

High School Literature Guide

High schoolers have a lot of literature available to them, but too many schools in recent years (as you likely experienced yourself) have focused on select books from the 1960s and 1970s. High schoolers are seen as needing a dash of Shakespeare and otherwise coming-of-age stories, sexual awakenings, political swaying, and anti-war literature. There is also a tendency to give all high schoolers, regardless of disposition, depressing books. Is that really necessary?

However, selecting books from the large range of literature can be daunting. Therefore, here are two sets of literature titles. One is more academic in nature, following a timeline according to setting. The other is a more casual guide, organized by genre or language.

The timeline of books by setting is not a perfect exercise. Romans, for example, were better experts on Rome than Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*. Still, it makes for a helpful organization. The left column of this list is primarily literature and fiction. The right mentions pieces religiously significant in nature that may be helpful or interesting to Lutheran high schoolers.

The second portion of this project offers a wide variety of titles spanning different genres and languages. Being well-read does not mean only reading difficult or academic works. Select a few titles to see whether your student enjoys French literature, German, etc. Reluctant readers can start with Action/Adventure. Various reading levels are represented. Let your child choose some himself! Show him that genres envelope a huge array of subjects, interests, and approaches.

Some poetry and drama are included, although novels dominate both sets of titles. Not all parts of the world are known for novels—or easy translation into English—so not all will be represented. Also, please note, languages are not strictly country-based: Spanish literature could include pieces from Spain and Latin America.

Some books are harder to read than others or exceedingly long. Selections and excerpts can be very helpful or consider similar but simpler options. Augustine's *Confessions*, for example, is significantly easier to understand than *The City of God*. Still, perhaps your student will be served by learning both titles, even if one—or neither—are read whole. In some cases, significant authors are highlighted rather than specific titles, in part so that students can simply get familiar with the names.

A few collections of folk tales and mythologies are recommended, since those are interesting and educational, without necessarily endorsing a specific book. You might ask, "Doesn't that mean this isn't an entirely vetted list?" It's true. Some discernment remains with the parent and student.

My last note is this: it would take a lifetime for most adults to read through all of these books. Even so, not all influential books have been listed. By no means think a high schooler must read these all! Nor that this list is absolutely definitive. Rather, may these lists guide you through some of the wealth we have at our fingertips as homeschoolers in an age of abundant literary access.



Literary Timeline By Setting

LITERATURE (*MOSTLY FICTION*)

The Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 1800 BC)
The Odyssey (Written in the 8th century BC about the 13th or 12th century BC)
The Aeneid (Written between 29 and 19 BC about the 13th or 12th century BC)
Aesop's Fables (Between 620 and 564 BC)
Oedipus Rex by Sophocles (430 BC)
Plays by Euripides (He died in 406)
Plato's *Republic* (375 BC)
Julius Caesar by Shakespeare (44 BC)
Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Nero (64 AD)
Antigone by Sophocles (5th century play)
Beowulf (5th & 6th centuries)

Alfred the Great: The King and His England (847-899)

The Sarashina Diary, Daughter of Sugawara no Takasue (1009–1059)

One Thousand and One Nights (*Arabian Nights*)
Ivanhoe (12th century)

The Song of the Cid (Set between 1140 and 1207)
William Wallace: The King's Enemy (1270-1305)
The Divine Comedy (Written between 1308 and 1320)
The Canterbury Tales (1380-1390)
Gawain and the Green Knight (Late 14th century)
Henry V (1415)
Here I Stand by Roland Bainton (or another)
God's Outlaw: The Real Story of William Tyndale and the English Bible
Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe (15—)
(Older high schoolers only due to some sexual content)
Don Quixote (1605-1615)
Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare (early 16—s)
Hamlet by Shakespeare
Courtship of Miles Standish (1621)
The Three Musketeers (1625-1628)
The Scarlet Letter (1642-1649)
Robinson Crusoe (1651)
Frankenstein (17--)
Roots (17—through the civil war)
The Spy by Cooper (1765 and 1783)
The Deerslayer (1740-1745)
A Tale of Two Cities (1775-1792)
Common Sense by Thomas Paine (1776)
Pride and Prejudice (1797)

CHRISTIAN PIECES OF THAT PERIOD

The Bible

The Didache (First or second century)
The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I (155AD)
The Confession of St. Patrick (Lived c. 387-493 AD)
Confessions & City of God by Augustine (397-400 AD)
The Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius (524AD)
Ecclesiastical History of the English People by Bede (731 AD)
The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion (1070-1080)

