BEST QUOTES ON LITERATURE

What does literature do better than anything else? It provides a detailed representation of the inner experience of being alive in a given time and place.

—Elif Batuman

The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries.

—René Descartes

The historian will tell you what happened. The novelist will tell you what it felt like.

—E. L. Doctorow

If Booth Tarkington were to write Seventeen today, he would have to call it Twelve.

—Arthur Pearl

Literature and butterflies are the two sweetest passions known to man.

—Vladimir Nabokov

More can be learnt from Miss Austen about the nature of the novel than from almost any other writer.

—Walter Allen

Clemens was sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our Literature.

—William Dean Howells

All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn...American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.

—Ernest Hemingway

I would dare say that Walden and Huckleberry Finn are the two books that reflect most deeply and most clearly the basic tensions involved in being an American.

—Clifton Fadiman
The total absence of humor from the Bible is one of the most singular things in all literature.

--Alfred North Whitehead

Literature is a part of life. Literature is experience. What we read in books becomes as much a part of us as the food we eat.

--Wallace A. Bacon

Psychologists suppose that life teaches us what we know, for better or worse, but it’s most often from fiction that we form our attitudes about life. If we waited for life to teach us about romantic love, for example, we might never learn anything about it at all.

--Michael Korda

The same thing is necessary for good nonfiction and good fiction—namely, reporting. The 19th-century novels used to do this as a matter of course. Balzac was constantly leaving his desk to see how a proper wedding was conducted in the countryside.

--Tom Wolfe

In a very real sense, people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read...It is not true that we have only one life to live; if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish.

--S. I. Hayakawa

Great novelists are the true historians of the times in which they live. Stop and think about it for a minute and I’m sure you’ll find that you didn’t get your impressions of what life was like here and abroad in the last 300 years from the history books—but from the novels of such literary titans as Hardy, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Sinclair Lewis, Jane Austen, and Tolstoy. Writers like these had a kind of extrasensory perception which enabled them to see beneath the surface of the age—and, of course, the genius to bring people and events to life in stories that enthralled readers of their own time as well as later generations.

--Bennett Cerf

Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul. He expands and deepens down, the more I contemplate him; and further and further, shoots his strong New England roots in the hot soil of my Southern soul.

--Herman Melville
Without a knowledge of mythology much of the elegant literature of our own language cannot be understood and appreciated.

—Thomas Bulfinch

You already know, turning the pages of Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*, how the story is going to turn out. But I defy the suggestion that its power lies solely, or even chiefly, in the bitter unfairness of its author’s death at the Nazis’ hands. Frank was a real writer—funny, wise, anarchic, gloriously talented—and a huge, joyful spirit. She made the Holocaust real for millions. Had she lived, no doubt she would have accomplished even more.

—Joyce Maynard

I exit a good short story feeling like someone’s just punched me in the gut. I’m hunched, doubled-over; the story lingers in my thoughts for days. I still remember the goosebumps on my arms after finishing ‘The Lady, or the Tiger?’ or seeing Madeline’s face, hearing her fingers claw at the tomb’s door for weeks after ‘The Fall of the House of Usher.’ I remember tossing Shirley Jackson’s ‘The Lottery’ across the room, so horrified at the conclusion I swore off reading for three days straight. Short fiction creeps up on you like that. Shakes you up, spins you around, ties on a blindfold and turns you loose on the world with a bat.

—Nicki Porter

It wasn’t precisely a book that changed my life; it was a writer. When we were first assigned *David Copperfield* in school, it was an article of faith that we were meant to hate it. Old-fashioned, discursive, carrying within its pages the dust of countless students before us, this was a castor oil assignment, good for us but terrible going down. Except that for me, it wasn’t. Quite the opposite. Almost from the moment that David asked whether he would emerge as the hero of his own life, a notion that hadn’t yet occurred to me, I was in.

—Anna Quindlen

Where should one turn for guidance in an appraisal of the essence of justice, morality, ethics, religion, science, literature, and the like? Not to the past, for history is willfully misinterpreted; and not to the church, which is ineffective because of the cowardice of its leaders. Even science cannot be helpful because its exponents have succeeded only in destroying the harmony of life. It is therefore the duty of literature to rediscover the truth and beauty of life that other means have failed to find.

—Hymen Chonon Berkowitz
History gives us the facts, sort of, but from literary works we can learn what the past smelled like, sounded like, and felt like, the forgotten gritty details of a lost era. Literature brings us as close as we can come to reinhabiting the past. By re-claiming this use of literature in the classroom, perhaps we can move away from the political agitation that has been our bread and butter—or porridge and hardtack—for the last 30 years.

—Scott Herring

The past is not another country; it is another life. The texture of daily living is different now than in the past, more different the further back we look, until we find people whose experiences created a psychology we might find baffling or rude. Many details that once made up the daily round are lost to us because people considered them too trivial to write down. Knowing the past means knowing what people carried in their pockets, what they did with their sewage, where their dogs slept. Those details may seem unimportant, but what they convey is not.

—Scott Herring

That’s what literature is. It’s the people who went before us, tapping out messages from the past, from beyond the grave, trying to tell us about life and death! Listen to them!

—Connie Willis

Practical, unflappable, loving, forging, patient—the Man in the Yellow Hat is who we would all like to be. Curious George is who we are. Well-meaning and disastrous, impulsive and forgetful, selfish and ingenious and in constant need of forgiveness. He may be the most human character in postwar literature. And he arrived with nothing, a refugee, to become a worldwide sensation—the ultimate American story.

—Jeff MacGregor

Literature gives us so many other lives to live, on so many different levels....Beautiful pieces of literature stay in your heart forever.

—Bernice Cullinan

We see then how far the monuments of wit and learning are more durable than the monuments of power, or of the hands. For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter; during which time infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities have been decayed and demolished?

--Francis Bacon
Culture is the habit of being pleased with the best and knowing why.

--Henry Van Dyke

Because of the doorstop profile of many of his books, people assume Dickens somehow does this with grand sweep, but he actually builds his world brick by brick, from the small telling details. Then he does other novelists one better: He builds in the grout of social conscience, so his novels are not only about Traddles and Skimpole (no one does names like Dickens) but about the punishing debtors-prison system, the absurd labyrinth of legal affairs, the strictures of social class….I reread one of Dickens’ novels every summer and, as a novelist and a human being, I always learn something new.

—Anna Quindlen

I have only ever read one book in my life, and that is White Fang. It’s so frightfully good I’ve never bothered to read another.

— Nancy Mitford

Peanuts by Charles Schulz is arguably the longest story told by a single artist in human history.

—Robert Thompson

The key element in tragedy is that heroes and heroines are destroyed by that which appears to be their greatest strength.

—Robert Shea

Plath didn’t have thick skin. I understood that immediately. Also that she was angry, though she burned with distant brilliance. Poems directly addressing the person despised? Not just wearing your heart on your sleeve, but setting that sleeve on fire?…The imagery in Ariel jumped from the page into my brain, and from there to my inherently less capable, colder fingertips. Her radical poems soared on their own updrafts. I got it right away: Those below should gather what cinders fell to earth.

—Ann Beattie

Books talk to you for an afternoon.
Literature speaks for generations.

—Terri Guillemets

When you re-read a classic you do not see in the book more than you did before.
You see more in you than there was before.

—Clifton Fadiman
In the afternoon it was common to see men who, by the state of them, had walked dusty miles to lay their hands upon a *Pickwick*; while in the evening, in every public house and inn the conversation was of the latest number and little else...Mr. Pickwick was *there*, in front of everyone, like a real person, not as a hazy mist of head-hidden words: every man, woman and child had exactly the same image of Mr. Pickwick in his or her consciousness. When a dustman talked of Mr. Pickwick, a lord could know exactly who was meant because of the pictures. *Your* Mr. Pickwick was *my* Mr. Pickwick, was a *universal* Mr. Pickwick—a being of fiction, a man-created man, was suddenly recognized by all. This was unprecedented in human affairs.

—Stephen Jarvis

The setting (physical as well as circumstantial) contributes much to the reader’s holistic experience of the story. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell quickly establishes a dystopian setting with just a few masterful brushstrokes in the opening paragraphs. The clock striking 13 (implying a militaristic government), the oversized posters of Big Brother throughout Winston Smith’s apartment building, the unreliable elevator (‘the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week.’)—these background details pull the reader into the world of the story. Similarly, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s description of the opulence of Jay Gatsby’s mansion sheds light on Gatsby’s obsessive desire to win back the heart of Daisy Buchanan (whose heart can be stirred only by opulence). Or consider how Edgar Allan Poe’s description of the decrepit house in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ serves as a projection of Roderick Usher’s inner decrepit state. A fully delineated setting is a powerful tool for adding depth and intrigue to a story.

—Fred White

From that time on, the world was hers for the reading. She would never be lonely again, never miss the lack of intimate friends. Books became her friends and there was one for every mood. There was poetry for quiet companionship. There was adventure when she tired of quiet hours. There would be love stories when she came into adolescence, and when she wanted to feel a closeness to someone she could read a biography. On that day when she first knew she could read, she made a vow to read one book a day as long as she lived.

—Betty Smith

I love the tradition of Dickens, where even the most minor walk-on characters are twitching and particular and alive.

—Donna Tartt
The book that changed my life—that made me yearn to be a writer as well as inspired me to ‘write’—is Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Like any child enraptured with a favorite book, I wanted to be Alice. It must have occurred to me that Alice was unlike any girl of my acquaintance; she seemed to belong to a foreign, upper-class environment with customs (teatime, crumpets, queens, kings, footmen) utterly alien to the farming society of Millersport, New York. I think that I learned from Alice to be just slightly bolder than I might have been, to question authority—that is, adults—and to look upon life as a possibility for adventures. If I’d taken Alice for a model, I was prepared to recognize fear, even terror, without succumbing to it. There are scenes of nightmare illogic in the Alice books—dramatizations of the anxiety of being eaten, for instance—yet Alice never becomes panicked or loses her common sense and dignity. Out of *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* have sprung not only much of my enthusiasm for writing but my sense of the world as an indecipherable, essentially absurd but fascinating spectacle.

--Joyce Carol Oates

It looks like it’s wasting time, but literature is actually the ultimate time-saver—because it gives us access to a range of emotions and events that it would take you years, decades, millennia to try to experience directly. Literature is the greatest reality simulator—a machine that puts you through infinitely more situations than you can ever directly witness.

--Mary Ruefle

I read *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* in 1970 while I was getting my master’s in English at Vanderbilt. The book’s first two volumes (of nine total!) were published in 1759, but the story unwound like nothing I’d read before; I felt like it must have been written in 2059. How could this author seem so much braver then the rest, and how was he able to break every writing rule ever made? And why was the story so much more fun because of it? The main character is Tristram—although he’s not really. The story just uses his birth, christening and circumcision (ow) as a pivot to move about. And the author, Laurence Sterne, mixes first and third person, throws down sentence fragments, rambles for 20 pages about an odd thought—seems, in short, to do whatever he damn feels.

--James Patterson

The most important book I’ve ever read was *the Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in English class, seventh or eighth grade, at Rothschild Junior High School, Brooklyn. It rocked my world.

—Spike Lee
Dracula, Don Quixote, Robinson Crusoe: it takes a special kind of greatness for a literary character to achieve autonomy from his creator. Like those ‘folk songs’ that are actually the products of a single pen (‘This Land is Your Land,’ say), such figures come to seem as if they’d sprung directly from the popular imagination, effacing their originators altogether. Everyone has heard of Frankenstein; not many know who Mary Shelley is.

--William Deresiewicz

A great novel is like a hunt for the answers to why we’re alive and what we’re doing here.

--Leon Kirchner

The ordinary man would rather read the life of the cruelest pirate that ever lived than of the wisest philosopher.

--Robert Lynd

I have the reputation for having read all of Henry James, which would argue a mis-spent youth and middle age.

--James Thurber

Short stories tend to be boat-shaped, with a lift at each end, to float.

--Edward Hoagland

Accepting a summary of a poem, an analysis of someone else’s reading or interpretation or experience of it, is analogous to having someone else eat your dinner for you... a work of art, as art, must be a personal experience.

--Louise M. Rosenblatt

Autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful.

--George Orwell

As a longtime teacher I reject both the position of the cultural absolutists, who think every ninth-grader should read Great Expectations, and that of the laissez-faire-ists, who pretend that reading about Nancy Drew has the same value is reading about Anna Karenina. Chanting the mantra ‘It doesn’t matter what they read, just so long as the read’ works only in the very short term. It works only to hook reluctant readers on books. Once a teacher has set her hook, then she must nudge, prod, and entice readers into meatier fare. To pretend that it doesn’t matter what people read is to say that they are not capable of growth, that they aren’t worthy of intellectual challenge and discovery.

—Susan Ohanian
Beowulf, of precarious provenance—the single surviving, crumbling manuscript bears the scorch marks of an 18th-century library fire—has traveled across a thousand years to lodge in our imagination like some kind of radioactive space nugget. A story from a pre-Christian era written down by an anonymous Christian, in alliterative Old English verse, it has an otherness, a real frosty interstellar otherness, but also a mysterious resonance. It’s holding something for us, this poem, the value of which is inseparable from its long and lonely transmission. And so we keep going back to it, we wonderingly retell it, testing it on our tongues like the syllables of a dream.

—James Parker

A child without an acquaintance of some kind with a classic of literature...suffers from that impoverishment for the rest of his life. No later intimacy is like that of the first.

--Lizette Woodworth Reese

Charles Dickens’ creation of Mr. Pickwick did more for the elevation of the human race—I say it in all seriousness—than Cardinal Newman’s Lead Kindly Light Amid the Encircling Gloom. Newman only cried out for light in the gloom of a sad world. Dickens gave it.

--Stephen Leacock

As a book-worm I have got so used to lewd and lascivious books that I no longer notice them. The most virtuous lady novelists write things that would have made a bartender blush two decades ago. If I open a new novel and find nothing about copulation in it, I suspect at once that it is simply a reprint of some forgotten novel of 1885, with a new name. When I began reviewing I used to send my review copies, after I had sweated through them, to the Y.M.C.A. By 1920 I was sending all discarded novels to a medical college.

--H. L. Mencken

Biography is, of the various kinds of narrative writing, that which is most eagerly read and most easily applied to the purposes of life.

--Samuel Johnson

Casting my mind’s eye over the whole of fiction, the only absolutely original creation I can think of is Don Quixote.

--W. Somerset Maugham
Literature is the question minus the answer.  

--Roland Barthes

Much, maybe too much, has been written about literature. (I know better than anyone; I’m an expert in the field). Yet the special thing about literature, the major art form of a Western civilization now ending before our very eyes, is not hard to define. Like literature, music can overwhelm you with sudden emotion, can move you to absolute sorrow or ecstasy; like literature, painting has the power to astonish, and to make you see the world through fresh eyes. But only literature can put you in touch with another human spirit, as a whole, with all its weaknesses and grandeur, its limitations, its pettinesses, its obsessions, its beliefs; with whatever it finds moving, interesting, exciting, or repugnant. Only literature can grant you access to a spirit from beyond the grave—a more direct, more complete, deeper access than you’d have in conversation with a friend. Even in our deepest, most lasting friendships, we never speak so openly as when we face a blank page and address an unknown reader.

--Michel Houellebecq

Shakespeare wrote narrative-driven, highly structured, convention-bound tales of lust, intrigue, and murder. In other words, he wrote thrillers. Almost all of his stories existed in some form already, but he managed to inhabit these familiar worlds, write them from the inside out, and elevate them beyond what anyone had seen before.

—Gregg Hurwitz

What is a classic? A classic is a book that gives you that exhilarating feeling, if only for a moment, that you’ve finally uncovered part of the meaning of life. A classic is a book that’s stood the test of time, a book that men and women all over the world keep reaching for throughout the ages for its special enlightenment. Not many books can survive such a test. Considering all the volumes that have been produced since man first put chisel to stone, classics account for an infinitesimal share of the total—less than .001 percent. That’s just a few thousand books. Of those, under 100 make up the solid core…. A classic can give you insights into yourself that you will get nowhere else. Sure, you can get pleasure out of almost any book. But a classic, once you penetrate it, lifts you up high! Aeschylus’s Oresteia was written nearly 2,500 years ago—but it still knocks me out!

—Steve Allen

The basis for all fiction is a struggle between good and evil.

--Lester del Rey
When modern fiction keeps me awake at night, like a groaning in the pipes, I open a volume of Dickens....Dickens’ books are maternity wards of the imagination. To invoke another of our cant words, there’s energy in them.

--Anatole Broyard

It is my firm conviction that fiction, and fiction alone, provides the means by which a writer can express his or her insights into the human condition. A great work of fiction never grows stale, it is never outmoded nor does it become obsolete. Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary provide the reader with a view of society, a perception of character, a knowledge of mores clearer than anything supplied by psychology, sociology or even history.

--Silva Tennenbaum

There’s one thing which fiction can do, socially and psychologically, which no other form of writing can. That is to get inside somebody else and look out through his eyes. You can’t do that in real life—even in married life....No other form of writing than the novel or the short story can do that.

--Richard Hughes

The aim of writing is to enable people a little better to enjoy life or a little better to endure it.

--W. H. Auden

Character in decay is the theme of the great bulk of superior fiction.

--H. L. Mencken

The absence of plot from the modern novel is often commented on, like the absence of characters. But nobody has called attention to the disappearance of another element, as though nobody missed it. We have almost forgotten that descriptions of sunsets, storms, rivers, lakes, mountains, valleys used to be one of the staple ingredients of fiction, not merely a painted backdrop for the action but a component evidently held to be necessary to the art.... We have come a long way from the time when the skill of an author was felt to be demonstrated by his descriptive prowess: Dickens’ London fogs, Fenimore Cooper’s waterfalls, forests, prairie, Emily Bronte’s moors, Hardy’s heath and milky vales, Melville’s Pacific. Yet in their day these were taken as samplings of the author’s purest creative ore, his vein of genius—more even than character portrayal or plot handling. In the old triad of plot, character and setting, the setting, comprising Nature and her moods supplied the atmosphere in an almost literal sense; it was the air the novel breathed.

--Mary McCarthy
It is less important that students read a selected number of important texts than that they read whatever they read critically and with understanding. A course in analytical reading, sensitively taught, would do more for a student (even if the required reading were a newspaper) than a course requiring students to plough through *David Copperfield*, *Hamlet*, and 13 other works recognized as classics simply because these works should be read by all high school students.

—Lucien L. Agosta

Murder mysteries are so perennially popular because they enable us to satisfy two needs at the same time: to discharge our aggressive tendencies by vicariously murdering someone, and to assuage our conscience by seeing the murderer captured and punished. Mysteries are the classic literary example of having our cake and eating it, too.

--Sydney J. Harris

Circumstances change, customs and habits die out and are replaced by others, but human nature doesn’t change: and hence literature is never out of date. That is why *King Lear* still tells us all we need to know about the perils of old age and pride, and why *Oedipus* still reads as if it had been written yesterday.

--Michael Korda

It always takes two imaginations to bring a novel to life.

--Joan Dial

To turn events into ideas is the function of literature.

--George Santayana

Our high respect for a well-read man is praise enough of literature.

--T. S. Eliot

If you would understand your own age, read the works of fiction produced in it. People in disguise speak freely.

--Arthur Helps

When it’s summer, people sit a lot. Or lie. Lie in the sense of recumbency. A good heavy book holds you down. It’s an anchor that keeps you from getting up and having another gin and tonic. Many a person has been saved from summer alcoholism, not to mention hypertoxicity, by Dostoyevsky. Put *The Idiot* in your lap or over your face, and you know where you are going to be for the afternoon.

