of the 1960s. His novel was adapted as a screenplay in 1975 starring Jack Nicholson and co-produced by Michael Douglas.

### The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain

Huckleberry Finn takes place around 1840 in the American South. The book was first released in the United Kingdom in December 1884. It was immediately published and read throughout North America and Europe.

Controversies over his views on race have yet to be resolved. Today, however, many believe that Twain was among the early critics of institutionalized racism, whose writings had a significant impact on shaping the literary climate of the 19th century.

### The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton

It's a 1920 classic novel by American author and Pulitzer Prize-winner Edith Wharton. The book was initially serialized in 1920 in four parts. It was later released as a book by D. Appleton & Company.

This book was Wharton's twelfth novel, in which she depicts desire, betrayal, and criticism of middle/upper-middle-class society during the sumptuous Golden Age of Old New York. It is worth mentioning that Wharton was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize.

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

The Catcher in the Rye is an iconic, coming-of-age tale partially published in serial form in 1945–1946. Salinger's uncannily accurate, insightful, and compassionate narrative made him perhaps the most recognizable voice in classic literature.

The Catcher in the Rye is considered one of the best classic books of the twentieth century. Nash K. Burger, the New York Times columnist, called it "an unusually brilliant novel."

### *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo

*Les Misérables* is a French historical novel first published in 1862.

The book is arguably one of the top ten literary writings of all time, with timeless themes of injustice, heroism, and love. He is widely considered the most remarkable and best-known French writer in history.

*Les Misérables* has been the subject of numerous adaptations in films, TV shows, and plays. Yet the depth of the relationship between Jean Valjean and Cosette does not fully translate from the page to the stage. For that reason alone, reading the book is undoubtedly worth the time.

## *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas

The 1844 adventure novel by French author Alexandre Dumas (père) is one of his most famous works, along with *The Three Musketeers*. The plot evolves from the drama of Dantes being imprisoned because of jealousy and envy to his story of determination, escape, and redemption.

Robin Buss's lively English translation is the closest to the original French version.

## *Ulysses* by James Joyce

It's a 1922 modernist novel by the most famous Irish writer, James Joyce. His command of the English language is remarkable and evident from the first page to the last. A unique artistic style, a brilliant panorama of the whole life, and numerous classical references make this book literally a stroke of genius.

The works of James Joyce, especially *Ulysses*, are not light reading. But it is also a life- and mind-changing novel.

## *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy

Neither Tolstoy nor his books need an introduction. William Faulkner, the eminent American writer, once called this book "the best novel ever written." Fyodor Dostoevsky considered *Anna Karenina* "flawless." Tolstoy's portrayal of love, embedded in the Russian cultural context, is still unsurpassed.

The Penguin version, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, is still the best English version available.

## *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë

Under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847. It is a wild, passionate story about the intense and turbulent love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. This book is brilliant not only for its dramatic and haunting themes but also for the deep imperfections of all the characters.

*Wuthering Heights* is a Gothic novel with mysterious or supernatural elements, set in dark and sometimes exotic settings.

## *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo

It's a 1969 crime novel that tells the story of a fictional Mafia family in New York City, headed by Vito Corleone, the Godfather. Puzo's masterpiece is a turbulent, highly entertaining story that has become part of America's national culture.

The 1972 film version of the novel was directed by Francis Ford Coppola and starred Marlon Brando as Don Vito Corleone and Al Pacino as Michael Corleone.

## *The Castle* by Franz Kafka

*The Castle* is an unfinished novel by Franz Kafka published in 1926, shortly after his death. The book is the story of K.'s (the novel's protagonist) relentless, unavailing struggle with an inscrutable authority to gain access to the Castle.

### [The Return of the Native by Thomas Hardy](#)

Thomas Hardy's sixth published novel is *The Return of the Native*. "This is the quality Hardy shares with the great writers... this setting behind the small action the terrific action of unfathomed nature," wrote D. H. Lawrence about this novel.

In 2010 an Americanized film adaptation of *The Return of the Native* was directed by Ben Westbrook.

### [A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce](#)

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is Joyce's first novel, portraying Stephen Dedalus' childhood and adolescence and his quest for identity through art. It was first published in 1916 and immediately established his reputation as a skilled writer with a unique literary style.

This masterpiece of semi-autobiographical fiction remains a must for any study of modern literature.

### [The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoyevsky](#)

*The Brothers Karamazov* or *The Karamazov Brothers* is the last novel of the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky sets forth a passionate philosophical debate about God, free will, and morality in this book.

The novel had a significant influence on many great thinkers, including Sigmund Freud. He described it as "the most magnificent novel ever written."

### [Go Tell It On The Mountain by James Baldwin](#)

*Go Tell It on the Mountain* is a semi-autobiographical novel originally published in 1953. It's the story of a young boy who discovers the terms of his identity. That was his first novel, yet it received excellent reviews and immediately established a deep and enduring new voice in American literature.

James Baldwin combined his objective and compassionate perspective of Harlem with a magnificent poetic style and narrative skill.

### [Animal Farm by George Orwell](#)

*Animal Farm* is a simple, plainly written story about animals rising up to take control of their own destiny, running the farm they work for, and living by a central doctrine of rules. The book is a short and easy-to-read story with valuable lessons about how political and governmental organizations operate.

It is also one of the illuminating semi-historical accounts of Joseph Stalin's communist rule in Soviet Russia.

### [Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes](#)

*The Ingenious Nobleman Sir Quixote of La Mancha*, or *Don Quixote*, is arguably one of the most celebrated writings in Spanish literature. The book had a significant influence on many great writers, including Alexandre Dumas, Mark Twain, and Edmond Rostand.

Edith Grossman's edition is the most popular and probably the most accurate translation into English.

### [The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen](#)

The Emperor's New Clothes is an allegorical cautionary tale published in 1837. The book is a brutally honest critique of the collective commitment to ignorance of the bare facts. It has been translated into over 100 languages.

Since its first publication, various adaptations of the tale have appeared, including a 2001 British historical drama directed by Alan Taylor.

### [Dracula by Bram Stoker](#)

Originally published in 1897, Bram Stoker's Dracula is a Gothic horror novel. The story is told in epistolary form, as a series of letters, diary entries, and newspaper articles. The book was undoubtedly revolutionary, both in terms of narrative style and perspective. The novel was largely inspired by Irish folk tales and legends.

### [I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou](#)

Here is a book joyous and painful, as mysterious and memorable, as childhood itself. It captures the longing of lonely children, the brute insult of bigotry, and the wonder of words that can make the world right.

Maya Angelou's debut memoir is a modern American classic beloved worldwide.