The Letters of John Hus (Also spelled Jan Hus, 1372-1415)
Reformation Literature! (1517-1648):
The Book of Concord; On Christian Liberty; Bondage of the Will; Luther's Commentary on Galatians; What is Marriage, Really?
Martin Chemnitz: *The Two Natures in Christ* (1578)

Foxes Book of Martyrs (1563)
Selected Poems by Donne (1572-1631)
The Dark Night of the Soul by John of the Cross (poem, 1577-1579)

Johann Gerhard's *Handbook of Consolations; Schola Pietatis, Sacred Meditations, Daily Exercise of Piety, Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms: in Twenty-Three Chapters Containing the Core of all Theology* (1611)
Poetry of George Herbert (1593-1633)
Pensées by Pascal (Collection of sayings, 1669-1670)
Paradise Lost by John Milton (Epic poem, 1608-1674)
The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan (Allegory, 1678)

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (18—s)
Oliver Twist (early 18—s)
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (mid 18—s)
Last of the Mohicans (1825)
Democracy in America by Alexis de Tocqueville
 (1830s)
The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1831)
Les Miserables (1832)
Moby Dick (early to mid 18—s)
Great Expectations (1812-1840)
Little Women (1860s)
Across Five Aprils (1861-1865)
Anne of Green Gables (1876-1881)
Anna Karenina (late 18—s) or other Tolstoy
The Witch of Blackberry Pond (1876)
The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)
All Quiet on the Western Front (1914ff)
The Metamorphosis (1915)
The Story of My Life by Helen Keller (1887ff)
Red Badge of Courage (1894)
Call of the Wild (Late 1890s)
The Secret Garden (early 1900s)
Up From Slavery (1901)
A Farewell to Arms (1914-1918)
The Great Gatsby (1922)
The Trial by Kafka (1925)
As I Lay Dying (1928)
All Creatures Great and Small (Set in the 1930s)
To Kill a Mockingbird (1930s)
Grapes of Wrath (1930s)
The Invisible Man (1930s)
Where the Red Fern Grows (1930s)
Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry (1933)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1930s & 40s)
Number the Stars (1943)
The Diary of a Young Girl (1944)
Night (1944-1945)
Animal Farm (1944)
Black Rain? (1945, Aftermath of bombing Hiroshima
 and Nagasaki)
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1950s)
Lord of the Flies (1950s)
The Outsiders (1960s)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1960s)

I'll stop here on the presumption that more recently books are better known to us.

David Henkel Against the Unitarians (1830)

Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel by CFW
 Walther (1884); *The Church & The Office of the
 Ministry* (1875); *God Grant It: Daily Devotions* (1894)
The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church (1887)

Orthodoxy by Chesterton (1908)

Christian Dogmatics by JT Mueller (1930s)

*Letters and Papers from Prison & The Cost of
 Discipleship* (1940s) by Bonhoeffer
The Man Born to be King by Sayers (1940s)
Hammer of God by Giertz (Written in 1941 but set over
 three generations)
Tortured for Christ by Richard Wurmbrand (Communist
 times)
 CS Lewis: *Mere Christianity*; *The Screwtape Letters*
 (1940s & 50s)
The Whimsical Christian: 18 Essays, Dorothy L. Sayers

There are many great contemporary lay-friendly/ high school-friendly Lutheran writers, such as Gene Veith, who has written *Loving God with All Your Mind*; *Reading Between the Lines*; *Spirituality of the Cross*; *God at Work*; *Family Vocations*; *Postmodern Times*, and *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*.

By Genres, Regions, or Language-of-Origin

Some duplication occurs on the two sections, but the timeline is intended more for educational reading and the genres more for leisure reading. Also, some books are appropriate for younger than high school but that should not disqualify them from reading. This list is organized in alphabetical order by genre or language of origin. Titles are not necessarily in any sort of order.

Action/Adventure

Robinson Crusoe
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea
Journey to the Center of the Earth
Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson
Tarzan of the Apes
The Mark of Zorro
Conan the Conqueror
Swiss Family Robinson
Captains Courageous by Kipling
Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stevenson
The Adventures of Robin Hood
King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table
Hatchet

Allegory

Piers Plowman (c. 1360-1387)
Pilgrim's Progress
Divine Comedy
Everyman (The morality play, not the Roth novel)
The Phantom Tollbooth
Lord of the Flies
Animal Farm

American Literature (Also see American Poets)

American Literature is a colossal, diverse category. Here are names it is good to know, even if you can't read a sample of each.