— Roy Blount Jr.
Literature is ‘The expression of a nation's mind in writing.’
—William E. Channing

Literature is news that stays news.
--Ezra Pound

Biography broadens the vision and allows us to live a thousand lives in one.
--Elbert Hubbard

Open George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* or William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, two hefty examples of 19th Century literature at its finest....You can’t read the book. Your mind, earnest and dutiful, will stick with the task for a clause or two, but somewhere after the fourth semicolon, just shy of the sixth ‘moreover’ or ‘henceforth,’ it will happen: Your mind, like a friendly pup, will bolt from the path and go nosing off to those interesting places in the distance where there’s light and noise and fun, tripping over its paws, deliriously happy at having slipped the surly bonds of a long, long, long sentence....We don’t read like we used to—and we probably can’t. No matter how much we try, we can’t seem to bring the necessary level of concentration to bear upon printed matter of any depth or complexity. Because of MTV or VH1, because of the Internet, because of cell phones or satellite pagers—pick your favorite hectoring doodad, since any or all may be responsible—we are no longer able to clear out the physical, psychological or intellectual space to grapple with sophisticated printed matter....

We may be reaching a critical point in human history: the moment after which no one is actually able to read anything written before 1900....There seems to be, simmering within us like various ingredients interacting in a witch’s cauldron, an inability to focus long and hard....those big, grand 19th Century novels...might as well be written in a foreign language, so inaccessibly remote have they become to 21st Century sensibilities.

--Julia Keller

Miguel de Cervantes...is the supreme genius of Spanish literature. He was a contemporary of Shakespeare and, in some ways, is comparable to him....*Don Quixote*..., published in 1605,...was the first work of literature that could be called a novel and is still the best of its class in the minds of many.

—Isaac Asimov

Although Cervantes led a life of what we would now call ‘quixotic’ adventure and glory, his great book satirized the empty worship of such a life as glamorized by the literary descendants of the troubadours....Cervantes smiles with gentle sadness at the folly of mankind.

—Isaac Asimov
George Chapman was the first to translate Homer’s epics into English....The first portion of the translation was published in 1598, the last in 1616. Until then Englishmen interested in the Homeric tales had to go back to the original Greek, or else to rely on the medieval versions of the tale, as Chaucer and Shakespeare did in their stories of the love of Troilus and Cressida. Chapman’s Homer was by no means an exact translation. In fact, Chapman not only translated Homer into English, but into the Elizabethan idea of English poetry complete with rhymed fourteen-syllable verse and with added moral homilies. Perhaps, for that reason, it proved extremely popular, remaining so even after Alexander Pope, between 1713 and 1726, translated Homer into urbane heroic couplets in equally artificial manner. It wasn’t till modern times that more or less literal translations appeared.

—Isaac Asimov

It was Helen who was queen of Sparta, and whom Paris carried off to Troy. It was she, commonly called ‘Helen of Troy,’ who was the occasion of the ten years war, parts of which were described in Homer’s Iliad. She was, therefore, the center and cause, so to speak, of the greatest work of literature of the ancient world.

—Isaac Asimov

Edgar Lee Masters was born in Garnett, Kansas, on August 23, 1869. A lawyer by profession, he published forgettable poetry until, in 1915, he produced his one masterpiece, The Spoon River Anthology. This consists of bitterly ironic epitaphs of the dead of the small town of Spoon River, supposedly delivered by each of them from the grave, and revealing the deficiencies of small-town life. The town in question seems to have been modeled on Lewistown, Illinois, which is near the Spoon River.

—Isaac Asimov

For me, it was a revelation. There, was revealed a completely different Anne to the child that I had lost. I had no idea of the depths of her thoughts and feelings.

—Otto Frank

While thought exists, words are alive and literature becomes an escape, not from, but into living.

--Cyril Connolly

The only important thing in a book is the meaning It has for you.

--W. Somerset Maugham

I have never known any distress that an hour’s reading did not relieve.

--Montesquieu
The love of novels is the preference of sentiment to the senses.  

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Journalism allows its readers to witness history; fiction gives its readers an opportunity to live it.

--John Hersey

Reality is not an inspiration for literature. At its best, literature is an inspiration for reality.

--Romain Gary

Literature is the orchestration of platitudes.

--Thornton Wilder

The chief glory of every people arises from its authors.

--Samuel Johnson

No species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, none can be more delightful or more useful.

--Samuel Johnson

There is properly no history; only biography.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.

--Francis Bacon

Never read any book that is not a year old.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

‘Classic.’ A book which people praise and don’t read.

--Mark Twain

For what are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? They are the only oracles which are not decayed.

--Thoreau

The biographer’s responsibility is large. He assays the role of a god, for in his hands the dead can be brought to life and granted a measure of immortality.

--John A. Garraty
I doubt if anything learnt at school is of more value than great literature learnt by heart.

--Sir Richard Livingstone

Literature exists to please—to lighten the burden of men’s lives; to make them for a short while forget their sorrows and their sins, their silenced hearth, their disappointed hopes, their grim futures—and those men of letters are the best loved who have best performed literature’s truest office.

—Augustine Birrell

Literature is an avenue to glory, ever open for those ingenious men who are deprived of honours or of wealth.

--Isaac D'Israeli

Literature is a succession of books from books.... Every novel was suckled at the breasts of older novels, and great mothers are often prolific of anemic offspring.

--John Macy

Literature in many of its branches is no other than the shadow of good talk.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Every man is a borrower and a mimic, life is theatrical and literature a quotation.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

It seems that the analysis of character is the highest human entertainment. And literature does it, unlike gossip, without mentioning real names.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

The Bible is literature, not dogma.

--George Santayana

Autobiographies are the most difficult things to write correctly, for there is nothing that a man knows less about than himself.

--Josh Billings

Literature taken in all its bearings, forms the grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal Kingdoms.

--William Godwin
Our American professors like their literature clear and cold and pure and very dead.  
--Sinclair Lewis

Language put to its best purpose, used at its utmost power and with the greatest skill, and recorded that it may not pass away, evaporate and be forgotten, is what we call, for want of a better word, literature.  
--J. H. Mackail

Good literature continually read for pleasure must, let us hope, do some good to the reader: must quicken his perception though dull, and sharpen his discrimination though blunt, and mellow the rawness of his personal opinions.  
--Alfred Edward Housman

Great literature, past or present, is the expression of great knowledge of the human heart.  
--Edith Hamilton

In science, read, by preference, the newest works; in literature, the oldest. The classic literature is always modern.  
--Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Literature is an investment of genius which pays dividends to all subsequent times.  
--John Burroughs

For the creation of a masterwork of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment.  
- Matthew Arnold

Never pursue literature as a trade.  
--Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect, between life and death. When literature becomes too intellectual—when it begins to ignore the passions, the emotions—it becomes sterile, silly, and actually without substance.  
--Isaac Bashevis Singer

It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature.  
--Henry James
It is with literature as with law or empire—an established name is an estate in tenure, or a throne in possession.

--Edgar Allan Poe

A knowledge of different literature is the best way to free one's self from the tyranny of any of them.

--Jose Marti

A novel is a mirror that strolls along a highway. Now it reflects the blue of the skies, now the mud puddles underfoot.

--Stendhal

The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.

--Henry James

The great standard of literature as to purity and exactness of style is the *Bible*.

--Hugh Blair

The classics are only primitive literature. They belong to the same class as primitive machinery and primitive music and primitive medicine.

--Stephen Leacock

Literature is the immortality of speech.

--August Wilhelm von Schlegel

Nothing lives in literature but that which has in it the vitality of creative art.

--E. P. Whipple

The intensely, stiflingly human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity; there is no escaping the uplift and the downpour, nor can they be kept out of criticism. We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised or even purified, the novel wilts, little is left but a bunch of words.

--E. M. Forster

The novel is something that never was before and will not be again.

--Eudora Welty
I really do think the South tends to produce better writers. There’s no mystery about it. We’re all Southerners, and we belong to a rural tradition. It’s an oral tradition... We like words. We like to tell stories....That’s where great literature comes from.

--James Dickey

The day of the regional Southern writing is all gone. I think that people who try to write in that style are usually repeating a phased-out genre—or doing Faulkner badly.

--Walker Percy (1970)

There are no absolute values in literature, and the only real meaning a book can have is the meaning it holds for its reader.

--Dayton Kohler

Literature is the mirror by which man is reflected.

--Jesse Perry

In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.

--Edgar Allan Poe

I scarcely think we could any of us claim that in reading a novel we deliberately watch the book itself, rather than the scenes and figures it suggests, or that we seek to construct an image of the book, page by page, while its form is gradually exposed to us. We are much more inclined to forget, if we can, that the book is an object of art, and to treat it as a piece of the life around us; we fashion for ourselves, we objectify, the elements in it that happen to strike us most keenly. These things take shape in the mind of the reader; they are recreated and set up where the mind’s eye can rest on them, but they are not that which the author offers us.

--Percy Lubbock

There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly...you may take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express it and realize it.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

What I like in a good author is not what he says, but what he whispers.

--Logan Pearsall Smith
Literature is the effort of man to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his condition.
--Walter Savage Landor

A novel is never anything but a philosophy put into images.
--Albert Camus

The short story is the art form that deals with the individual when there is no longer a society to absorb him and when he is compelled to exist, as it were, by his own inner light.
--Frank O'Connor

Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man—the biography of the man himself cannot be written.
--Mark Twain

Literature provides a living through, not simple knowledge about.
--Louise M. Rosenblatt

Literature is man’s written record of what it is like to be alive.
--Unknown

Ideally, our literary education should begin, not with prose, but with such things as ‘this little Pig went to market’—with verse rhythm reinforced by physical assault. The infant who gets bounced on somebody’s knee to the rhythm of ‘Ride a cock horse’ does not need a foot-note telling him that Banbury Cross is twenty miles northeast of Oxford....All he needs is to get bounced. If he is, he is beginning to develop response to poetry in the place where it ought to start.
--Northrop Frye

Literature is an effective means of preserving, transmitting, and improving the cultures that make up a pluralistic society.
--James E. Kerber

We cannot improve on the classics.
--Jean de la Fontaine

All that non-fiction can do is answer questions. It’s fiction’s business to ask them.
--Richard Hughes
One hears about life all the time from different people with very different narrative gifts.

--Anthony Powell

For a government to have a great writer is like having another government. That’s why no regime has ever loved great writers, only minor ones!

--Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn

The letters and records of writers of genius are one of the ways we have of finding out how life was really lived in any given time and place.

--Edmund Wilson

The essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.

--Aldous Huxley

Journalism is literature in a hurry.

--Matthew Arnold

An editor—a person employed on a newspaper, whose business it is to separate the wheat from the chaff and to see that the chaff is printed.

--Elbert Hubbard

The truth is, we’ve not really developed a fiction that can accommodate the full tumult, the zaniness and crazed quality of modern experience.

--Saul Bellow

A novel must be exceptionally good to live as long as the average cat.

--Hugh MacLennan

Two or three generations of literature may do more to change thought than two or three thousand years of traditional life.

--Sir James Frazer

Literature, well or ill conducted, is the Great Engine by which all civilized states must ultimately be supported or overthrown.

--T. J. Mathias

The world is fundamentally hostile to literature, in great part because the world is gregarious, and literature is a solitary pursuit.

--Andrew Lang
It is life that shakes and rocks us, it is literature which stabilizes and confirms.
--H. W. Garrod

The reader’s own experience, moving beneath the pressure of the word, brings into consciousness how many sights, how many feelings of which the author of that word can have no notion.
--Vernon Len

He who had thought he had understood something in my work, had as a rule adjusted something in it to his own image—not infrequently the very opposite of myself.
--Nietzsche

Literature...may enable us to exercise our senses more intensely and more fully than we otherwise have time or opportunity to.
--Louise H. Rosenblatt

An autobiography usually reveals nothing bad about its writer except his memory.
--Franklin P. Jones

Canadian books may occasionally have had a wild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none.
--E. K. Brown

There are just three big cities in the United states that are story cities—New York, of course, New Orleans, and the best of the lot, San Francisco.
--Frank Norris

The Pulitzer Prize in fiction takes dead aim at mediocrity and almost never misses.
--William Gass

Another secret of fine prose is that it subtly teaches the reader how it works. It conveys not only information, not only instruction, but also the values in which the Information and instruction are properly framed.
--Judson Jerome

All novels are about minorities; the individual is a minority
--Ralph Ellison
Insights into the human condition are often more vividly expressed in a dramatic scene in a novel than in a text by an historian or psychologist.

--Joan Dial

Literature—good, bad and indifferent—shapes our lives. When we are young, it is the stuff of our dreams, fantasies and ambitions, not only an escape from the far less interesting real world around us, but also a way of learning about things that all too often can’t be learned at home.

--Michael Korda

Literature is not an escape from life, it is a way of experiencing life, on a larger scale—a way of understanding that what we feel and experience has been felt and experienced before, that our problems are not unique but have been faced by other people, and overcome.

--Michael Korda

(What is) the difference between good novels and merely entertaining ones? It seems to me that a good novel is more than the sum of its parts, that when you have finished reading it you are moved by the characters to reflect on the subject of character itself. Because they are so convincingly alive in a particular way the people in a good novel inevitably become advertisements for or against an idea, a form or desire, or an attitude toward experience.

--Anatole Broyard

Literature has two advantages over wine. A good book ages forever; and you can read it as often as you wish without diminishing its substance. The devoted reader is like a wine lover whose dream has come true. His stock will never spoil or be consumed. He can sample, enjoy, and share his cellar without fear of depleting his reserves; it will grow as he grows. He need never go thirsty.

--Roger Shattuck

Any novel...is a synthetic composition fabricated of found art...and bits and pieces taken from a rag-bag of observations, memory, dreamy invention, willful creation.

--Geoffrey Wolff

It’s so easy to forget what a satisfying thing ordinary life can be. Where it exists, people seem to take it for granted, instead of shouting it to the housetops. You would think it would find its way into fiction—surely, novelists must have noticed its joys, like a hungry man with his nose pressed to a bakery window—but ordinary life just about disappeared from fiction somewhere in the nineteenth century.

--Anatole Broyard
Great literature teaches us about *ourselves*. It does *not* offer us pat, readymade solutions like self-help books; it offers examples and life experiences that help us, in good times or bad, to face our own problems.

--Michael Korda

Fiction is *about* pressure....(It) draws its heat not from the sun but from friction, discord, opposition.

--Geoffrey Wolff

Most literature deals consciously or unconsciously with the problem of reality; it asks what is real in the worlds, which values are real, which without foundation and therefore false or evil.

--Joyce Carol Sates

World literature is no longer an abstract anthology, nor a generalization invented be literary historians: It is, rather a certain common body and a common spirit, a living, heartfelt unity reflecting the growing unity of mankind.

--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

The existence of good bad literature—the fact that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one’s intellect simply refuses to take seriously—is a re- minder that art is not the same thing as celebration.

--George Orwell

In a first-rate work of fiction, the real clash is not between the characters, but between the author and the world.

--Vladimir Nabokov

A biography is not a compilation of facts. It is a portrait in words of a man or woman in conflict with himself or with the world around him, or with both.

--Milton Lomask

Words make and break literature. Unlike other areas of communication, however, literature does more than inform or persuade or argue. It fulfills an emotive and aesthetic sense. It suggests a meaning, and conveys a tonal coloring.

--Martin Tucker

It is through literature that the word has been preserved and nourished and it is in literature that we find the candor and refreshment of truth.

--Shirley Hazzard
A novel is a picture, a portrait, and we do not forget that there is more in a portrait than the ‘likeness.’ Form, design, composition, are to be sought in a novel as in any other work of art; a novel is the better for possessing them.

--Percy Lubbock

We must not forget that (children) can learn from Lewis Carroll as well as social studies, that they can learn from Aesop as well as the new math, that the ugly duckling need not be discarded in favor of driver education.

--Madeleine L’Engle

The short story was invented by de Maupassant and Chekhov between them, and its limits are apparent. It may not wander far, it has to keep close to its base point, it will only carry a few characters, three at least, at best not more than three; there is not time, or space, for elaborate characterization.

--Sean O’Faolain

One of the interesting things about being a novelist at this hour of the world is that one is working in a form that may be nearing the end of its line. The realistic novel obviously has shot its bolt. The old masters of 20th-century fiction—especially Joyce and Kafka in their various ways—brought prose narrative to a kind of ultimacy.

--John Barth

The special genius of the novel as a genre is its ability to depict not only the exterior world of action, but the interior world of character—and one crucial thing more, the relation between them.

--Alan Friedman

Despite (or perhaps because of) their increasingly complex nature, mysteries still remain at the top of the leisure-time reading category. They are read by men and women, by the old and young. The suspense and challenge that are found in their pages compel the reader to speed towards the end to seek the puzzle’s solution. And for those who would rather not cope with problems, even not in books, the certainty that an answer awaits them at the end, offers a special soothing effect. All is well, that ends well!

--Bestsellers

Good literature recalls the past, reflects the present, and prognosticates the future; it is more than a mirror, for it reaches ahead of today and beckons one into tomorrow, offering the reader new growth in wisdom, insight, and understanding.

--Bess Porter Adams
Good literature...bears the mark of truth and integrity; it carries the reader along into genuine, if vicarious, experience; it stirs his emotions, arouses his curiosity, stimulates his mind, and gives him a measuring stick for living. The characters in the stories are as real as the people he knows; the ideas in essays, novels, plays, and poems are as true as the best thinking of the human mind.

--Bess Porter Adams

Literature, national though it be in origin, knows no frontiers, and should remain common currency between nations in spite of political or international upheavals.

--Marchette Chute

The main object of the novel is to represent life. I cannot understand any other motive for interweaving imaginary incidents, and I do not perceive any other measure of the value of such combinations. The effect of a novel—the effect of any work of art—is to entertain; but that is a very different thing. The success of a work of art, to my mind, may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the time that we have lived another life—that we have had miraculous enlargement of experience. The greater the art the greater the miracle, and the more certain also the fact that we have been entertained—in the best meaning of the word, at least, which signifies that we have been living at the expense of someone else.

--Henry James

Fiction is properly at work on the here and now, or the past made here and now; for in novels we have to be there. Fiction provides the ideal texture through which the feeling and meaning that permeate our own personal, present lives will best show through. For in his theme—the most vital and important part of the work at hand—the novelist has the blessing of the inexhaustible subject: you and me.

--Eudora Welty

When a novelist is said to ‘understand’ the life of any segment of humanity (or humanity as a whole), has he not also ordered his observations at many different levels of abstraction—the particular and concrete, the general, and the more general? However, the novelist presents that order not in a scientific, ethical, or philosophical system of highly abstract generalizations, but in a set of symbolic experiences at the descriptive level...involving the reader's feelings through the mechanism of identification. And these symbolic experiences, in the work of any competent novelist, are woven together to form a consistent set of attitudes, whether of scorn, or compassion, or admiration of courage, or sympathy with the downtrodden, or a sense of futility, depending on his outlook.

--S. I. Hayakawa
The once-looked-down-upon mystery novel has more than come into its own as a brilliant device for probing the ills of society.

--Publishers Weekly

I don’t believe that the short story or the novel—or the symphony or the sculpture of an object—should ever stand still enough in artistic time for us to say unequivocally what it is, or should be.

--Hortense Calisher

Great writing opens our hearts to life, to suffering, to love.

--Edna O’Brien

A good story is neither traditional nor ‘new.’ It is ageless. Nor are good stories to be divided into such categories as ‘a man’s story,’ or ‘a woman’s story,’ or ‘a child’s story.’ As only one example, how many adults of both sexes revel in that ‘child’s story,’ Alice in Wonderland?

--Martha Foley

The choices an author does make, and those he does not, may tell us a great deal about him personally. The consequence is that the author’s own presence is, or can be, an important ingredient of every work he creates. It is this personal dimension of fiction that helps make the difference, I believe, between storytelling and literary art....

This is not to say that subjectivity and self-revelation will, in themselves, make a work of fiction good; but in every work of fiction that we do agree is good, it might well be found that the author himself is there invisibly as one of the characters—and usually as one of the more interesting characters.

--Joseph Heller

Fiction permits you the imposition of a kind of order, a kind of coherence out of life. We see our lives with a beginning and with an end, but basically, in the great overall scheme of things, we’re just one small atom. We’re only one small part of a never-ending, massive whirling toward a kind of extinction. But with fiction you can for the moment freeze this.

--Harry Mark Petrakis

Fiction is born from the awareness that life is tragic. It’s tragic because it’s transitory, because the sun rises in the morning and the sun sets at night—and this is part of that which we seek to display.

--Harry Mark Petrakis
A story becomes something different with every reader, since the effect it produces is a combination of the written words and of the reader's own personality, which itself changes with the day or the mood. But there are certain stories that present ideas and emotions with a force that is never forgotten.

--Alan Garner

A short story should embody or suggest something universal, some kind of statement about life. I am not saying that a short story should be didactic, or intended to instruct, teach, or lecture the reader. Far from it. Nor am I saying that a short story should be aimed at uplifting the spirit. What I am suggesting is that the good short story—the story worthy of being read more than once—ultimately should be concerned with some aspect of the human experience. It should entertain, it should be admirable esthetically; but, especially, it should have relevance above and beyond the relevance of the incidents and the characters themselves.

--William Peden

The great novelists emphasize the complexity of human life and make it difficult to conceive of rapid solutions to age-old problems, but it may be important to note that this very complexity may put off a number of young people impatient for results. Non-fiction is in many ways more comforting; it assumes that things can be described, people categorized, problems analyzed....Categories may make discourse easier but they tend to lead us away from human truth.

--Edward D. Sullivan

The novel is a past reported in the present. On the stage it is always now. This confers upon the action an increased vitality which the novelist longs in vain to incorporate into his work.

This condition in the theatre brings with it another important element:

In the theatre we are not aware of the intervening storyteller. The speeches arise from the characters in an apparently pure spontaneity.

A play is what takes place.

A novel is what one person tells us took place.

A play visibly represents pure existing. A novel is what one mind, claiming omniscience, asserts to have existed.

--Thornton Wilder
The good work is always the drama of the writer’s identity with, and struggle against, his time.  

--Robert Penn Warren

To say that you can exhaust man’s interest in the story is to say that you can exhaust his interest in mankind....we will always be curious about what we are and how we became that way.  

--Vance Bourjaily

A play is fiction—and fiction is fact distorted into truth.  

--Edward Albee

Even the most objective novels are cradled in the authors’ emotions and the authors’ assumptions about life and mind and the passions.  

--Thornton Wilder

Short stories are like solar plexus blows. The effect is single and at once.  

--Joseph Slotkin

What is a plot? It is a series of incidents with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Like theme, characterization, and setting, it is one of the four elements of fiction, and it is perhaps the most important of these four elements. Plot is what happens. Alone, it is the tale told by the idiot who cannot see the point of the story, who is unaware of the background (setting), and to whom all its characters or personages are of equal importance, and without past or future.

Plot contains conflict, suspense, resolution (or plot climax as distinguished from thematic climax), and the events are seldom told in exact chronological sequenced most plots, whether in stories, novels, or dramas, begin in the middle, go back to the beginning, and jump to the end.  

--Catherine Lindsay

To read a great novel helps us to live because it helps us better to understand life. Characters in a novel are not reticent as are people in real life. We listen in to their most intimate conversations. We are admitted into their silent deliberations. We know what they say to themselves in the darkness of the night. Then we realize, much to our surprise and relief, that they are nearer to us than we could have believed.  

--Andre Maurois
The greatest of novels not only help us to understand life; they also help us to accept it, just as it is, with its miseries and delights. They give us a broad picture of the world, with its comedies and its tragedies, its noble and despicable characters.

--Andre Maurois

In the hands of its great masters—Chekhov, James, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Kipling, Lawrence, Babel or Hemingway—the short story became preeminently a medium in which something happened. It was an event, or the dramatic representation of an event. This occurrence may have been actual and external, or it may have been altogether internal—the reaching of insight after imaginary contemplation, for example—but the short story in its classical phase typically represented an ‘action’ in Aristotle’s sense of that term.

--Steven Marcus

It is the natural function of art to be interesting. Neither the plays of the Greeks nor those of Shakespeare are boring. The novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy engage the reader at every moment. The problem with most coterie art is that it is dull. Too often it is also vacant. The artist is so puffed up with himself that he has no time for the business in hand....Finally, he finds himself alone and unappreciated.

--Cecil Hemley

The mature reader buys non-fiction in increasing quantities. He knows that American biographers and historians still write with great skill and clarity. Since these people have not as yet been told that they are artists, they do their jobs as best they can and collect their royalties when their books are successful.

--Cecil Hemley

All of literature comes out of the family—Oedipus, Hamlet—even Genesis is a family story.

--Irwin Shaw

I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories. I think a little menace is fine to have in a story. For one thing, it’s good for the circulation. There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won’t be a story. What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it’s also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things.

--Raymond Carver
A novel shouldn’t be merely entertaining, like some literary versions of Chinese food, leaving you hungry an hour later; it should stick with you for a while.

--C. P. Crow

A good novel is a wondrous thing—entertaining, compelling, evocative and lasting! It should have strong narrative appeal and, ultimately should express the triumph of the human spirit, rather than defeat, radiance rather than darkness, passion and warmth rather than despair and disillusionment.

--Jaroldeen Edwards

Fiction cannot help but be didactic, but it should be decently quiet about it.

--John M. Ford

Characters in novels are interesting as much for their fallibilities as for their strengths, and this recognition makes one more tolerant in real life.

--David Smith

The novel’s great strength...is in its grasp of character.

--Robert Alter

The novel is usually not content...just to represent character in particular social circumstances, but also leads us to reflect on the ultimate purpose and meaning of an individual life.

--Robert Alter

One distinguishing feature of western literature is that the landscape is an active character; a participant in the events of a novel; that the landscape acts on, and interacts with, the human characters.

--Edward Abbey

The short story...simply cannot be defined. Art is: it springs forth from the soul, usually in mysterious ways; and it addresses itself to an audience, sometimes in humility, very often in arrogance....I am not especially disposed to stories with a strong narrative movement, nor do I particularly want or need fiction to have characters, or a clearly evoked setting, or, in fact, much of a ‘point’ at all. I suppose I want simply the sense, which the writer conveys only through the skill of his language, that something unique is being offered. Some illumination, some droll observation, the authenticity of what it feels like from a position alien to my own.

--Joyce Carol Oates
Great novels are great fairy tales.  
--Vladimir Nabokov

Creativity almost inevitably presupposes thinking without language, whether we are referring to a new idea, imagination, artistic creation, the emotional power of memory, or mathematical thought....

Picasso stated, ‘I don’t see, I find.’ In physics, Einstein stressed the nonverbal nature of his thinking. His concepts presented themselves in the form of signs, images, and ‘physical entities,’ which he then tried to associate. These elements were ‘of visual and some of muscular type,’ Einstein explained. ‘Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned: associative play is sufficiently established to be reproduced at will.’

Isn’t it the same with literature?  
--Francois Lhermitte

I have a very modest proposal for improving the teaching of literature in high schools.

They’re teaching Cuckoo because it’s easy. You have to teach what is hard, but teachers don’t want to....Let’s face it...if you don’t learn Shakespeare in high school, you’ll probably never get a hit at it.  
--Ken Kesey

(The novel) isn’t dead, and it never will be dead as long as people have the age-old fascination that goes all the way back to the caveman, of being told a story and wanting to know what happens next. The novel is going to live as long as that propensity survives in the minds of men, women, and children.  
--James Dickey

Fiction is the most fluid and changing of literary forms, the one that most immediately reflects the changes in our collective consciousness, and in fact that is one of its great virtues. As soon as fiction gets frozen into one particular model, it loses that responsiveness to our immediate experience that is its hallmark. It becomes literary. It seems to me that this is one of the major factors contributing to the recent decline in the popularity of fiction: People no longer believe in the novel as a medium that gets at the truth of their lives.  
--Ronald Sukenick
It is one of the paradoxes of American literature that our writers are forever looking back with love and nostalgia at lives they couldn’t wait to leave. The feeling seems to be strongest in those who grew up in neighborhoods, small towns or on farms.

--Anatole Broyard

In fiction you lay bare the problem...so that you can see how tormenting, how insoluble it is.

--Judith Cherniak

I have learned to admire...the teachers who find the courage and resourcefulness to have students learn literary works by heart. They are few in number and they do so in the face of strong pedagogical theory and prejudice to the contrary. Yet literature will remain a coating on the printed page or an intellectual game unless we can quicken it into real speech for the young. Reading aloud and learning by heart remain for me the two most essential, and most neglected, of literary activities.

--Roger Shattuck

You might say plot is the skeleton of a book, character development its flesh and blood, and style, its heart. Each part must make sense in terms of the whole. A good plot gives the story shape and structurally moves the action along.

--Elizabeth Gordon

Children ask of a story what they ask of a dream—that it satisfy their wishes.

--Randall Jarrell

The crime novel is a very useful tool for writers wanting to describe, analyze, and explain our time, our kind of society and human beings now. There is no reason whatsoever to regard the crime novel as a lower kind of literature compared to what is sometimes called real literature.

--K. Arne Blom

If life is a series of briefly glimpsed vistas, unrealized dreams, dimly perceived people, and stories that seem to have no beginning and no end, it is definitely not this way in fiction. Here at last is a world all of a piece. The people we meet in the books we read are people we know as we have known no one else in all our lives. We are privy to their most intimate thoughts, their secret dreams, even their nightmares. Nothing is hidden from us—or so it appears. What these people do, therefore, is understandable to us when they say or do something, we know why they have said or done it.

--William C. Knott
If the word is sacred...fiction occupies the inner temple. It alone may reveal a universe; all other voices merely inform.

--Thomas Williams

Why is biography not regarded as a creative art? Virginia Woolf says it is not an art, it’s a craft, which I quite agree with. But when a craft is carried out by a genius, it becomes art.

--Mina Kirstein Curtiss

Our most popular form of literature, the novel, apes the form of genuine history in order to bestow an air of reality on imaginary events.

--Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff

Readers formerly content with the spectacle of life now want to know why the depicted characters (in novels) behave as they do; and in the ‘new novel’ characters themselves have given place to situations and states, mostly psychological, in which time itself is abolished. Everywhere, events are disappearing.

--Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff

Thinking back over the stories of the decade, I am struck by the increasing number that have been written...in the first person—and the first person not in the traditional role of observer-narrator, but more often than not at the very center of the story, as its principal character. Does this mean, then, that we are entering an age of disguised autobiography? Conceivably: but I think a more plausible explanation is to be found in a comment made by George Orwell.... ‘In the first person any thing can be made to sound credible.’

--William Abrahams

I don’t see a split between fiction and poetry. Both originate in a certain feeling—a governing emotion. Both are coming from the same place in the gut. For me the common denominator is always an ethical issue....Everything starts from an observed fact of life and then the search begins for the issue....

--Robert Penn Warren

Most of all great fiction, through exaggeration and surprise, through dramatizing the extreme but significant case—through absurd or macabre or radically simplified plot—throws light (sometimes terrible, sometimes consoling) on the human capacity to endure and suffer, and on the terrible dilemmas of marginal choice.

--Albert J. Guerard
American fiction has always see-sawed between realism, or naturalism, and romanticism. Realism used to shock—it still does, a number of readers...Today it is not the realistic but the romantic which startles, so unused to it have American readers become. It comes under the name of ‘innovative,’ a freewheeling, invented kind of writing which, whenever the author wishes, forsakes characters, narrative and natural laws and even allows the long-tabooed deus ex machina to reappear. A term apter than ‘innovative’ might be ‘free fiction,’ just as the poets who first abandoned meter and rhyme called their writing free verse.

--Martha Foley

Literature transmits condensed and irrefutable human experience in still another priceless way: from generation to generation. It thus becomes the living memory of a nation. What has faded into history it thus keeps warm and preserves in a form that defies distortion and falsehood. Thus literature, together with language, preserves and protects a nation’s soul.

--Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Literature has the same transforming quality as painting. To a very large extent every nation is the invention of its poets, novelists, and other authors who have written about the land and its people, about the dreams and aspirations of their countrymen as well as about the observed realities of their daily lives. America is no exception; America is a state of mind and spirit created in good part by the books that have emerged from American experience—as truly, certainly, as it is a political entity shaped by historical circumstance. We are all, so to speak, the spiritual heirs of Poor Richard, Father Knickerbocker, Natty Bumppo, Hiawatha, Huckleberry Finn, and a long succession of other cherished figures from our literary past. They have fashioned our national image, not only in our own eyes but in the eyes of the world at large.

--Marshall B. Davidson

I think that world literature has the power in these frightening times to help mankind see itself accurately despite what is advocated by partisans and by parties. It has the power to transmit the condensed experience of one region to another, so that different scales of values are combined, and so that one people accurately and concisely knows the true history of another with a power of recognition and acute awareness.

--Alexander Solzhenitsyn

The pure short story is a bit like a Chinese box puzzle; you have to have all the pieces fit just right, without any excess at all.

--Craig Shaw Gardner
The one and only substitute for experience which we have not ourselves had is art, literature. We have been given a miraculous faculty: Despite the differences of language, customs and social structure we are able to communicate life experience from one whole nation to another, to communicate a difficult national experience many decades long which the second of the two has never experienced.

--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

No woman has ever told the whole truth of her life. The autobiographies of most famous women are a series of accounts of the outward existence, of petty details and anecdotes which give no realization of their real life. For the great moments of joy or agony they remain strangely silent.

--Isadora Duncan

I have never read the life of any important person without discovering that he knew more and could do more than I could ever hope to know or do in half a dozen lifetimes.

--J. B. Priestley

What I learned first, and most lastingly, is that whoever would tell the truth about any man must be, in the literal sense, his apologist....I mean that the first and perhaps the only duty of an honest biographer is, so far as may be, to set forth the man of whom he writes as that men saw himself, and to explain him on his own terms. Then judgment may best be left to those who read.

--M. A. DeWolfe Howe

Men’s characters come to us from their graves. For life is dazzling and complex: we cannot grasp it, we never understand the heart-in-action. But when the heart has stopped beating forever we turn to the lamp and the manuscript. Some artist pulls aside a curtain and shows us the man. He becomes better known to posterity than he was to his intimate friends.

--John Jay Chapman

The biographer’s responsibility is large. He assays the role of a god, for in his hands the dead can by brought to life and granted a measure of immortality. He should, at least, then, seek to emulate the more reliable divinities in his zeal for truth, his tolerance of human frailty, and his love for mankind.

--John A. Garraty

One of the benefits of fiction...is that it very often teaches you how to live.

--Katherine Paterson
The love of novels is the preference of sentiment to the senses.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

History is a novel which did take place; a novel is history that could take place.

--Edmond and Jules de Goncourt

The vitality of a new movement in art or letters can be pretty accurately gauged by the fury it arouses.

--Logan Pearsall Smith

The unusual is only found in a very small percentage, except in literary creations, and that is exactly what makes literature.

--Julio Cortazar

What is so wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote, and brings to birth in us also the creative impulse.

--E. M. Forster

No human being ever spoke of scenery for above two minutes at a time, which makes me suspect that we hear too much of it in literature.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression.

--Alfred North Whitehead

Biography, like big game hunting, is one of the recognized forms of sport, and it is as unfair as only sport can be.

--Philip Guedalla

When a book, any sort of book, reaches a certain intensity of artistic performance it becomes literature. That intensity may be a matter of style, situation, character, emotional tone, or idea, or half a dozen other things. It may also be a perfection of control over the movement of a story similar to the control a great pitcher has over a ball.

--Raymond Chandler

The novel is the highest example of subtle interrelatedness that man has discovered.

--D. H. Lawrence
Literature plays an important role in our country, helping the Party to educate the people correctly, to instill in them advanced, progressive ideas by which our Party is guided. And it is not without reason that writers in our country are called engineers of the human soul.

--Nikita Khrushchev

No wonder the really powerful men in our society, whether politicians or scientists, hold writers and poets in contempt. They do it because they get no evidence from modern literature that anybody is thinking about any significant question.

--Saul Bellow

What is wrong with most writing today is its flaccidity, its lack of pleasure in the manipulation of sounds and pauses. The written word is becoming inert. One dreads to think what it will be like in 2020.

--Anthony Burgess

A wondrous dream, a fantasy incarnate, fiction completes us, mutilated beings burdened with the awful dichotomy of having only one life and the ability to desire a thousand.

--Mario Vargas Llosa

Some things can only be said in fiction, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t true.

--Aaron Latham

Stories ought to judge and interpret the world.

--Cynthia Ozick

Fiction is nothing less than the subtlest instrument for self-examination and self-display that mankind has invented yet. Psychology and X-rays bring up some portentous shadows, and demographics and stroboscopic photography do some fine breakdowns, but for the full *parfum* and effluvia of being human, for feathery ambiguity and rank facticity, for the air and iron, fire and spit of our daily mortal adventure there is nothing like fiction: it makes sociology look priggish, history problematical, the film media two-dimensional, and the National Enquirer as silly as last week’s cereal box.

--John Updike

Literature could be said to be a sort of disciplined technique for arousing certain emotions.

--Iris Murdoch
Literature is recognizable through its capacity to evoke more than its says.
--Anthony Burgess

Works of art and literature are not an entertainment or a diversion to amuse our leisure, but the one serious and enduring achievement of mankind—the notches on the bank of an irrigation channel which record the height to which the water once rose.

--Gerald Brenan

A curious thing about written literature: It is about four thousand years old, but we have no way of knowing whether four thousand years constitutes senility or the maiden blush of youth.

--John Barth

Literature is, primarily, a chain of connections from the past to the present.
--Gore Vidal

Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but molds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac.

--Oscar Wilde

A novel is rescued life.

--Hortense Calisher

When we want to understand grief beyond grief, or the eternal confrontation of man and woman, man and God, man and himself, we go to the novel.

--Richard Condon

Every novel worthy of the name is like another planet, whether large or small, which has its own laws just as it has its own flora and fauna.

--Francois Mauriac

Poetry is a kind of gasp, and there it is, a spark on the page. Fiction, on the other hand, is like a swamp fire.

--Joy Kogawa

The serious novel is now almost in the same situation as poetry. Eventually the novel will simply be an academic exercise, written by academics to be used in classrooms in order to test the ingenuity of students.

--Gore Vidal
There are no laws for the novel. There never have been, nor can there be.  
--Doris Lessing

Almost all the great writers have as their motif, more or less disguised, the ‘passage from childhood to maturity,’ the clash between the thrill of expectation, and the disillusioning knowledge of the truth. *Lost Illusion* is the undisclosed title of every novel.

--Andre Maurois

Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader—not the fact that it’s raining, but the feel of being rained upon.

--E. L. Doctorow

Good writing excites me, and makes life worth living.

--Harold Pinter

Every abridgment of a good book is a stupid abridgment.

--Montaigne

Education has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading.

--G. M. Trevelyan

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine—they are the life, the soul of reading; take them out of this book for instance—you might as well take the book along with them.

--Laurence Sterne

I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant.

--James Joyce

Literature is, perhaps, the most powerful of the arts.

--James T. Farrell

It (literature) is a means of transmitting experience, feeling, and emotion so that one man can tell others, either in the present or in the future, something of the story of how men and women have lived and felt and thought.