Washington Irving (1783-1859)
James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)
Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
Herman Melville (1819-1891)
Mark Twain (1835-1910)
Henry James (1843-1916)
Willa Cather (1873-1947)
TS Eliot (1888-1965)
F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)
William Faulkner (1897-1962)
Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)
Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)
Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)
John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

American Poets

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
Walt Whitman (1819-1892)
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
Robert Frost (1874-1963)
Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature

Much of Arabic literature is poetry, which may or may not translate well into English. Even the most famous set of stories, *The Arabian Nights*, seems to have Persian and Indian influence.

Asian

Chinese:

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon (A recent novel inspired by Chinese folklore)
One Hundred Poems from the Chinese, Kenneth Rexroth
Monkey: Folk Novel of China, Wu Ch'eng-en.

Japanese:

Tales of Japan: Traditional Stories of Monsters and Magic
One Hundred Poems from the Japanese, Kenneth Rexroth
The Tale of Genji, Murasaki Shikibu
The Pillow Book, Sei Shonagon
The Sarashina Diary, Daughter of Sugawara no Takasue (1009-1059)
An Account of My Hut, Kamo no Chomei (Buddhist, yet it might be thought-provoking)
The Five Rings by Musashi

Autobiographies

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin
Up from Slavery by Booker T. Washington
Tortured for Christ by Richard Wurmbrand
The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom
Evidence Not Seen: A Woman's Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II by Darlene Rose
Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity by Nabeel Qureshi

Biblical Times Historical Fiction

Quo Vadis: A Narrative of the Time of Ben Hur
The Robe
The Silver Chalice
The Bronze Bow (First century Galilee)

British/English Literature (Also see British Poetry)

English Literature is a colossal, diverse category. Again, here are names it is good to know, even if you can't read a sample of each. Also note a *lot* of children's books were originally British.

Sir Thomas Malory (*Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1485)
Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)
Sir Thomas More (1478-1535)
John Bunyan (1628-1688)
William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
John Donne (1572-1631)
Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) (earliest English novelist)
Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)
Alexander Pope (1688-1744)
Jane Austen (1775-1817)
Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)
Charles Dickens (1812-1870)
The Bronte sisters, Emily, Charlotte, and Anne (1840s and 1850s)
George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans: 1819-1880)
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)
Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)
HG Wells (1866-1946)
George MacDonald (1824-1905)
Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)
Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)
Beatrix Potter (1866-1943)
Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)
PG Wodehouse (Pronounced WOOD-house: 1881-1975)
Agatha Christie (1890-1976)
CS Lewis (1898-1963)
Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)
George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair: 1903-1950)
Arthur Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966)
Graham Greene (1904-1991)
Roald Dahl (1916-1990)
JK Rowling (b. 1965)

British/English Poetry

Shakespeare (1564-1616)
John Donne (1572-1631)
George Herbert (1593-1633)
Thomas Traherne (1636-1674)
John Milton (1608-1674)
Alexander Pope (1688-1744)
William Blake (1757-1827)
William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
Lord Byron (1788-1824)
John Keats (1795-1821)
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)
Robert and Elizabeth Browning

Comedy

Cold Comfort Farm
A Confederacy of Dunces
Three Men in a Boat
The Importance of Being Earnest
Much Ado About Nothing by Shakespeare
The Innocents Abroad (Twain going to Europe)
Roughing It (Twain going west)
PG Wodehouse

Dark Fiction Christian Authors

These Christian authors may not be suitable for every high schooler, but are thought-provoking for others.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (A Russian Orthodox author who lived between 1821 and 1881)
Graham Greene (A Roman Catholic author who lived from 1904 to 1991, who wrote about ambivalent moral and political issues of the world)
(Mary) Flannery O'Connor (A Roman Catholic author who lived from 1925 to 1964 in Georgia, who wrote in a sardonic Southern Gothic style.) (Short stories may be easier than her novels.)

Dystopian Classics

Dystopian literature uses an anti-utopia to explore social and political structures. There has been an obvious resurgence in the genre, but I will leave parents to judge the quality of recent releases while here listing a selection.

Brave New World (Published in 1931, set in 2540)
Animal Farm (Published in 1945)
1984 (Published in 1949, set in 1984)
Fahrenheit 451 (Published in 1953, set after the 1990s)
Lord of the Flies (Published in 1954)
A Wrinkle in Time (Published in 1962)
The Giver (All four books in the series)

Epic Poetry

The Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2000 BC)
The Iliad (c. 800 BC, Greek)
The Odyssey (c. 800 BC, Greek)
The Aeneid (19 BC, Roman)
Metamorphoses (8 AD)
The Song of Roland (11-12th century)
The Saga of Grettir the Strong (13-14th century, Icelandic Sagas)
The Divine Comedy (1308-1321, Italian)
Paradise Lost (1667)

Fantasy

The Princess and the Goblin by MacDonald
Phantastes by MacDonald
The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis
The Lord of the Rings by JRR Tolkien
Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
The Once and Future King by TH White
The Space Trilogy by CS Lewis
Dragonflight by Anne McCaffrey?