--James T. Farrell
The only test of a work of literature is that it shall please other ages than its own.
--Gerald Brenen

Maybe the whole idea of the ‘classic,’ the book that survives over time, is obsolete; in a society where so much is disposable, why should literature be made to last?
--James Atlas

Literature stirs the mind. It makes you think about a million things, but it does not lead you. So the basic function of literature, as far as I can see, is to entertain the spirit...It’s basically an entertainment and it has only qualities of entertainment—which means, if you are not entertained while you read a book there is no other reward for you.
--Isaac Bashevis Singer

Fiction, even at its best, is remarkably useless in the world of events...The men who tinker with rubber, metal, neutrons and drugs—not those who tinker with fiction—hold the key to events.
--Wright Morris

The novel is a powerful literary form which is capable of reaching out in the real world and modifying it. It is a form which even the nonliterary had better take seriously.
--Anthony Burgess

American authors don’t really write about America, but more about personal feelings.
--Wang Meng

If this thirty-year period (1945-1975) has in fact produced its identifying masterpieces, we do not appear to know what they are or where exactly to find them.
--Warner Berthoff

Let us reflect whether there be any living writer whose silence we would consider a literary disaster.
--Cyril Connolly

Perhaps great writers arrive only at certain stages of a civilization. Great writing may be conjured by great injustice.
--Lance Morrow
One cannot help feeling that its guardians sometimes miss the point of literature, which is not to cut gems of flashing and exquisite rarity but to communicate, to convey a meaning, an art, a story, a fantasy, even a mystery, to someone.

--Barbara Tuchman

Need we totally scorn mere escapism?...The trivial novel may be taking someone’s mind off illness, injury, the loneliness of old age or the turmoil of adolescence. There are times when human beings need to put their feet up and relax.

--Marjorie Boulton

Romantic novels are not keeping anybody from reading ‘good’ literature. These books may even have the salutary effect of at least getting one faction of society reading, keeping minds active and increasing vocabulary.

--Joseph M. Sendry

The object of the novel...is to enlarge experience, not to convey facts.

--John Garnett

A novel is an impression, not an argument.

--Thomas Hardy

The purpose of fiction is...to make the reader see.

--Peter DeVries

For me, a page of good prose is where one hears the rain. A page of good prose is where one hears the noise of battle. A page of good prose has the power to give grief or universality that lends it to a youthful beauty. A page of good prose seems to me the most serious dialogue that well-informed and intelligent men and women carry on today in this endeavor to make sure that the fires of this planet burn peaceably.

--John Cheever

How much of the work of the 1600's is still around except Shakespeare’s?

--Samuel Z. Arkoff

The job of satire is to frighten and enlighten.

--Richard Condon

The goal of Satire is reform, the goal of Comedy acceptance.

--W. H. Auden
Satire is a form of writing in which the message is serious and the method is humor.

--Dr. Laurence J. Peter

Satire is among the most powerful weapons we have. You can do more with it than any other kind of writing.

--Art Buchwald

Satire is not the greatest type of literature...Still, it is one of the most original, challenging and memorable forms.

--Gilbert Highet

One *Catch-22* or *Dr. Strangelove* is more powerful than all the books and movies that try to show war ‘as it is.’

--William Zinsser

It seems that the analysis of character is the highest human entertainment. And literature does it, unlike gossip, without mentioning real names.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect, between life and death. When literature becomes too intellectual—when it begins to ignore the passions, the emotions—it becomes sterile, silly, and actually without substance.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existences, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences signify something, tend to something, fulfill something; it promises us meaning, harmony, and even justice....Art attempts to find in the universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what is fundamental, enduring, essential.

--Saul Bellow

A lawyer without history or literature is a mechanic, a mere working mason; if he possesses some knowledge of these, he may venture to call himself an architect.

--Sir Walter Scott

We read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author.

--John Keats
It does not follow because many books are written by persons born in America that there exists an American literature. Books which imitate or represent the thoughts and life of Europe do not constitute an American literature. Before such can exist, an original idea must animate this nation and fresh currents of life must call into life fresh thoughts along its shores.

--Margaret Fuller (1846)

For the creation of a masterwork of literature two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment.

--Matthew Arnold

The power of the Latin classic is in character, that of the Greek is in beauty. Now character is capable of being taught, learnt, and assimilated: beauty hardly.

--Matthew Arnold

The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.

--Matthew Arnold

Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is a study of perfection.

--Matthew Arnold

Literature is an investment of genius which pays dividends to all subsequent times.

--John Burroughs

No one can draw more out of things, books included, than he already knows. A man has no ears for that to which experience has given him no access.

--Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Ideas are to literature what light is to painting.

--Paul Bourget

Great literature, past or present, is the expression of great knowledge of the human heart; great art is the expression of a solution of the conflict between the demands of the world without and that within.

--Edith Hamilton
Of the pleasures derivable from the cultivation of the arts, sciences, and literature, time will not abate the growing passion; for old men still cherish an affection and feel a youthful enthusiasm in those pursuits, when all others have ceased to interest.

--Isaac D'Israeli

The New Testament, and to a very large extent the Old, is the soul of man. You cannot criticize it. It criticizes you.

--John Jay Chapman

Literature is not an abstract science, to which exact definitions can be applied. It is an art, the success of which depends on personal persuasiveness, on the author's skill to give as on ours to receive.

--Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch

By American literature in the proper sense we ought to mean literature written in an American way, with an American turn of language and an American cast of thought. The test is that it couldn't have been written anywhere else.

--Stephen Butler Leacock

Art, it seems to me, should simplify. That, indeed, is very nearly the whole of the higher artistic process; finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole—so that all that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page.

--Willa Sibert Cather

Homer is new and fresh this morning, and nothing, perhaps, is as old and tired as today's newspaper.

--Charles Peguy

Every great literature has always been allegorical—alllegorical of some view of the whole universe.

--Gilbert Keith Chesterton

No species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.
A great literature is chiefly the product of inquiring minds in revolt against the immovable certainties of the nation.

--H. L. Mencken

I doubt if the texture of Southern life is any more grotesque than that of the rest of the nation, but it does seem evident that the Southern writer is particularly adept at recognizing the grotesque; and to recognize the grotesque, you have to have some notion of what is not grotesque and why.

--Flannery O'Connor

Taste is the literary conscience of the soul.

--Joseph Joubert

Literature is a fragment of a fragment; of all that ever happened, or has been said, but a fraction has been written, and of this but little is extant.

--Goethe

When literature is the sole business of life, it becomes a drudgery. When we are able to resort to it only at certain hours, it is a charming relaxation. In my earlier days I was a banker’s clerk, obliged to be at the desk every day from ten till five o’clock; and I shall never forget the delight with which, on returning home, I used to read and write during the evening.

--Rogers

A country which has no national literature, or a literature too insignificant to force its way abroad, must always be, to its neighbors at least, in every important spiritual respect, an unknown and unestimated country.

--Thomas Carlyle

The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation; the two keep pace in their downward tendency.

--Goethe

There is such a thing as literary fashion, and prose and verse have been regulated by the same caprice that cuts our coats and cocks our hats.

--Disraeli

Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.

--William Dean Howells
A good novel should be, and generally is, a magnifying or diminishing glass of life. It may lessen or enlarge what it reflects, but the general features of society are faithfully reproduced by it. If a man reads such works with intelligent interest, he may learn almost as much of the world from his library as from the clubs and drawing rooms of St. James.

--Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The novel, in its best form, I regard as one of the most powerful engines of civilization ever invented.

--Sir J. Herschel

Lessons of wisdom have never such power over us as when they are wrought into the heart through the groundwork of a story which engages the passions. Is it that we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon? Or is the heart so in love with deceit, that where a true report will not reach it, we must cheat it with a fable in order to come at the truth?

--Laurence Sterne

Legitimately produced, and truly inspired, fiction interprets humanity, informs the understanding, and quickens the affections. It reflects ourselves, warns us against prevailing social follies, adds rich specimens to our cabinets of character, dramatizes life for the unimaginative, daguerreotypes it for the unobservant, multiplies experience for the isolated or inactive, and cheers age, retirement, and invalidism with an available and harmless solace.

—Henry Theodore Tuckerman

It’s not a ladder we’re climbing, it’s literature we’re producing....We cannot possibly leave it to history as a discipline nor to sociology nor science nor economics to tell the story of our people.

--Nikki Giovanni

Literature is a power to be possessed, not a body of objects to be studied.

--Unknown

Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures.

--Jessamyn West

Biography is higher gossip.

--Robert Winder
A novel is a static thing that one moves through; a play is a dynamic thing that moves past one.

--Kenneth Tynan

The greatest masterpiece in literature is only a dictionary out of order.

--Jean Cocteau

The novel is a subjective epic composition in which the author begs leave to treat the world according to his point of view. It is only a question, therefore, whether he has a point of view. The rest will take care of itself.

--Goethe

Fiction still has more to tell people than nonfiction. I think that we are being swallowed up by journalism and discourse. There are so many books that are written just for the head and don’t address feelings at all. A good novel does address feelings. It engages you one to one; you and the writer together share something, share a sense of life.

--Saul Bellow

When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Landor replies: ‘Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.’

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man’s work, has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state, as Talma taught Napoleon? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behavior?

--Ralph Waldo Emerson on Shakespeare

Shakespeare’s principal merit may be conveyed in saying that he of all men best understands the English language, and can say what he will.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Shakespeare has done more for woman than all the other dramatists of the world.

--Robert G. Ingersoll
Every man with a belly full of the classics is an enemy of the human race.

--Henry Miller

I have often wondered about two things. First, why high school kids almost invariably hate the books they are assigned to read by their English teachers; and second, why English teachers almost invariably hate the books students read in their spare time. Something seems very wrong with such a situation. There is a bridge out here, and the ferry service is uncertain at best.

--Stephen King

The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.

--Oscar Wilde

No man understands a deep book until he has seen and lived at least part of its contents.

--Ezra Pound

It is only through fiction and the dimension of the imaginary that we can learn something real about individual experience. Any other approach is bound to be general and abstract.

--Nicola Chiaromonte

Great books are the voices of their times; the greatest literature is timeless.

--Unknown

Stories ought to judge and interpret the world.

--Cynthia Ozick

A novel is the chance to try on a different life for size.

--Marion C. Garretty

We rely upon the poets, the philosophers, and the playwrights to articulate what most of us can only feel, in joy or sorrow. They illuminate the thoughts for which we only grope; they give us the strength and balm we cannot find in ourselves.

Whenever I feel my courage wavering I rush to them. They give me the wisdom of acceptance, the will and resilience to push on.

--Helen Hayes
For most people, fiction is history; fiction is history without tables, graphs, dates, imports, edicts, evidence, laws; history without hiatus—intelligible, simple, smooth.

--William Gass

That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disenfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourse of my book friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness.

--Helen Keller

Literary fiction, whether directed to the purpose of transient amusement, or adopted as an indirect medium of instruction, has always in its most genuine form exhibited a mirror of the times in which it is composed; reflecting morals, customs, manners, peculiarity of character, and prevalence of opinion. Thus, perhaps, after all, it forms the best history of nations.

--Sydney Owenson Morgan

Literature, fiction, poetry, whatever, makes justice in the world. That’s why it almost always has to be on the side of the underdog.

--Grace Paley

To me a novel is something that’s built around the character of time, the nature of time, and the effects that time has on events and characters.

--Frank O’Connor

Biography and fiction are mirror forms, character creation by opposite means. Objective and subjective; learned and imagined; shaped and invented.

--Clark Blaise

The author’s words are like a gold mine which must be searched by thorough digging for the nuggets of thought beneath.

--Charles Wesley Emerson

Literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty.

—Lionel Trilling
It is a melancholy fact that in spite of the millions of dollars expended upon our schools, grammar and high, upon our colleges and our public libraries, a genuine love of literature is imparted to only a very small portion of our population.

--Sam Walter Foss

A sequel is an admission that you’ve been reduced to imitating yourself.

--Don Marquis

When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Landor replies: ‘Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.’

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Shakespeare was an intellectual ocean, whose waves touched all the shores of thought,...towards which all rivers ran, and from which now the isles and continents of thought receive their dew and rain.

--Robert G. Ingersoll

I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatever he penn’d) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, would he had blotted a thousand.

--Ben Jonson

I do believe that literature is revolutionary and thus, political in a deeper sense. Literature not only sustains a historical experience and continues a tradition. It also—through moral risk and formal experimentation and verbal humor—transforms the conservative horizon of the readers and helps liberate us all from the determinisms of prejudice, doctrinal rigidity and barren repetition.

--Carlos Fuentes

A good novel ought to have a shape. Pop novelists never fail to gather their strands of action into a climax. They are helped in this by the comparative inertness of their characters. The characters of an art novel resist the structure which their creators try to impose on them; they want to go their own way. They do not even want the book to come to an end and so they have, sometimes arbitrarily, as in E. M. Forster, to be killed off. A good novel contrives, nevertheless, somehow to trace a parabola. It is not merely a slice of life. It is life delicately molded into a shape. A picture has a frame and a novel ends where it has to—in some kind of resolution of thought or action which satisfies as the end of a symphony satisfies.

--Anthony Burgess
A narrative is like a room on whose walls a number of false doors have been painted; while within the narrative, we have many apparent choices of exit, but when the author leads us to one particular door, we know it is the right one because it opens.

--John Updike

The story speaks to the inner life of the reader. It is, I believe, as essential as food and water, as sleep, dreams, and love.

--Norma Fox Mazer

Movies...are increasingly about technique, and technology, rather than people, and draw their inspiration from other movies rather than from any special passion or insight of the director. Literature is in danger of becoming similarly stylized and self-absorbed. There is a vast and growing body of fiction that takes as its subject the process of inventing fiction, or the conventions of fiction in this or that form, or the nature of fictional structures. This work is considered experimental by those who produce and admire it, generally the same people, but in practice most of it has become so ritualized and predictable that it is, in effect, simply another form of silence: white noise.

For that matter, most of the noise that fills our lives is white noise. We live in a great silence where what frightens us and moves us and sustains us is rarely given voice. But when that silence is broken we bend forward and listen.

--Tobias Wolff

Maybe the nature of fiction is that, unlike reporting for the New York Times, it has to admit everything—all aspects and forms of thought and behavior and feeling, no matter how awful they may be. Fiction has no borders; everything is open, you have a limitless possibility of knowing the truth.

--E. L. Doctorow

The great epics, like our own classics, must mean something, not by didactic pedagogy, propaganda, or edification—but by their action, a murky metaphysical historic significance, a sober intuition into the character of a nation—profundities imagined, as if in a dream, by authors who knew what they had written.

--W. H. Auden

A work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.

--Vladimir Nabokov
Literature conveys the recorded experience of the human condition, enabling individuals to transcend time, place, age, individual condition, and culture.

--California State Department of Education

Autobiography is an unrivaled vehicle for telling the truth about other people.
--Philip Guedalla

Biography is to give a man some kind of shape after his death.
--Virginia Woolf

The answers you get from literature depend upon the questions you pose.
--Margaret Atwood

In short, a novel is only some work in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

--Jane Austen

It is a joy to find thoughts one might have, beautifully expressed...by someone...wiser than oneself.

--Marlene Dietrich

All autobiographies are alibi-ographies.

--Clare Boothe Luce

The reason that fiction is more interesting than any other form of literature to those of us who really like to study people, is that in fiction the author can really tell the truth without hurting anyone and without humiliating himself too much.

--Eleanor Roosevelt

There are writers you admire, for the skill or for the art, for the inventiveness or for the professionalism of a career well spent. And there are writers—sometimes the same ones, sometimes not—to whom you are powerfully attracted, for reasons that may or may not have to do with literary values. They speak to you, or speak for you, sometimes with a voice that could almost be your own. Often, there is one writer in particular who awakens you, who is the teacher they say you will meet when you are ready for the lesson.

--James D. Houston
No story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather we who read it are no longer the same interpreters.

--George Eliot

Serious literature does not exist to make life easy but to complicate it.

--Witold Gombrowicz


--Ambrose Bierce

For me the novel is a social vehicle. It reflects society.

--Margaret Atwood

The writer in Western civilization has become not a voice of his tribe, but of his individuality.

--Aharon Appelfeld

What literature can and should do is change the people who teach the people who don’t read the books.

--A. S. Byatt

An autobiography is an obituary in serial form with the last installment missing.

--Quentin Crisp

Best-sellers are about murder, money, revenge, ambition, and sex, sex, sex. So are literary novels. But best-selling authors give you more per page: there are five murders, three world financial crises, two bankruptcies and a civil war in A Dangerous Fortune. There is more drama in it than a literary author will deal with in a lifetime of work.

--Ken Follett

Literature...is the rediscovery of childhood.

--Georges Bataille

The illusion of art is to make one believe that great literature is very close to life, but exactly the opposite is true. Life is amorphous, literature is formal.

--Françoise Sagan

Governments are suspicious of literature because it is a force that eludes them.

--Emile Zola
The novel remains for me one of the few forms where we can record man’s complexity and the strength and decency of his longings. Where we can describe, step by step, minute by minute, our not altogether unpleasant struggle to put ourselves into a viable and devout relationship to our beloved and mistaken world.

--John Cheever

Fiction is not a dream. Nor is it guesswork. It is imagining based on facts, and the facts must be accurate or the work of imagining will not stand up.

--Margaret Culkin Banning

Both technically and thematically Chicano literature is a revolutionary force in that it advocates a change not necessarily solicited, welcome, or wanted, by the dominant culture. Chicano literature is revolutionary in that it imposes itself forcefully rather than sits back for natural evolution to invite it in.

--Abelardo Delgado

The future of literature is bright. The de-emphasis will be on merely mirroring the cultural; in the sense of a representational or realistic mirroring of the culture, the trend is to a more personal work which will carry the culture in it, but will have a concern with experimentation, with style, and perhaps character.

--Rudolfo Anaya

Literature is the thought of thinking souls.

--Thomas Carlyle

Social function is the heart of literature.

--Credo of the Harlem Renaissance

Here we write well when we expose frauds and hypocrites. We are great at counting warts and blemishes and weighing feet of clay. In expressing love, we belong among the undeveloped countries.

--Saul Bellow

If I had to live my life all over again, I would change one thing: I wouldn’t read *Moby Dick*.

--Woody Allen

To say Agatha Christie’s character are cardboard cut-outs is an insult to cardboard.

--Ruth Rendell
The *Mormon Bible* is chloroform in print. If Joseph Smith composed this book, the act was a miracle—keeping awake while he did it was, at any rate.

--Mark Twain

The want of human interest is always felt. *Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. None ever wished it longer than it is.

--Samuel Johnson

I have a prejudice against people who print things in a foreign language and add no translation. When I am the reader, and the author considers me able to do the translating myself, he pays me quite a nice compliment—but if he would do the translating for me I would try to get along without the compliment.

--Mark Twain

Only those things are beautiful which are inspired by madness and written by reason.

—Andre Gide

To know the force of human genius we should read Shakespeare; to see the insignificance of human learning we may study his commentators.

--William Hazlitt

Poets like Shakespeare knew more about psychiatry than any $25-an-hour man.

--Robert Frost

Reading a translation is like looking at a tapestry on the wrong side.

--Cervantes

Satire is moral outrage transformed into comic art.

--Philip Roth

Novels, when well-written, tell you more about life than the most sophisticated computerized sociology.

--Rosmarie Wittman Lamb

Comedies make comments, but tragedy reflects man’s destiny.

--Herbert Lieberman
Some censoring Readers will scornfully say, why hath this Lady writ her own Life? since none cares to know whose daughter she was or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived, or what humor or disposition she was of? I answer that it is true, that ‘tis to no purpose to the Readers, but it is to the Authoress, because I write it for my own sake, not theirs.

--Margaret Cavendish

The best biographies leave their readers with a sense of having all but entered into a second life, and of having come to know another human being in some ways better than he knew himself.

--Mary Cable

Literature teaches us about human possibility. It stretches the imagination and teaches us to imagine people who are different from us and yet are human like us. And so we can empathize with them, and we can stretch our understanding of what it is to be human and to deal with perennial human problems: love, death, sex, the individual in society, making your way in the world, loss, transience.

--Barbara Newman

I really think that literature, the arts, all the products of culture are the commonwealth of humanity. And I really do believe that the only way that human beings will ever make any progress toward getting along peaceably is to learn to understand and appreciate one another’s culture.

--Barbara Newman

One way to experience the adventure of humanity is to travel, to meet people who are not like us, who speak other languages, who make their living in different ways, whose cities look different from ours, whose farms grow different crops. And you say, ‘Wow, the world is so much richer a place than I thought it was.’ I think reading literature from other cultures, reading literature in translation, better yet, reading literature in other languages if we can, are other ways to do that. So the past is another country, too.

--Barbara Newman

Someone in Chaucer’s England would not have thought about gender or religion or money or politics or anything else the same way we do. And yet, since we are all, after all, one species, if we do a lot of research, it is possible for us to attain never a full understanding, but some degree of empathetic understanding of what it was like, what their problems were, what light they shed on our problems, and vice versa.

--Barbara Newman
The pleasure of reading biography, like that of reading letters, derives from the universal hunger to penetrate other lives.  

--Patricia Meyer Spacks

When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young.

--Maya Angelou

All good literature is a treasure of honey in the combs of God.

--C. V. Devan Nair

Discretion is not the better part of biography.

--Lytton Strachey

Shakespeare tells the same stories over and over in so many guises that it takes a long time before you notice.

--Howard Nemerov

Mysteries and thrillers are not the same things, though they are literary siblings. Roughly put, I would say the distinction is that mysteries emphasize motive and psychology whereas thrillers rely more heavily on action and plot. Some mysteries are thrillers and some thrillers are mysteries, but not all mysteries are thrillers, nor are all thrillers mysteries.

--Jon Meacham

This special field of literature, in contrast to that of practical and that of scientific concerns, involves...feelings and attitudes. At first glance, the field of feeling and attitudes may seem trivial when thought of in contrast to the great bustling practical business of the world or in contrast to the vast body of organized knowledge which science is and which allows man to master, to a certain degree, nature and his own fate. The field of feeling and attitude may seem to be ‘merely personal’ and ‘merely subjective,’ and therefore of no general interest. But at second thought, we may realize that all the action and knowledge in the world can be valuable only as these things bring meaning to life—to our particular lives especially.

--Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren

Literature is the most complicated language that man has invented for talking not only to others but to himself.
In literature we enter the contraries of the human predicament more fully and what distinguishes literature from other forms of knowledge is that it cannot be understood unless we understand what it is to be human.

--J. Bronowski

Fiction is truth in a made-up story.

--Diane Carlisle

The function of the novel is to be useful.

—H. G. Wells

To read Dickens is to be caught up in a tumble of words—and in language juicy with the flux of life.

--Simon Schama

Most people’s interest in contemporary ‘literary’ fiction, if they have any interest at all, is a matter of wanting to read the latest Big Novel while it’s still being talked about. If they like it, so much the better, but a sense of connection to their peers is what they’re really after. It would be wrong to think them gullible. They succumb to the loudest promotional campaign every year only because they recognize the recurring need for an ‘it’ novel, something everyone can agree to read at about the same time.

--B. R. Myers

A boy’s story is the best that is ever told.

--Charles Dickens

One magazine called me ‘a training bra for Stephen King.’ I didn’t really like that.

R. L. Stine (Author of the juvenile Goose Bumps series)

In everyone there is a certain thing that loves children, fears death and that likes sunlight: that thing enjoys Dickens.

—G. K. Chesterton
Before long the reading of novels will occupy a niche not much more significant than
the one currently occupied by the reading of poems in Latin.

--Philip Roth

I am the literary equivalent of a Big Mac and fries.

--Stephen King

Fiction is the truth inside the lie.

--Stephen King

There is much to learn about being human from imagined lives.

--Michael Gerson

Most novels, especially popular ones, are humiliating.

—D. H. Lawrence

As much as I understand the importance of fundamentals, it’s often the ‘extra stuff’
that gives you the fundamentals. They do it in a weird way; they do it through
themed learning communities where you’re thinking about greening a campus, and
suddenly you’re learning about engineering because you need to figure out how to
make that HVAC system more efficient—but you wouldn’t have thought about do-
ing that until you got interested in the problem in the first place. And maybe you
didn’t get interested in the environment until you were read a Dr. Seuss story as a
kid that focused on the environment.

--Lynne M. Thomas

She (Jane Austen) is the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness.

--Virginia Woolf

I love biographies. I get very excited by the truth that comes out of what people
have left behind, like letters. I first fell in love with Emily Dickinson when I read
her letters. It’s like listening to someone’s heart.

--Julie Harris

Kafka found life unbearably complicated, altogether daunting, and for the most part
joyless, and so described it in his fiction. This is not, let us agree, the best outlook
for a great writer. Great writers are impressed by the mysteries of life; poor Kafka
was crushed by them.

--Joseph Epstein
The humanities are the flower that blossoms on top of the ‘stem.’ (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math.)

--John Lithgow

Novels can pull off a trick that nonfiction cannot replicate; they allow us not only to consider an idea in elaborate detail, but to inhabit an idea, to follow it through to its most extreme conclusions. To live it.

--Nathaniel Rich

Language gradually varies, and with it fade away the writings of authors who have flourished their allotted time.

--Washington Irving

Words have a power beyond their meaning. I remember the stories of my childhood, but I remember the single words that shone out of fairy stories—milk and buns, a flask of wine, a cabbage cut fresh from the garden. I see the whiteness, feel the sticky brown, marvel at the beads of moisture on thin, cold glass, hear the knife click through the stem and touch the dew along the ribbed leaves. I would read again stories that frightened me, for the sake of such perceptions. They seem to echo an older life, beyond my knowing.

--Pamela Brown

Into this wild ocean of words Shakespeare plunged head over heels, and disported himself in it with a wild dolphin joy. He collected words from everywhere, from rustic speech and dialect (he no doubt spoke the Warwickshire dialect all his life), from Chaucer and the old books, from translators of the classics, from lawyers and grave theologians, from traveled young gallants. He was, moreover, perhaps the greatest word-creator the world has ever known, and has probably added more new words to our vocabulary than all the other English poets put together. He made up his language as he went along—‘crashing’, as he has been described, ‘through the forest of words like a thunderbolt, crushing them out of shape if they don’t fit in, melting moods and tenses, and leaving people to gape at the transformation.’

—Logan Pearsall Smith

Take the sum of human achievement in action, in science, in art, in literature—subtract the work of the men above forty, and while we should miss great treasures, even priceless treasures, we would practically be where we are today....The effective, moving, vitalizing work of the world is done between the ages of twenty-five and forty.

--Sir William Osler
Sciences are the how, and the humanities are the why.  
--George Lucas

Human life itself may be almost pure chaos, but the work of the artist is to take these handfuls of confusion and disparate things, things that seem to be irreconcilable, and put them together in a frame to give them some kind of shape and meaning.  
—Katherine Anne Porter

Children who do hear stories and are read stories from early on have an intuitive understanding of how one thing resolutely leads into another, that things in life are connected, whereas children who do not hear stories do not hear that connectedness. They think that incidents happen without connection, that life is a series of disconnected bursts that happen to you.  
—Jane Yolen

Cervantes smiled Spain’s chivalry away; A single laugh demolished the right arm Of his country.  
—George Byron

I have never known a novel that was good enough to be good in spite of its being adapted to the author’s political views.  
—Edith Wharton

Translation is like a woman. If it is beautiful, it is not faithful. If it is faithful, it is most certainly not beautiful.  
—Yevgeny Yevtushenko

I think it is very possible that the novel, like poetry before it, could die. Poetry is already living on a very high, snow-covered peak. But nobody goes to visit. And I think the same thing is beginning to happen to the novel. I say, God bless John Grisham and all the other extremely popular writers. At least they are writing things that entertain. Every writer should entertain.  
--Tom Wolfe

Indeed, great fiction shows us not how to conduct our behavior but how to feel. Eventually, it may show us how to face our feelings and face our actions and to have new inklings about what they mean. A good novel of any year can initiate us into our own new experience.  
--Eudora Welty
Literature...helps readers develop the imaginative capacity to put themselves in the place of others—a capacity essential in a democracy, where we need to rise above narrow self-interest and envision the broader human consequences of political decisions.

--Louise Rosenblatt

I’ve been teaching Shakespeare for more then 25 years, and it’s still astonishing to me how seamlessly Shakespeare combines the extraordinary and the ordinary at so many levels—from scenes that mix sublime pathos with obscene jokes to passages in which epic grandiloquence or rhapsodic lyricism progresses hand in hand with the most conversational diction.

--Yu Jin Ko

Shakespeare’s language models precision and efficiency. Consider the terse expressiveness of the Duke of York’s rebuke of a flattering nephew: ‘Uncle me no uncles!’ In addition to such snappy dialogue, Shakespeare teaches us that a kind of music occurs when long, Latinate words are set next to short, hard Anglo-Saxon ones, as when Hamlet speaks of his father’s ‘canonized bones.’ Long to short, abstract to earthy, spirit to bone. That’s Shakespeare’s rhythm.

--Grace Tiffany

Shakespeare teaches us that the music of language matters. What you have to say is important, but if you want it to have impact, how you say it makes all the difference. There are only three original plots in all of Shakespeare’s plays, but his distillation of human experience into lyrical verse and prose is why his work endures. ‘The play’s the thing,’ but it’s crafted from the ‘words, words, words.’

--Christopher Moore

Reading shakespeare gives you a visceral experience of how expansive the imaginative possibilities of language can be. But at the same time, the precision of the language is as remarkable as the range, amplitude and inventiveness. I think what’s commonly referred to as Shakespeare’s universality comes down to how the element of precision—linguistic and psychological—centers the verbal virtuosity.

--Yu Jin Ko

All the great legends are Templates for human behavior. I would define a myth as a story that has survived.

--John Boorman

All Bibles are man-made.

--Thomas A. Edison
Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty.

--Oscar Wilde

The very essence of literature is the war between emotion and intellect, between life and death. When literature becomes too intellectual - when it begins to ignore the passions, the emotions - it becomes sterile, silly, and actually without substance.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer

We all like stories that make us cry. It’s so nice to feel sad when you’ve nothing in particular to feel sad about.

--Anne Sullivan

What one has not experienced, one will never understand in print.

--Isadora Duncan

All autobiographies are lies. I do not mean unconscious, unintentional lies: I mean deliberate lies.

--George Bernard Shaw

The difference between memoir and autobiography, as far as I see it, is that a memoir is there primarily to tell one particular story, whereas an autobiography tries to be a full account of a life.

--Salman Rushdie

When you put down the good things you ought to have done, and leave out the bad ones you did do well, that’s memoirs.

--Will Rogers

Memoirs are a well-known form of fiction.

--Frank Harris

The memoirist has license, I think, to mess a bit with the lighting, the stage set, the costumes and the incidental music that’s being performed in the orchestra pit—but not, however, with the script, with the play itself.

--Tom Robbins

I never went to college. But I have lectured on campuses for a quarter-century, and it is my impression that after taking a course in The Novel, it is an unusual student who would ever want to read a novel again.

--Gore Vidal
The world is not made of molecules, the world is made of stories.
--Muriel Rukeyser

Fiction is a continual discovery of what one wants to say, what one feels, what one means, and is, in that sense, a performance art.
--Edmund White

The reason I love comics more than anything else is that the longest story will be just a few pages. With a novel, it takes so many pages to get to one thing happening.
--Sergio Aragones

The writers who have the deepest influence on one are those one reads in one’s more impressionable, early life, and often it is the more youthful works of those writers that leave the deepest imprint.
--J. M. Coetzee

Good fiction shows human nature for what it is: flawed, heroic, struggling, joyous, hateful, corrupt, self-serving, self-sacrificing, rebellious and dozens of other attributes that make up the human condition. Good fiction also enables us to vicariously experience life through the psyches of people who are different from ourselves and yet possess enough shared qualities for us to identify with them. This is why reading fiction can foster compassion and tolerance.
--Fred White

Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry....Basically, very little magic and a lot of hard work are involved.
--Gabriel García Márquez

By confining your child to blameless stories of child life in which nothing at all alarming every happens, you will fail to banish the terrors, and would succeed in banishing all that can ennoble them or make them endurable.
—C. S. Lewis

Ongoing serials are perfect for shy readers who are uncomfortable meeting new protagonists. They are considered a gateway drug for actual literature.
--Earth (The Book) A Visitor’s Guide to the Human Race

Classics are works of such depth and importance you have to read them. Literally. To graduate, you have to read them.
Hemingway was a prisoner of his style. No one can talk like the characters in Hemingway except the characters in Hemingway. His style in the wildest sense finally killed him.

--William Burroughs

The human soul needs actual beauty more than bread.

--David Herbert Lawrence

Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the inards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.

--E. B. White

Only through art can we emerge from ourselves and know what another person sees.

--Marcel Proust

It’s not name dropping, but not many people can say, like me, that they spent the day with the likes of Francis Bacon or that boring drunk Dylan Thomas. You don’t forget things like that.

--Jeffrey Bernard

Writers are like runners: each has an optimal distance. There are marathoners (Proust, Musil, Mailer, Pynchon, Vollmann); middle-distance runners, whose novels rarely stray far from the standard 300-page finish line (Highsmith, Weldon, Auster); and sprinters (Simenon, Salinger, Lydia Davis, Donald Antrim). But length isn’t everything. Kurt Vonnegut and Mark Twain were sprinters who wrote novels—novels that are thinly disguised story collections. Dickens wrote enormous novels that tend to be compendiums of middle-distance novels shuffled together.

--Nathaniel Rich

[Novelists] are like members of an eccentric family in an ancestral mansion...Some are full of respect, some reserved, others bend double with laughter; the rebellious and impatient slash the canvases, twist the cutlery, raise a toast, and throw the crystal in the grate.

--Michael Schmidt
There’s a reason we call them novels. The genre, Michael Schmidt remarks, ‘takes in and takes on invention like no other literary form.’ Modernity’s preeminent artistic innovation, the novel is perpetually striving to achieve the new. Its very looseness, its lack of rules and notorious difficulty of definition, is the secret of its strength. What is a novel? Almost anything that writers have attempted to convince us that it might be. Fiction has always been conspicuously porous to other forms, especially those that we refer to by the term that would seem to negate it, nonfiction: travel, history, journalism, biography, true crime—in our own day, most obviously, memoir.

--William Deresiewicz

The novel has more room than other forms (though serial television has emerged as a rival). Unconstrained by conditions of performance, it makes the most rotund Wagnerian opera, let alone the longest movie, play, or symphony, look anorexic by comparison. Michael Schmidt remarks that the novel arose from medieval genres, with little relation to the classical tradition, but as it grew it claimed the epic goal of plenitude, the ambition to incorporate the whole of life. So many landmark novels are not only huge, they seem to seek to swallow the entire world: Don Quixote, Moby Dick, Middlemarch, Ulysses, War and Peace (whose title might be glossed as Iliad Plus Odyssey, an epic times two), Proust’s Recherche, the titanic socio-graphic cycles of Balzack and Zola, the whole Joycean line of Gaddis, Pynchon, DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace, who wrote a book whose title dares the adjective infinite.

--William Deresiewicz

The novel is novel, but is also, typically, news—the tidings of the world around us. It is no coincidence that a number of the genre’s greatest exponents, starting with Defoe himself, were journalists as well. The novel reaches in and out at once. Like no other art, not poetry or music on the one hand, not photography or movies on the other, it joins the self to the world, puts the self in the world, does the deep dive of interiority and surveils the social scope. That polarity, that tension—call it Richardson versus Fielding, the novels of the soul and of the road—has proved endlessly generative. You can put yourself at any moment, as a writer, anywhere you want to on the spectrum, from the most introspective to the most documentary, invent whatever methods you can think of to bring both self and world into focus.

--William Deresiewicz

Read the Bible—It will scare the hell out of you.

—Church Sign

I think this confusion leads intellectuals and artists themselves to believe that the elite arts and humanities are a kind of higher, exalted form of human endeavor.

--Steven Pinker
Novel-reading is indeed unusually private, unusually personal, unusually intimate. It doesn’t happen out there, in front of our eyes; it happens in here, in our heads. The form’s relationship to time is also unique. The novel isn’t static, like painting and sculpture, but though it tells a story, it doesn’t unfold in an inexorable progression, like music, dance, theater, or film. The reader, not the clock, controls the pace. The novel allows you the freedom to pause: to savor a phrase, contemplate a meaning, daydream about an image, absorb the impact of a revelation—make the experience uniquely your own.

--William Deresiewicz

More than with any other form of art the relationships we have with novels are apt to approach the kind we have with people. For a long time, novels were typically named after people (Tom Jones, Emma, Jane Eyre), but that is not the crux of it. What makes our experience of novels so personal is not that they have protagonists, but that they have narrators. Paintings and photographs don’t, and neither, with rare (and usually unfortunate) exception, do movies or plays. Novels bring another subjectivity before us; they give us the illusion of being addressed by a human being.

--William Deresiewicz

The novel’s days of cultural preeminence have long since gone. The form rose to primacy across the 19th century, achieved a zenith of prestige in modernism, then yielded pride of place to the new visual media. It is no accident, perhaps, that the modernist anni mirabiles after the First World War (the years of Ulysses, Proust, Mrs. Dalloway, The Magic Mountain, The Great Gatsby, and others) directly preceded the invention of the talkies—a last, astounding efflorescence.

--William Deresiewicz

You know...that a blank wall is an appalling thing to look at. The wall of a museum -- a canvas -- a piece of film -- or a guy sitting in front of a typewriter. Then, you start out to do something -- that vague thing called creation. The beginning strikes awe within you.

--Edward Steichen

People think that because a novel’s invented, it isn’t true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they cannot include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that.

--Anthony Powell

Literature is the denunciation of the times in which one lives.

--Camilo Jose Cela
Hemingway’s style didn’t come easily, and it wasn’t in the least natural—it needed to be made, carved from the rock of a very rough draft.

--Michael Gorra

The dead-mother plot has a long and storied history, going back past Bambi and Snow White, past the mystical motherless world of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia, past Dickens’s orphans, past Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Mermaid, past the Brothers Grimm’s step-mothers, and past Charles Perrault’s Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella. As Marina Warner notes in her book From the Beast to the Blonde, one of the first Cinderella stories, that of Yeh-hsien, comes from ninth-century China. The dead-mother plot is a fixture of fiction, so deeply woven into our storytelling fabric that it seems impossible to unravel or explain.

--Sarah Boxer

All the great novels, all the great films, all the great dramas are fictions that actually tell us the truth about us or about human nature or about human situations without being tied into the minutia of documentary events. Otherwise we might as well just make documentaries.

—Jeremy Northam

Literature teaches us the importance of getting outside our own heads. When you identify with a character of the opposite sex, from a different social class, you can feel what it’s like to be someone else. The ability to see the world through someone else’s eyes is a skill that pays off in everything from business negotiations to disciplining a child. The point of reading is to learn the value of other perspectives. If all you know about the other side is what your side says about them, then you’re not thinking.

--Gary Saul Morson

When I read a book I seem to read it with my eyes only, but now and then I come across a passage, perhaps only a phrase, which has a meaning for me, and it becomes part of me.