(Avoid *The Golden Compass* and *His Dark Materials* as they are explicitly and purposefully anti-Christian.)

French Literature

The Count of Monte Cristo (1844)
Les Miserables
The Three Musketeers
The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Books by Jules Verne

German

Sometimes known for the “Sturm und Drang” literary movement, some German literature focuses more on internal action and high emotion as individuals revolt against society.

Significant early texts include:

Hildebrandslied or *Song of Hildebrand*
Heliand
Simplicius Simplicissimus

Significant authors include:

Goethe, *Faustus*
Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* and other short stories
Thomas Mann
Hermann Hesse
Gunter Grass

Horror/Monster

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
Dracula by Bram Stoker
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde
Metamorphosis by Kafka
Beowulf

Indian Subcontinent

India has an ancient tradition of writing in verse. Its literary tradition also includes 22 officially-recognized languages and the English British colonization cultivated. I'm just not sure of a way to pick a few books. Further, a great many are explicitly Hindu or Buddhist.

The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian by Nirad Chaudhuri was a favorite book of Churchill.

It may be useful to learn that, generally speaking, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are ancient Sanskrit epics, which could be compared to the Greek *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. *Mahabharata* includes the Hindu religious text *Bhagavad Gita*.

Playwrights

Aeschylus (Ancient Greek)
Euripides (Ancient Greek)
Sophocles (Ancient Greek): *Antigone*
William Shakespeare (English)
Christopher Marlowe (British)
Moliere (French)
Anton Chekhov (Russian)

Russian Literature

A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
Crime and Punishment (1860s) or other Dostoyevsky

Significant authors include Alexander Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Note: Because Russian uses a Cyrillic alphabet, sometimes there are various spellings for names. Also, there tend to be prostitutes in Russian literature, but that does *not* mean there are explicit scenes or descriptions.

Satire

The Screwtape Letters

The Celestial Railroad

Gulliver's Travels

The Importance of Being Ernest

A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift (Read this before your student)

In Praise of Folly by Desiderius Erasmus (Erasmus was a humanist Roman Catholic a few years older than Luther. Still, he and Luther didn't disagree about everything.)

Scandinavian Literature

A few facts and expressions for you:

- Sweden ranks fourth in the most Nobel Prizes in literature, behind France, the USA, United Kingdom, and Germany.
- Nordic Noir is a genre known for realistic drama.
- Icelanders' sagas are prose histories.
- A "skald" is a composer and reciter of poems honoring heroes and their deeds.

Kalevala, epic poetry compiled from Finnish ballads, songs, and various oral traditions

Tales of Norse Mythology

Short Stories: Hans Christian Andersen

Lutheran: *The Hammer of God*

The Complete and Original Norwegian Folktales of

Asbjornsen and Moe

Edda by Snorri Sturluson

Kristin Lavransdatter

Sea Books

Call It Courage

The Long Ships

Hornblower series

Master and Commander

The Sea Wolf

Two Years Before the Mast

Short Stories

Grimm's Original Fairy Tales

Just So Stories

Edgar Allen Poe

Hans Christian Andersen

Tales from Shakespeare by Lamb

Everything That Rises Must Converge &

A Good Man is Hard to Find (O'Connor)

Franz Kafka

Anton Chekhov (Russian)

The Overcoat by Gogol (Ukrainian/Russian)

Science Fiction

Science fiction can get quite philosophical and political, but here's an introductory selection.

The Time Machine

War of the Worlds

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Ender's Game

The Dune Chronicles

The Foundation Trilogy by Isaac Asimov

The Martian (some strong language)

Spanish

El Cid/ The Song of the Cid (Set between 1140 and 1207)

Don Quixote (early 1600s)

Spy Novels

The Thirty-Nine Steps

Greenmantle

The Three Hostages

War Novels/ Military Fiction

Many of the ancient epics

Euripedes' *The Trojan Women*

Shakespeare's *Henry V*

Simplicius Simplicissimus

Tolstoy's *War and Peace*

The Red Badge of Courage

All Quiet on the Western Front

The Guns of Navarone

Western

This genre is generally understood as featuring an American story taking place in the 1800s frontier west of the Mississippi.

The Luck of Roaring Camp by Bret Harte (shorts story)

Hondo by Louis L'Amour (L'Amour actually novelized the John Wayne movie!)

The Searchers by Alan Le May

Butcher's Crossing by John Williams

True Grit by Charles Portis

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert

Ford by Ron Hansen