—W. Somerset Maugham

Good fiction is made of that which is real, and reality is difficult to come by.

—Ralph Ellison

The novel is a penetrating study of morals and ethics.

—Bille August
Adults don’t turn to literature to learn. We turn to literature to have great experiences, to meet great people, to have a window into a world we may not have otherwise experienced and to see some of ourselves.

—Jacqueline Woodson

How do we feel about the on-the-page poetry of Dylan Thomas? His big, late-period thumpers are not looking good. ‘Fern Hill’ is gloop; ‘Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night’ is inferior Yeats. And his early stuff is impossible, a young man and his bubbling glands, his bubbling thesaurus—*Faded my elbow ghost, the mothers-eyed/ As, blowing on the angels, I was lost*—the sort of poetry you press upon a non-poetry-reader if you want to make sure he never goes near a poem again....I am startled, offended, by the plain unreadability of 60 percent of his verse. *Our eunuch dreams, all seedless in the light...*What the hell?

—James Parker

Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.

—C. S. Lewis

How does Dickens create sympathy for Pip in *Great Expectations*? He gives him a girl’s name.

—Unknown

The sole substitute for an experience which we have not ourselves lived through is art and literature.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

A good novel is an indivisible sum; every scene, sequence and passage of a good novel has to involve, contribute to and advance all three of its major attributes: theme, plot, characterization.

—Ayn Rand

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you. What I want is to have the reader come out just 6 percent more awake to the world.

—George Saunders

When we see a natural style, we are astonished and charmed; for we expected to see an author, and we find a person.

—Blaise Pascal
Art can serve people. Basically, the royal road to salvation, for me, lies through an artist saying very uncompromising things about himself. And through reading that relentless investigation, the reader will understand something surprising about himself.

—David Sheilds

…the hero’s journey, or quest narrative, the structure that the American writer and mythologist Joseph Campbell identified and named the ‘monomyth’ in 1949. The quest underlies just about every form of storytelling, from religious myth to Greek epic to Hollywood blockbuster to personal memoir. In this structure, a protagonist is shaken out of his normal way of life by some disturbance and—often reluctantly at first, but at the urging of some kind of mentor or wise figure—strikes out on a journey to an unfamiliar realm. There he faces test, battles enemies, questions the loyalty of friends and allies, withstands a climactic ordeal, teeters on the brink of failure or death, and ultimately returns to where he began, victorious but in some way transformed.

—Alana Karran

Nothing is easier than to falsify the past. Lifeless instruction will do it. If you rob it of vitality, stiffen it with pedantry, sophisticate it with argument, chill it with unsympathetic comment, you render it as dead as any academic exercise. The safest way in all ordinary seasons is to let it speak for itself: resort to its records, listen to its poets and to its masters in the humbler art of prose. Your real and proper object, after all, is not to expound, but to realize it, consort with it, and make your spirit kin with it, so that you may never shake the sense of obligation off. In short, I believe that the catholic study of the world’s literature as a record of spirit is the right preparation for leadership in the world’s affairs, if you undertake it like a man and not like a pedant.

—Woodrow Wilson

There is hardly a pioneer’s hut which does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare. I remember reading the feudal drama of Henry V for the first time in a log cabin.

—Alexis de Tocqueville


—Jack Hamann
Sidewalk resonates because Silverstein wrote for the ear. Purposeful rhythm. Calculated pace. Challenging riffs. Delightful melodies. Words selected as much for their sound as their meaning. Sound becomes meaning.

—Jack Hamann

At school, our reading text was called Fun with Dick and Jane. By comparison, Seuss’ characters were having loads more fun.

—Jack Hamann

All biographies and autobiographies are fiction.

—Joe Mitchell

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you.

—George Saunders

Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Underlying everything—the evocative flashes, the dogged working of language—is the writer’s belief in the story as a system of knowledge. This belief is akin to the scientist’s faith in the scientific method as a way to truth.

—E. L. Doctorow

Every man’s work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.

—Samuel Butler

How do you make any sense of history, art or literature without knowing the stories and iconography of your own culture and all the world’s main religions?

—Polly Toynbee

The fact of storytelling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell.

—Ben Okri

I dislike literary jargon and never use it. Criticism has only one function and that is to help readers read and understand literature. It is not a science, it is an aid to art.

—Anne Stevenson
Drama assumes an order. If only so that it might have —by disrupting that order— a way of surprising.

—Vaclav Havel

Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life.

—Robert Stevenson

For us Africans, literature must serve a purpose: to expose, embarrass, and fight corruption and authoritarianism. It is understandable why the African artist is utilitarian.

—Ama Ata Aidoo

Like a painting, a piece of music or of sculpture, a work of literature is a work of art. That means, most simply, that all parts of the work have been so organized that it expresses an ordered, harmonious, whole experience.

—Geraldine Murphy

Literature cannot express abstract form, as can music, painting, and sculpture, because words are signs for things. But, because language is discursive, because it has phonemic quality and lexical meaning, literature, like music and painting, can express motion and fragility.

—Geraldine Murphy

The writer shares his medium with all who use the language. The words he uses are the same as those used in everyday discourse. He is, in fact, confined to the words and to the meanings of each that native speakers in his time have agreed upon. There is no literary vocabulary; there are no ‘poetic’ words. The writer simply makes ordinary words behave in extraordinary ways. He exploits their several literal meanings, their connotations, their image potential, their symbol values, their sounds, their rhythms. He extends vocabulary by creating new words....And the writer give surprising, fresh contexts to familiar words....The writer turns to his account all the dimensions words have to offer.

—Geraldine Murphy

Words and language conventions are all a writer has to use to express his ideas., feelings, vision. He can only choose and order words in certain ways. If he so organizes language that his work evokes a perception of pattern, an ordered experience, in those readers who respond to the words as they direct, then his work is a work of literature.

—Geraldine Murphy
All works of literature, whether they are fiction or nonfiction and whatever their particular form, have a common use as well as a common function. All can serve as a special kind of cultural document; all have the potential for evoking to some degree an experience of order, unity, harmony and for giving thereby aesthetic pleasure.

—Geraldine Murphy

Reading works of imaginative literature not only deepens a reader’s insight into human experience, it also gives him what we usually call a ‘broad understanding’ of human conduct. A vast panorama of possible human experience is rendered in works of literature, so, a sensitive reader, undergoing these concrete situations, is constantly extending the scope of his own experience. He may be having experiences that in his own life he has never had, may never have, and can never have. And we are referring not only to the erotic, the grotesque, and the exotic, but to the host of situations, that each individual, limited by time and by the circumstances of his own life and personality, can never undergo.

—Geraldine Murphy

Through reading, modern man can realize how a Renaissance subject felt about a king. The skeptic can experience what it is like to be a securely religious man. Those who need to love can know what it is like to need love. Naïve men can recognize the ironic injustice in the scheme of things. Women can see the world through the eyes of a man; adults, through the eyes of a child. The normal man can experience the world of an idiot. The irresponsible can feel with the dutiful. And the secure can discover the tightrope they walk.

Those who tend to find the tragic, the painful, and the pathetic unendurable in life can have these experiences in literature. In life, they may flee from such experiences, sentimentalize them, protest the injustice of them, or confront them stoically or heroically—indeed, do everything but undergo them dispassionately. But when the same human situations are represented in literature at the remove of form, they can respond to them with objective detachment; they can have these ‘unbearable’ experiences. Indeed, they can find what is tragic and horrifying in life tragic and satisfying in literature; they can find what is overwhelmingly pathetic in life ironically humorous in literature or what seems repulsive in life paradoxically comic in literature. Their response to the situation and literature is, of course, with the rendering forces it to be.

—Geraldine Murphy

In more mature literature, drawings disappear from the pages, and the writer assumes the role of illustrator. Language must be the author’s brush and palette.

—Rebekah Caplan
Reading works of imaginative literature broadens experience in ways life cannot....Through works of imaginative literature, readers not only have experiences that, for one reason or another, lie outside the pale of their individual lives, but they have them with more penetration, more clarity, and more intensity than they could have them in everyday life even if they could actually experience all the situations represented.

—Geraldine Murphy

Works of imaginative literature have the potential for giving a reader a unique kind of knowledge: a kind of understanding of human conduct that he simply cannot get from life, from any intellectual discipline, or from nonfiction. For it comes from experiencing complex human situations that are fully and intensely rendered. To give this kind of knowledge is the cognitive function of imaginative literature.

—Geraldine Murphy

A myth is a story through which the world is explained to us. When confronted with a myth, we should scrutinize its contents on two levels: realism and ideology. A responsible attitude towards a myth demands critical questioning of whether its contents stand up to reality, and of whose interests it legitimizes. This is important, because stories about the world never originate in a void: they always represent a pre-selected point of view embedded in an existential position. In this way, the myth transcends its descriptive brief and acquires a normative dimension. The myth also tells us how the world out to be, and provides us with moral categories that indicate what kind of behavior is desirable and what kinds of acts are objectionable.

—Cees C. Hamelink

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, print put forward a definition of intelligence that gave priority to the objective, rational use of the mind and at the same time encouraged forms of public discourse with serious, logically ordered content. It is no accident that the Age for Reason was coexistent with the growth of print culture, first in Europe and then in America....Almost all of the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias toward exposition: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; and abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for delayed response.

—Neil Postman

[Of To Kill a Mockingbird] What I remembered of my long-ago reading of the novel was the gusto of the children and their outdoor world, and the indoor narrative, the courtroom drama of a trumped-up charge of rape, a hideous miscarriage of justice and a racial murder. Rereading the novel recently, I realized I had forgotten how
odd the book is, the wobbly construction, the arch language and shifting point of view, how atonal and forced it is at times, a youthful directness and clarity in some of the writing mingled with adult perceptions and arcane language. For example, Scout is in a classroom with a new teacher from North Alabama. ‘The class murmured apprehensively,’ Scout tells us, ‘should she prove to harbor her share of the peculiarities indigenous to that region.’ This is a tangled way for a 6-year-old to perceive a stranger, and this verbosity pervades the book.

—Paul Theroux

That’s the odd thing about a great deal of a certain sort of Deep South fiction—its grotesquerie and gothic, its high color and fantastication, the emphasis on freakishness. Look no further than Faulkner or Erskine Caldwell, but there’s plenty in Harper Lee too, in *Mockingbird*, the Boo Radley factor, the Misses Tutti and Frutti, and the racist Mrs. Dubose, who is a morphine addict: ‘Her face was the color of a dirty pillowcase and the corners of her mouth glistened with wet which inched like a glacier down the deep grooves enclosing her chin.’ This sort of prose acts as a kind of indirection, dramatizing weirdness as a way of distracting the reader from day to day indignities.

—Paul Theroux

In literature, as in love, we are astonished at what is chosen by others.

—André Maurois

Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds and other minds and other dreams.

—Neil Gaiman

Literary fiction ideally mirrors, with precision and insight, the world and our experiences as thinking and feeling social creatures.

—Jack Smith

Narrative is linear, but action has breadth and depth as well as height and is solid.

—Thomas Carlyle

Shakespeare uses the supernatural elements to reveal his character's inner desires and fears.

—John Foster

All fictions are structures of fantasy and craft erected around certain acts, people or circumstances that stand out in the writer’s memory and stimulate his imagination.

—Mario Vargas Llosa
One of the things that makes *Hamlet* unique among Shakespeare’s characters is his courage to face up to the darker elements of his personality.

—Kenneth Branagh

The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers.

—James Baldwin

Fable is more historical than fact, because fact tells us about one man and fable tells us about a million men.

—Gilbert K. Chesterton

Literature should not be suppressed merely because it offends the moral code of the censor.

—William O. Douglas

Fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners.

—Virginia Woolf

Influences are enriching, and they can be found in every work of art, even the most original.

—Lukas Foss

Style is not something applied. It is something that permeates. It is of the nature of that in which it is found, whether the poem, the manner of a god, the bearing of a man. It is not a dress.

—Wallace Stevens

That is what the title of artist means: one who perceives more than his fellows, and who records more than he has seen.

—Edward Gordon Craig

A great number of the disappointments and mishaps of the troubled world are the direct result of literature and the allied arts. It is our belief that no human being who devotes his life and energy to the manufacture of fantasies can be anything but fundamentally inadequate.

—Christopher Hampton
The literature of America should reflect the children of America.
—Lucille Clifton

Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be read once.
—Cyril Connolly

Science fiction and fantasy are two flavors of the same thing. I use what I call the furniture rule: If a book has spaceships and aliens, it’s science fiction; if it has dragons and castles, it’s fantasy.
—George R. R. Martin

What the detective story is about is not murder but the restoration of order.
—P. D. James

Hemingway is terribly limited. His technique is good for short stories, for people who meet once in a bar very late at night, but do not enter into relations. But not for the novel.
—W. H. Auden

There is quite enough sorrow and shame and suffering and baseness in real life, and there is no need for meeting it unnecessarily in fiction.
—Theodore Roosevelt

Science Fiction will never run out of things to wonder about until the human race ceases to use its brain.
—Julian May

All good literature rests primarily on insight.
—George H. Lewes

Are you somebody who worries about people not reading novels anymore? And do you think that has an impact on the culture? When I think about how I understand my role as citizen, setting aside being president, and the most important set of understandings that I bring to that position of citizen, the most important stuff I’ve learned I think I’ve learned from novels. It has to do with empathy. It has to do with being comfortable with the notion that the world is complicated and full of grays, but there’s still truth there to be found, and that you have to strive for that and work for that. And the notion that it’s possible to connect with some[one] else even though they’re very different from you.
—Barack Obama
'The White Man’s Burden’ is seven stanzas long and is a glimpse into the way Europeans justified their colonial ambitions. The poor white man, said Kipling, is doomed to the hard work of going to foreign places and raising up the local savages into civilized society. It was originally written for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee and then altered to serve as a British man’s advice for how America should treat the newly acquired Philippines. It begins like this:

Take up the White Man’s burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half child.

And it continues in that vein for another six verses. ‘The White Man’s Burden,’ from title to execution, is so over the top in its exhortations of white superiority that it could be mistaken for parody. But it isn’t.

—Katharine Trendacosta

The *Jungle Book* is just as drenched with racism and colonialism as anything else Kipling wrote on the subject. The thread running throughout the stories is that Mowgli is superior to the animals that raised him by virtue of being man, not beast. That’s a neat parallel to Britain and India.

—Katharine Trendacosta

Great geniuses have the shortest biographies. Their cousins can tell you nothing about them. They lived in their writings, and so their house and street life was trivial and commonplace.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The theory...that a deficit in empathy imperils a democratic culture, and novels keep us entwined and engaged when we might otherwise drift apart in shrill and narcissistic self-certainty has its roots in pragmatist thinking of the 1980s. Specifically, it draws on the philosopher Richard Rorty’s argument that, in a pluralist culture, theology and philosophy cease to be persuasive sources of a universal, shared human nature that can undergird moral injunctions against cruelty. Catalysts of mutual concern are therefore to be found elsewhere, in imagination rather than dogma.

—Nicholas Dames
Novels and ethnographies which sensitize one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were supposed to do.

—Richard Rorty

By encouraging us to adopt the perspective of an other—in particular, a profoundly alien other—fiction leads us to draw new and wider nets around our otherwise more isolated selves. Reading novels breaks down the boundary between ‘me’ and ‘not me.’

—Nicholas Dames

According to widely publicized studies, reading fiction improves our ‘theory of mind,’ the capacities that enable us to comprehend the mental states of others. (Especially effective, one study found, is literary fiction—work given to portraying nuanced psychological states in characters—as opposed to genre fiction.) The evidence: Immersion in novels and stories stimulates activity in the brain’s ‘default network.’ That’s the neuroscientific term for the complex of regions associated with drifting, non-goal-oriented consciousness as well as with introspective reflection on the self and others, and on remembered or hypothetical experiences—in short, with that once might have been called the moral imagination.

—Nicholas Dames

Novel-reading trains us in empathy.

—Richard Rorty

Don Quixote, now 400 years old, provided us with the blueprint for a literary form that, above all, teaches readers the cognitive habits of empathetic thinking.

—Nicholas Dames

Fiction can serve as an antidote to the anomie of fierce yet stifling partisan identification and clamorous yet thin social connections.

—Nicholas Dames

At one time or another, after all, different visions of the novel have vied for prominence: the idea of fiction as a kind of play, a pretend state that liberates our powers of invention; the appreciation of fiction’s role in releasing unexpressed agonies, allowing us a cathartic self-knowledge; the awareness of the thrill fiction offers of living in a space where assumed values are thrown into question.

—Nicholas Dames
Literature is the most sophisticated example of the process by which we come to grasp our own environment, especially our human environment, with its complex and ambiguous values; you become aware through imaginative enactment and an imaginative logic that all the possibilities of fate are your own, for better or worse. Literature is the most complicated language that man has invented for talking not only to others but to himself.

—Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren

In literature, we enter the contraries of the human predicament more fully, and what distinguishes literature from other forms of knowledge is that it cannot be understood unless we understand what it is to be human.

—J. Bronowski

I had thought of the Lycidas as a full-grown beauty—as springing up with all its parts absolute—till, in an evil hour, I was shown the original copy of it, together with the other minor poems of the author, in the library of Trinity, kept like some treasure to be proud of. I wish they had thrown them in the Cam, or sent them after the latter Cantos of Spenser, into the Irish Channel. How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! as if they might have been otherwise, and just as good! as if inspiration were made up of parts, and these fluctuating, successive, indifferent! I will never go into the workshop of any great artist again.

—Charles Lamb

We can presumably understand Hamlet without knowing Shakespeare's private life or the steps in the composition of the play, but we cannot understand the play unless we know something of the heroic tradition in which revenge is held to be honorable.

—Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren

An autobiography is a book a person writes about his own life and it is usually full of all sorts of boring details.

—Roald Dahl

Woe to that nation whose literature is cut short by the intrusion of force. This is not merely interference with freedom of the press but the sealing up of a nation's heart, the excision of its memory.
Satire lies about literary men while they live and eulogy lies about them when they die.

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

It should be *Middlemarch* that changed my life, right? Except it didn’t. Nor, really, did any other book read in adulthood. For a book to really change your life, you have to be young, your relationship to the world still pliable. Which puts me in mind of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. I can still see its cover in my mind’s eye, that free, fenced-in yard containing stylized, elongated animals—a lion that’s being hugged by a little girl. The other children are all facing the camera and waving a warm welcome to…me!

—Richard Russo

Literature ... is the rediscovery of childhood.

—Georges Bataille

The literary term for describing in words what you see in a picture is *ekphrasis*. The practice can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, through the Renaissance and the works of the Romantic poets, all the way into literature of the 19th century. Typically, the word *ekphrastic* is applied to poetry. Consider Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ Homer’s vivid descriptions in *the Iliad*, or W. H. Auden’s retelling of Homer’s story in his own poem ‘The Shield of Achilles.’

—Donna Baier Stein

Hold fast to the *Bible*. To the influence of this Book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization and to this we must look as our guide in the future.

—Ulysses S. Grant

Is there any rationale for building entire mansions of words? I think there is, and that the readers of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* and Charles Dicken’s *Bleak House* understand it: sometimes even a monster is no monster. Sometimes it’s beautiful and we fall in love with all that story, more than any film or TV program could ever hope to provide. Even after a thousand pages we don’t want to leave the world the writer has made for us, or the make—believe people who live there.

—Stephen King
Stories and novels consist of three parts: narration, which moves the story from point A to point B and finally to point Z; description, which creates a sensory reality for the reader; and dialogue, which brings characters to life through their speech.

—Stephen King

Stories aren’t souvenir tee-shirts or GameBoys. Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered pre-existing world.

—Stephen King

Personal experience is the basis of all real Literature.

—George H. Lewis

A good style in literature, if closely examined, will be seen to consist in a constant succession of tiny surprises.

—Ford Madox Ford

The narrator of Mary McCarthy’s The Company She Keeps could be seen as ‘enslaved because she persists in looking for her identity in a man.’ Similarly, Miss McCarthy’s The Group could serve to illustrate ‘what happens to women who have been educated at first-rate women’s colleges—taught philosophy and history—and then were consigned to breast-feeding and gourmet cooking.’

—Joan Didion

Mrs. Lessing writes exclusively in the service of immediate cosmic reform: she wants to write...only to create a new way of looking at life.

—Joan Didion

My changing everything into fiction is simply a means of concealing something from myself.

—Doris Lessing

A short story is the ultimate close-up magic trick—a couple of thousand words to take you around the universe or break your heart.

—Neil Gaiman

A novel is a war, but a short story is a landmine.

—Nicki Porter

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you.

—George Saunders
How did a poor and socially awkward ex-governess named Charlotte [Brontë] and her even more awkward sister, Emily, who kept house for their father in a parsonage on a Yorkshire moor far from the literary circles of London, come to write novels and poems that outshone nearly every other 19th-century British novel and poem by dint of being more alive?

—Judith Shulevitz

As we open Jane Eyre once more we cannot stifle the suspicion that we shall find her world of imagination as antiquated, mid-Victorian, and out of date as the parsonage on the moor, a place only to be visited by the curious, only preserved by the pious. So we open Jane Eyre; and in two pages every doubt is swept clean from our minds.

—Virginia Woolf

If Charlotte’s [Brontë] novels keep up a stiff wind, Emily’s one novel, Wuthering Heights, is a thunderstorm. Her characters, even the ghosts, Woolf [Virginia] writes, have ‘such a gust of life that they transcend reality.’

—Judith Shulevitz

Charlotte’s [Brontë] writing would have been even better, Woolf [Virginia] says, had she ‘possessed say three hundred [pounds] a year.’

—Judith Shulevitz

The Brontë sisters were women of their class and time—educated, impoverished, likely destined to spinsterhood—although with a twist. Their childhood was sui generis. Motherless since they were very young, the Brontës enjoyed the benign neglect of their busy father and made the most of their freedom to develop elaborate fantasy worlds. They read everything they could; spent long afternoons on the moor that began at their back door; invented exotic kingdoms with voluminous histories and political intrigues; put on plays only they would see; issued magazines only they would read; and sewed novels and poems into miniature books written in script so tiny that no adult in the household could decipher them.

—Judith Shulevitz

The sad thing is that people have to be very ill or have broken a leg in order to have the opportunity to read In Search of Lost Time.

—Robert Proust

Every single novel owes a debt to books that came before it. To paraphrase the words of the Bible, there is simply nothing new under the sun.

—Jeff Somers
I do like books, real paper books. I have shelves full to prove it. But reading Proust on my cellphone was, I have to say, like no other reading experience I’ve had before or since. It was magical....Here are my instructions. Make sure no one else is awake. Turn off the lights. Your windows can stay open. Now tune on your phone and begin reading. Repeat as necessary each night. Do not stop until the very last word of the very last volume, *Time Regained*. Soon you will see that the smallness of your cellphone (my screen was about two by three inches) and the length of Proust’s sentences are not the shocking mismatch you might think. Your cellphone screen is like a tiny glass-bottomed boat moving slowly over a vast and glowing ocean of words in the night. There is no shore. There is nothing beyond the words in front of you. It’s a voyage for one in the nighttime. Pure romance.

—Sarah Boxer

Storytelling is how we—not just writers, *everyone*—practice our humanity, by trying to make sense of the world and our place in it.

—Julia Fierro

I don’t claim that my novels are truth. I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges.

--Muriel Spark

Writing is life making itself known to me through words.

--Jessamyn West

Respect the masterpiece. It is true reverence to man. There is no quality so great, none so much needed now.

—Frank Lloyd Wright

Mr. Chandler [Raymond] is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, the Great Wrong Place, and his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.

—W. H. Auden

The literature of women’s lives is a tradition of escapees, women who have lived to tell the tale.

—Phyllis Rose
All literature is gossip.

—Truman Capote

There is this existential loneliness in the real world. I don’t know what you’re thinking or what it’s like inside you and you don’t know what it’s like inside me. In fiction I think we can leap over that wall itself in a certain way... There’s another level... A really great piece of fiction for me may or may not take me away and make me forget that I’m sitting in a chair. There’s real commercial stuff can do that, and a riveting plot can do that, but it doesn’t make me feel less lonely... There’s a kind of Ah-ha! Somebody at least for a moment feels about something or sees something the way that I do. It doesn’t happen all the time. It’s these brief flashes or flames, but I get that sometimes. I feel unalone--intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. I feel human and unalone and that I’m in a deep, significant conversation with another consciousness in fiction and poetry in a way that I don’t with other art.

—David Foster Wallace

The beautiful unruliness of literature is what makes it so much fun to wander through: you read Jane Austen and you say, oh, that is IT. And then you turn around and read Sterne, and you say, Man, that is IT. And then you wander across a century or so, and you run into Kafka, or Calvino, or Cortazar, and you say, well that is IT. And then you stroll through what Updike called the grottos of Ulysses, and after that you consort with Baldwin or Welty or Spencer, or Morrison, or Bellow or Fitzgerald and then back to W. Shakespeare, Esq; the champ, and all the time you feel the excitement of being in the presence of IT.

—Kathy Fish

This duality has been reflected in classical as well as modern literature as reason versus passion, or mind and the ‘unconscious.’ There are moments in each of our lives when our verbal-intellect suggests one course, and our ‘heart’ or intuition, another.

—Robert E. Ornstein

Mysteries are my weakness. Hunky detectives, villainous officials, plot surprises going off like a string of firecrackers—all these are enough to make me forget that I am on an airplane going through turbulence or to keep me up all night.

—Susan Cheever

Reading a contemporary novel is usually but not always a waste of time. My point is that we should not read something new unless it promises to be as good as the classics we thereby leave unread.

--B. R. Myers
In literature, in Zola, or Flaubert, or all the Russians, we know people inside out. We know Prince Andrei in *War and Peace*. We know Natasha. We know the wonderful Pierre. We know them far better than we know [real] people. Do you think we truly know Anna Karenina? Do we know whether she is in love with Vronsky when she betrays her husband? Was she in love or was it a dream, a romantic illusion? I think she was in love. When Tolstoy describes the first dance—I'll never forget—and her dress and her necklace of fresh pansies, dark violet pansies. And he dances with her. One of the most beautiful commencements of love I've ever read.

—Edna O'Brien

It's very important that all children are able to be not just entertained, but also that the stories can help them with the challenges in their personal lives.

—Roald Dahl

Literature is full of coincidences, which some love to believe are plagiarisms. There are thoughts always abroad in the air which it takes more wit to avoid than to hit upon.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Science fiction, outside of poetry, is the only literary field which has no limits, no parameters whatsoever.

—Theodore Sturgeon

Literature, as art, is not life ‘as is’ but life ‘as if.’ It does not, as Hamlet said, ‘hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature.’ Art does not conceive human experience as simple and direct. Too many seemingly irrelevant acts clutter our daily lives; too many activities occur which are too dull or too prosaic to make interesting literature. It is the writer, as artist, who points up the importance of an act, an experience, by his ordering of specific detail, thereby giving meaning and directness to experience. Art then is not a mirroring or an exact copy. It is not a snapshot of an experience, but an artistic ordering of details which communicates an artistic truth and an appearance of validity.

--J. A. Christensen

Every day books are published that contain no real artfulness in the lines, books made up of clichés and limp prose, stupid stories offering nothing but high concept and plot—or supra-literary books that shut out even a serious reader in the name of assertions about the right of an author to be dull for a good cause. (No matter how serious a book is, if it is not entertaining, it is a failure.)

--Richard Bausch
Nothing is as important as good writing, because in literature, the walls between people and cultures are broken down, and the things that plague us most—suspicion and fear of the other, and the tendency to see whole groups of people as objects, as monoliths of one cultural stereotype or another—are defeated.

--Richard Bausch

When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Lander replies, ‘Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.’

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

It is commonly asserted and accepted that *Paradise Lost* is among the two or three greatest English poems; it may justly be taken as the type of supreme poetic achievement in our literature.

—John Drinkwater

An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian. His role is to make you realize the doom and glory of knowing who you are and what you are. He has to tell, because nobody else can tell, what it is like to be alive.

--James Baldwin

This is the age of the journalist, more than the age of the artist, the teacher, the pastor. It is the age of ‘non-fiction’ because imagination cannot keep up with the fantastic daily realities.

--Eric Sevareid

It’s an absurd error to put modern English literature in the curriculum. You should read contemporary literature for pleasure or not at all. You shouldn’t be taught to monkey with it.

—Rebecca West

The Da Vinci Code may well be the only novel ever written that begins with the word ‘renowned’... I think what enabled the first word to tip me off that I was about to spend a number of hours in the company of one of the worst prose stylists in the history of literature was this. Putting curriculum vitae details into complex modifiers on proper names or definite descriptions is what you do in journalistic stories about deaths; you just don’t do it in describing an event in a narrative... Why did I keep reading? Because London Heathrow is a long way from San Francisco International.

—Geoffrey K. Pullum
Only a small proportion of literature does more than partly compensate people for the damage they have suffered in learning to read.  

--Rebecca West

The *Mute* became *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*.  
*Private Fleming, His Various Battles* was changed to *The Red Badge of Courage*.  
*First Impressions* turned into *Pride and Prejudice*.  
*The House of the Faith* became *Brideshead Revisited*.  
*It Shouldn’t Happen to a Vet* turned into *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.  
*The Kingdom by the Sea* became *Lolita*.  
*Tom-All-Alone’s Factory that Got Into Chancery and Never Got Out* eventually became *Bleak House*.  
F. Scot Fitzgerald wanted to give *The Great Gatsby* the name *The High-Bouncing Lover or Trimalchio in West Egg*, Trimalchio being a rich patron in Petronius’s ‘Satyricon.’  
*Pansy* turns out to have been the intended title of the book that became *Gone With the Wind*.  
Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* was once to be named *Pumphrey*.  

—Andre Bernard

‘You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!’ In the two centuries since Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s monster first uttered these rebellious words to his maker in the pages of *Frankenstein*, this terrible reversal has captivated cultural imagination. What would happen if or when the day came that humankind created an intelligence so powerful that it turned against us? It’s a scenario that’s been visualized a thousand ways: with robots (*The Terminator*), with computers (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), with human-animal hybrids (*The Island of Doctor Moreau*)—even, in the case of Disney’s (and yes, going further back, Goethe’s) ‘The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,’ with animated brooms.

—Christopher Orr

Haunted houses—he kind portrayed in countless books and movies—are designed to make their guests feel small and powerless, but also a tiny bit titillated in spite of themselves. Suspense builds slowly. Each creepy revelation incites curiosity first, then dread, then horror. The point is to seduce these mortals into exploring their own darkest corners, only to reduce them to a quivering pile of nerves. The best haunted houses don’t murder their guests. Instead, they slowly and sublimely drive them mad.

—Heather Havrilesky

A short story is like a quick kiss in the dark from a stranger.  

--Stephen King
Jackson [Shirley] unveiled the brutality and contempt that lurk beneath the surface of neighborly human interactions. From ‘The Lottery,’ her seminal portrait of a murderous horde of ordinary folks published in The New Yorker in 1948, to her final chilling novel, We Have Always Lived in the Castle (1962), in which a hostile gaggle of villagers harasses two sisters isolated in their dead parents’ lonely house, Jackson felt compelled to sound the alarm on humanity: People are competitive and self-serving, and no one can be trusted.

—Heather Havrilesky

It might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities.

--Tom C. Clark

The great authors were great readers, and one way to understand them is to read the books they read.

—Mortimer J. Adler

Imaginative literature primarily pleases rather than teaches. It is much easier to be pleased than taught, but much harder to know why one is pleased. Beauty is harder to analyze than truth.

—Mortimer J. Adler

A good book can teach you about the world and about yourself. You learn more than how to read better; you also learn more about life. You become wiser. Not just more knowledgeable - books that provide nothing but information can produce that result. But wiser, in the sense that you are more deeply aware of the great and enduring truths of human life.

—Mortimer J. Adler

We do not feed pablum to children who are ready for meat and vegetables, and we should not feed verbal pablum to children able to digest literature. Children learn to read by reading—and schools should provide plenty of opportunities for them to do so. Yet one study shows that in the typical primary school class, only seven or eight minutes per day are allotted to silent reading time. Children spend about 70 percent of the time allocated for reading instruction engaged in ‘seatwork,’ mostly on skill sheets and workbooks that may require only a perfunctory level of reading.

—William J. Bennett
In our high school, we have, if anything, too much of the historical approach to literature where you have one of these boring textbooks where kids memorize historical dates and link them to literary dates and names. Kids themselves say there’s so much memorization in school that the game is to memorize the stuff, get the grade on the test, and then forget it.

—Patrick Welsh

Poetry has the potential to bridge the gap between learning and life. One advantage is its length. Because most poems are fairly short, they are not as intimidating to the average reader as a typical middle school novel. Another advantage is that poetry is powerful. Within the lines of a well-constructed poem is a world of meaning and metaphor that connects print to life. It is precisely this connection that holds appeal for the adolescent learner who is on a perpetual journey of self-exploration.

—Janet A. Finke & Karen D. Wood

The Arts are fundamental resources through which the world is viewed, meaning is created, and the mind developed. To neglect the contribution of the Arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources, or poorly trained teachers, is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds.

—Elliot W. Eisner

The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.

—Elliot W. Eisner

Science fiction is held in low regard as a branch of literature, and perhaps it deserves this critical contempt. But if we view it as a kind of sociology of the future, rather than as literature, science fiction has immense value as a mind-stretching force for the creation of the habit of anticipation. Our children should be studying Arthur C. Clarke, William Tenn, Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury and Robert Sheckley, not because these writers can tell them about rocket ships and time machines but, more important, because they can lead young minds through an imaginative exploration of the jungle of political, social, psychological, and ethical issues that will confront these children as adults.

— Alvin Toffler

The arts are called liberal, because they enable those who practise them to live in freedom.

--Tirso de Molina
The curriculum of the school should give the student access to the important cultural tools available through which intelligence can be expanded. Among the most important of these tools are the arts.

--Elliot Eisner

(Because) it is the intellect which dominates schooling...the specifically soul making subjects—literature, drama, music, the visual arts—are progressively ‘de-souled’ as the child progresses through school.

—Dr. Bernie Neville

To encourage literature and the arts is a duty which every good citizen owes to his country.

—George Washington

When I was growing up I fell in love with Roald Dahl’s books....They were so deliciously anarchistic, so attractive in their subversion that I always had the impression I was putting one over on my mom by reading them. It took me 40 years to figure out that she was the one putting something over on me.

—David Riegler

*Bambi* has a profound effect on children because it’s about losing your mother.

—Christine Baranski

History tells what man has done; art, what man has made; literature, what man has felt; religion, what man has believed; philosophy, what man has thought.

--Benjamin C. Leeming

When the man who knows all about the fruit fly chromosomes finds himself sitting next to an authority on *Beowulf*...there may be an uneasy silence.

--Brand Blanshard

The force of the advertising word and image dwarfs the power of other literature in the 20th century.

—Daniel J. Boorstin

That is what the title of artist means: one who perceives more than his fellows, and who records more than he has seen.

—Edward Gordon Craig

The noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men.

--Francis Bacon
In 1904, when *Peter Pan* began playing in London, the children were so enthralled by the flying hero of Never-Never Land that they took his words literally: if they believed strongly enough, then they would be able to fly. J. M. Barrie, the imaginative creator of *Peter Pan*, began hearing from distraught parents whose children had injured themselves attempting to fly. He could have issued a statement or written a disclaimer for parents bringing their children to the play. Instead, he incorporated a slight change into Peter’s formula for flying. His solution was effective, imaginative, and long-lasting. His solution perfectly fit the situation and even improved on what originally existed—the ideal way to solve a problem. From then on, in order to fly, the children in the story needed to be sprinkled with the dust of Tinker Bell, a pixie.

—*Front Line Supervisor’s Bulletin*

...we’re in English class, which for most of us is an excruciating exercise in staying awake through the great classics of literature. These works—groundbreaking, incendiary, timeless—have been pureed by the curriculum monsters into a digestible pabulum of themes and factoids we can spew back on a test. Scoring well on tests is the sort of happy thing that gets the school district the greenbacks they crave. Understanding and appreciating the material are secondary.

—Libba Bray

Once you allow yourself to identify with the people in a story, then you might begin to see yourself in that story even if on the surface it’s far removed from your situation. This is what I try to tell my students: this is one great thing that literature can do - it can make us identify with situations and people far away.

—Chinua Achebe

I tell my students, it’s not difficult to identify with somebody like yourself, somebody next door who looks like you. What’s more difficult is to identify with someone you don’t see, who’s very far away, who’s a different color, who eats a different kind of food. When you begin to do that then literature is really performing its wonders.

—Chinua Achebe

I’m a big believer in pairing classics with contemporary literature, so students have the opportunity to see that literature is not a cold, dead thing that happened once but instead a vibrant mode of storytelling that’s been with us a long time - and will be with us, I hope, for a long time to come.

—John Green
I’m so disturbed when my women students behave as though they can only read women, or black students behave as though they can only read blacks, or white students behave as though they can only identify with a white writer.

—Bell Hooks

It worries me that undergrads and high school students are forced into books they aren’t ready for, like Faulkner’s, and then they are afraid of putting their toes in the water again.

—Alice McDermott

I really love helping students and helping them empathize with people who lived a really long time ago. That’s one of the highlights of working in fiction.

—Deborah Harkness

The truly great books are always novels: Anna Karenina, The Brothers Karamazov, The Magic Mountain. Just as with Shahnameh, I browse these books from time to time to remember how a great book works on us or to teach my students at Columbia University.

—Orhan Pamuk

People would react to books by authors like James and Austen almost on a gut level. I think it was not so much the message, because the best authors do not have obvious messages. These authors were disturbing to my students because of their perspectives on life.

—Azar Nafisi

I have no doubt that On the Road is a Great American Novel. But I’m also certain my students will do fine without it.

—Tony D’Souza

There’s a specificity of language that’s required in Shakespeare that most drama students in England deal with - a specificity of language that is somehow not as clear in a lot of American schools.

—James Avery

It’s certainly no secret that American students are taught less and less about the canonical literary masterpieces of the past, and there is no shortage of people who believe that what little they’re required to learn in school is still too much.

—Terry Teachout
Just don't take any class where you have to read **BEOWULF**.
—Woody Allen

When I was twelve, my sixth-grade English class went on a field trip to see Franco Zeffirelli’s film adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. From that moment forward I dreamed that someday I’d meet my own Juliet. I’d marry her and I would love her with the same passion and intensity as Romeo. The fact that their marriage lasted fewer than three days before they both were dead didn’t seem to affect my fantasy. Even if they had lived, I don’t think their relationship could have survived. Let’s face it, being that emotionally aflame, sexually charged, and transcendentally eloquent every single second can really start to grate on a person’s nerves. However, if I could find someone to love just a fraction of the way that Montague loved his Capulet, then marrying her would be worth it.

—Annabelle Gurwitch

Empathy is as important as literacy. When we read with a child, we are doing so much more than teaching him to read or instilling in her a love of language. We are doing something that I believe is just as powerful, and it is something that we are losing as a culture: By reading with a child, we are teaching that child to be human.

—Anna Dewdney

I seldom read anything that is not of a factual nature because I want to invest my time wisely in the things that will improve my life. Don’t misunderstand; there is nothing wrong with reading purely for the joy of it. Novels have their place, but biographies of famous men and women contain information that can change lives.

—Zig Ziglar

My favorite writers are all Jews—David, Solomon, Matthew, Mark.

—Zig Ziglar

Sarcasm: A literary device for identifying the stupid.

—Unknown

There are two novels that can change a bookish fourteen-year old’s life: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Atlas Shrugged*. One is a childish fantasy that often engenders a lifelong obsession with its unbelievable heroes, leading to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood, unable to deal with the real world. The other, of course, involves orcs.

—John Rogers
Not only are most of our citizens fathomlessly ignorant of the glories of American literature, a fast-growing percentage of our students are no longer taught much about any works of American art, be they novels, paintings, symphonies or ballets.

—Terry Teachout

I picked up one of the books and flipped through it. Don’t get me wrong, I like reading. But some books should come with warning labels: Caution: contains characters and plots guaranteed to induce sleepiness. Do not attempt to operate heavy machinery after ingesting more than one chapter. Has been known to cause blindness, seizures and a terminal loathing of literature. Should only be taken under the supervision of a highly trained English teacher. Preferably one who grades on the curve.

—Laurie Halse Anderson

MARGINALIA

Sometimes the notes are ferocious, skirmishes against the author raging along the borders of every page in tiny black script.
If I could just get my hands on you, Kierkegaard, or Conor Cruise O’Brien, they seem to say, I would bolt the door and beat some logic into your head.

Other comments are more offhand, dismissive – ‘Nonsense.’ ‘Please!’ ‘HA!!’ - that kind of thing.
I remember once looking up from my reading, my thumb as a bookmark, trying to imagine what the person must look like who wrote ‘Don’t be a ninny’ alongside a paragraph in The Life of Emily Dickinson.

Students are more modest needing to leave only their splayed footprints along the shore of the page.
One scrawls ‘Metaphor’ next to a stanza of Eliot’s.
Another notes the presence of ‘Irony’ fifty times outside the paragraphs of A Modest Proposal.
Or they are fans who cheer from the empty bleachers,
Hands cupped around their mouths.
‘Absolutely,’ they shout
to Duns Scotus and James Baldwin.
Yes. ‘Bull’s-eye.’ ‘My man!’
Check marks, asterisks, and exclamation points rain down along the sidelines.

And if you have managed to graduate from college
without ever having written ‘Man vs. Nature’
in a margin, perhaps now
is the time to take one step forward.

We have all seized the white perimeter as our own
and reached for a pen if only to show
we did not just laze in an armchair turning pages;
we pressed a thought into the wayside,
planted an impression along the verge.

Even Irish monks in their cold scriptoria
jotted along the borders of the Gospels
brief asides about the pains of copying,
a bird singing near their window,
or the sunlight that illuminated their page-
anonymous men catching a ride into the future
on a vessel more lasting than themselves.

And you have not read Joshua Reynolds,
they say, until you have read him
enwreathed with Blake's furious scribbling.

Yet the one I think of most often,
the one that dangles from me like a locket,
was written in the copy of Catcher in the Rye
I borrowed from the local library
one slow, hot summer.
I was just beginning high school then,
reading books on a davenport in my parents' living room,
and I cannot tell you
how vastly my loneliness was deepened,
how poignant and amplified the world before me seemed, when I found on one page

A few greasy looking smears
and next to them, written in soft pencil—
by a beautiful girl, I could tell,
whom I would never meet—
Pardon the egg salad stains, but I'm in love.

—Billy Collins

Governments and fashions come and go but Jane Eyre is for all time.

—Jasper Fforde

The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.

—Tom Clancy

You forget everything. The hours slip by. You travel in your chair through centuries you seem to see before you, your thoughts are caught up in the story, dallying with the details or following the course of the plot, you enter into characters, so that it seems as if it were your own heart beating beneath their costumes.

—Gustave Flaubert

I hate when people ask what a book is about. People who read for plot, people who suck out the story like the cream filling in an Oreo, should stick to comic strips and soap operas. . . . Every book worth a damn is about emotions and love and death and pain. It's about words. It's about a man dealing with life. Okay?

—J. R. Moehringer

How is it that, a full two centuries after Jane Austen finished her manuscript, we come to the world of Pride and Prejudice and find ourselves transcending customs, strictures, time, mores, to arrive at a place that educates, amuses, and enchalls us? It is a miracle. We read in bed because reading is halfway between life and dreaming, our own consciousness in someone else's mind.

—Anna Quindlen

There's no better way to inform and expand your mind on a regular basis than to get into the habit of reading good literature.

—Stephen R. Covey

Books are not about passing the time. They're about other lives. Other worlds.

—Alan Bennett
Literature is the safe and traditional vehicle through which we learn about the world and pass on values from one generation to the next. Books save lives.

—Laurie Anderson

A tough life needs a tough language—and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers—a language powerful enough to say how it is.

—Jeanette Winterson

The thing about Tolkien, about *The Lord of the Rings*, is that it’s perfect. It’s this whole world, this whole process of immersion, this journey. It’s not, I’m pretty sure, actually true, but that makes it more amazing, that someone could make it all up. Reading it changes everything.

—Jo Walton

The wonderful thing about books is that they allow us to enter imaginatively into someone else’s life. And when we do that, we learn to sympathize with other people. But the real surprise is that we also learn truths about ourselves, about our own lives, that somehow we hadn’t been able to see before.

—Katherine Paterson

If you’ve ever read one of those articles that asks notable people to list their favorite books, you may have been impressed or daunted to see them pick Proust or Thomas Mann or James Joyce. You might even feel sheepish about the fact that you reread *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Lord of the Rings*, or *The Catcher in the Rye* or *Gone With the Wind* every couple of years with some much pleasure. Perhaps, like me, you’re even a little suspicious of their claims, because we all know that the books we’ve loved best are seldom the ones we esteem the most highly - or the ones we’d most like other people to think we read over and over again.

—Laura Miller

Unlike television, reading does not swallow the senses or dictate thought. Reading stimulates the ecology of the imagination. Can you remember the wonder you felt when first reading *The Jungle Book* or *Tom Sawyer* or *Huckleberry Finn*? Kipling’s world within a world; Twain’s slow river, the feel of freedom and sand on the secret island, and in the depths of the cave?

—Richard Louv

Of all the unexpected things in contemporary literature, this is among the oddest: that kids have an inordinate appetite for very long, very tricky, very strange books about places that don’t exist.

—Adam Gopnik
I am no novel-reader—I seldom look into novels—Do not imagine that I often read novels—It is really very well for a novel. Such is the common cant. ‘And what are you reading, Miss—?’ ‘Oh! It is only a novel!’ replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. ‘It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda’; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.

—Jane Austen

There is no literature anymore, there are just single books that arrive in bookstores, just as letters, newspapers, advertising pamphlets arrive in mailboxes.

—Tõnu Ōnnepalu

The rationale for the existence of literature lies precisely in its ability to work on issues that concern us deeply. And it does so in a way that keeps our motivation at its highest intensity. Literature is fuel for ‘hot cognition.’ One may presume that imaginative literature is a property that all human cultures possess and as such may provide humans with an evolutionary advantage.

—Mette Hjort

There is not enough story in the books written today. When you come on a book that has real narrative drive—which tells an exciting story—you have, in the novel field, a best seller, such as *The Caine Mutiny* or *Gone with the Wind*.

--Roger Garis

The role of literature is to help develop the individual, and it takes a good book to do this. A poor book takes a child and puts him back a step or two, a mediocre book takes a child and leaves him where he is. A good book promotes an awareness of the possibilities of life, the universality of life, the awakening of response.

--Sheila Egoff

Facts never become obsolete or stale. Commentaries always become obsolete and stale. When a writer tries to explain too much, to psychologize, he’s already out of date when he begins. If Homer had tried to explain the deeds of his heroes according to the old Greek philosophy or psychology of his time, if such a thing existed—it really didn’t exist—nobody could read Homer any more. Homer just gave us the images and the facts, and because of this, the ‘Iliad’ and the ‘Odyssey’ are fresh in our times.

--Isaac Bashevis Singer
The credit of ancient literature, the certainty of history, and the truth of religion, are all involved in the secure transmission of ancient books to modern times.

--Isaac Taylor

Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilization would have been impossible. They are engines of change (as the poet said), windows on the world and lighthouses erected in the sea of time. They are companions, teachers, magicians, bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are humanity in print.

—Barbara W. Tuchman

Truly each new book is as a ship that bears us away from the fixity of our limitations into the movement and splendor of life’s infinite ocean.

--Helen Keller

If anyone has any doubt about the importance of books, or about the adage that the pen is mightier than the sword, it’s worth considering that Plato’s Republic, the Bible, the Koran, Darwin’s Origin of Species, Marx’s Das Kapital, Hitler’s Mein Kampf, and The Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung have probably changed the course of history as much as any process or event, any individual or any nation.

—Unknown

Books worth reading once are worth reading twice; and what is most important of all, the masterpieces of literature are worth reading a thousand times.

--John Morley

He who would be well-traveled should journey through the Bible’s books, For the whole world can be seen there.

--Sibylle Schwarz

Mysteries and thrillers are not the same things, though they are literary siblings. Roughly put, I would say the distinction is that mysteries emphasize motive and psychology whereas thrillers rely more heavily on action and plot. Some mysteries are thrillers and some thrillers are mysteries, but not all mysteries are thrillers, nor are all thrillers mysteries.

--Jon Meacham

You don’t need a young athletic body or piles of money to read some of the world’s great books.

--Roseanne Barr
Before the arrival of the 40th and final installment of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, in 1841, American readers of the series were forced to wait. And wait. And wait—not just for Charles Dickens to finish his story, but for his completed work to cross the Atlantic. When the ship bearing the resolution of the series finally docked in New York, a mob desperate to learn the fate of the tale’s protagonist, Little Nell, stormed the wharf. The ensuing scene would make a modern-day publisher swoon: a band of readers passionately demanding to learn how the story ends.

--Megan Garber

If an English middle-class family owned just three books, along with the Bible and Shakespeare would be Fitzgerald (*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*). It was a kind of universal badge of culture.

--Dick Davis

The book that most changed my life was actually a series of books—the complete *Wizard of Oz* series, by L. Frank Baum. My family had a vintage collection of these books, passed down through many generations of hands, and I read them all with rapt passion. I well remember being bundled up in a blanket next to our wood stove in Litchfield, Connecticut, on cold winter weekends, lost in these marvelous tales. These books taught me to love reading, but more important, they taught me to love adventure, and to believe in the heroism of adventurous little girls from small family farms (not unlike my own) who were able to set out on wild voyages of discovery. When I eventually threw myself out into the world, to go on my own wild voyages of discovery, I do believe that the spirit of Dorothy Gale came with me. I am forever grateful to my grandparents, my great-aunts and my great-uncles, who saved these gorgeous and crumbling old books for my enlightenment, my inspiration and my education.

--Elizabeth Gilbert

Style and Structure are the essence of a book; great ideas are hogwash.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Literature is an effective means of preserving, transmitting, and improving the cultures that make up our pluralistic society. Change is a normal and inescapable result of those sociocultural and physical worlds on whose stages we act out our life’s roles. Often, however, change is difficult to understand and accept. Books can serve for readers as a bridge between generations, between the past and the present, between what is and what ought to be. Children’s horizons can be broadened through vicarious encounters during their quest for self-understanding and acceptance of others.

—James E. Kerber

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Romance novels are the only books that take less time to write than they do to read. They teach lonely women about passionate love, maritime history and 18th century undergarments.

—Earth (The Book) A Visitor’s Guide to the Human Race

English teachers and their students must have freedom to read and see and think and discuss and learn if there is any hope of reality entering the classroom. Where censors grant teachers ‘limited’ freedom as long as students read only ‘wholesome’ books and ‘uplifting’ magazines about ‘good’ Americans and ‘happy’ things, view only ‘suitable’ and ‘clean’ and ‘Christian’ films, create only ‘optimistic’ and ‘positive’ and ‘inspirational’ media materials, and discuss only ‘noncontroversial’ and ‘safe’ topics, there is no possibility of education and the search for truth, only the indoctrination into the community’s contemporary mores.

—Kenneth L. Donelson

Books are the means to immortality. Plato lives forever, as do Dickens, and Dr. Seuss, Soames Forsyte, Jo March, Scrooge, Anna Karenina and Vronsky. Over and over again Heathcliff wanders the moor searching for his Cathy. Over and over again Ahab fights the whale. Through them all we experience other times, other places, other lives. We manage to become much more than our own selves.

—Anna Quindlen

There’s no such thing as a kid who hates reading. There are kids who love reading, and kids who are reading the wrong books.

—James Patterson

Every day books are published that contain no real artfulness in the lines, books made up of clichés and limp prose, stupid stories offering nothing but high concept and plot—or supra-literary books that shut out even a serious reader in the name of assertions about the right of an author to be dull for a good cause. (No matter how serious a book is, if it is not entertaining, it is a failure.)

—Richard Bausch

The English Bible—a book which if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.

—Thomas Babington Macaulay
I remember thinking that people were crazy for reading the same book more than once, but I now have a new-found appreciation for the re-discovery of literature. The lessons we learned from books in the school curriculum are reinvented and updated when we read as adults.

—Rachel Nichols

If a book is easy and fits nicely into all your language conventions and thought forms, then you probably will not grow much from reading it. It may be entertaining, but not enlarging to your understanding. It’s the hard books that count. Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.

—Mortimer J. Adler

If you are reading in order to become a better reader, you cannot read just any book or article. You will not improve as a reader if all you read are books that are well within your capacity. You must tackle books that are beyond you, or, as we have said, books that are over your head. Only books of that sort will make you stretch your mind. And unless you stretch, you will not learn.

—Mortimer J. Adler

Books should be a part of every child’s life. They should occupy a central place in home and classroom alike. Children should have at their fingertips books like Where the Wild Things Are, Charlotte’s Web, and Winnie the Pooh. This is the only way they will really grasp the idea that reading is a joy rather than a burden. Yet in a recent study of fifth graders’ reading habits, 90 percent of the children were found to read books only four minutes a day or less. The same children may watch television an average of three and a half hours a day.

—William J. Bennett

The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village.

—Roald Dahl

There are two kinds of books in the world--the boring kind they make you read in school and the interesting kind that they won’t let you read in school because then they would have to talk about real stuff like sex and divorce and is there a God and if there isn’t then what happens when you die, and how come the history books have so many lies in them.

—LouAnne Johnson
A surprising number of people—including many students of literature—will tell you they haven’t really lived in a book since they were children. Sadly, being taught literature often destroys the life of the books.

—A. S. Byatt

On my website there’s a quote from the writer Anthony Burgess: ‘The greatest gift is the passion for reading. It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind.

I’ve always found that inspiring because the written word, as an art form, is unlike any other: movies, TV, music, they’re shared experiences, but books aren’t like that. The relationship between a writer and a reader is utterly unique to those two individuals. The world that forms in your head as you read a book will be slightly different to that experienced by every other reader. Anywhere. Ever. Reading is very personal, a communication from one mind to another, something which can’t be exactly copied, or replicated, or directly shared.

If I read the work of, say, one of the great Victorian novelists, it’s like a gift from the past, a momentary connection to another’s thoughts. Their ideas are down on paper, to be picked up by me, over a century later. Writers can speak individually to readers across a year, or ten years, or a thousand.

That’s why I love books.

—Simon Cheshire

You might have noticed that I have been sending you used books. I have done this not to save money, but to make a point which is that a used book, unlike a used car, hasn’t lost any of its initial value. A good story rolls of the lot into the hands of its new reader as smoothly as the day it was written. And there’s another reason for these used paperbacks that never cost much even when new; I like the idea of holding a book that someone else has held, of eyes running over lines that have already seen the light of other eyes. That, in one image, is the community of readers, is the communion of literature.

—Yann Martel

All the plays that have ever been written, from Ancient Greece to the present day, have never really been anything but thrillers. Drama has always been realistic and there has always been a detective about. Every play is an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There is a riddle and it is satisfied in the final scene.

--Eugene Ionesco
If I show up at your house ten years from now and find nothing in your living room
but *The Readers Digest*, nothing on your bedroom night table but the newest Dan
Brown novel, and nothing in your bathroom but *Jokes for the John*, I'll chase you
down to the end of your driveway and back, screaming 'Where are your books? You
graduated college ten years ago, so how come there are no damn books in your
house? Why are you living on the intellectual equivalent of Kraft Macaroni and
Cheese?'

—Stephen King

Plays do not imitate the apparently random actions of life. Rather...plays are care-
fully shaped to feature a central conflict. Exposition, complication, crisis, denoue-
ment refer...to stages in the treatment of this conflict. Yet, we must not let the
metaphor of conflict mislead us into supposing that dramatic action is primarily
physical movement. The conflict it occasions involves the collision of ideas or creeds
as often as it does brute force.

--Stanley Johnson,
   Judah Bierman,
   and James Hart

The novel is a past reported in the present. On the stage it is always now. This con-
fers upon the action an increased vitality which the novelist longs in vain to incor-
porate into his work.

This condition in the theatre brings with it another important element:

In the theatre we are not aware of the intervening storyteller. The speeches arise
from the characters in an apparently pure spontaneity.

*A play is what takes place.*

*A novel is what one person tells us took place.*

A play visibly represents pure existing. A novel is what one mind, claiming omni-
science, asserts to have existed.

--Thornton Wilder

All plays are social comment. Even plays fashioned as escapist entertainment are a
comment on the view that society has of itself and of its needs. Some playwrights
are conscious social critics, intentional social critics...some do it more intuitively.

--Edward Albee
The Russian dramatist is one who, walking through a cemetery, does not see the flowers on the graves. The American dramatist...does not see the graves under the flowers.

--George Jean Nathan

Drama is based on the Mistake. I think someone is my friend when he really is my enemy, that I am free to marry a woman when in fact she is my mother, that this person is a chambermaid when it is a young nobleman in disguise, that this well-dressed young man is rich when he is really a penniless adventurer, or that if I do this such and such a result will follow when in fact it results in something very different. All good drama has two movements, first the making of the mistake, then the discovery that it was a mistake.

—W. H. Auden

From the time of Sophocles or before, people have wanted stories—adventures. A Shakespearian drama was considered a failure if it didn’t have a few murders or suicides in it, and at the end, the more corpses strewn about the stage, the better.

—Roger Garis

Literature and film in my opinion are like saloons where bottles have no labels. I want to taste each one myself and figure out which is what. If I’m denied this by labeling, then my entertainment is considerably lessened.

—Saadat Hasan Manto

There is no surer foundation for a beautiful friendship than a mutual taste in literature.

—P. G. Wodehouse

Literature is a textually transmitted disease, normally contracted in childhood.

—Jane Yolen

Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life.

—Fernando Pessoa

Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.

—G. K. Chesterton

So Matilda’s strong young mind continued to grow, nurtured by the voices of all those authors who had sent their books out into the world like ships on the sea. These books gave Matilda a hopeful and comforting message: You are not alone.

—Roald Dahl
Life is not a PG feel-good movie. Real life often ends badly. Literature tries to document this reality, while showing us it is still possible for us to endure nobly.

—Matthew Quick

Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation. They deepen and widen and expand our sense of life: they feed the soul. When writers make us shake our heads with the exactness of their prose and their truths, and even make us laugh about ourselves or life, our buoyancy is restored. We are given a shot at dancing with, or at least clapping along with, the absurdity of life, instead of being squashed by it over and over again. It’s like singing on a boat during a terrible storm at sea. You can’t stop the raging storm, but singing can change the hearts and spirits of the people who are together on that ship.

—Anne Lamott

The truth is, everyone likes to look down on someone. If your favorites are all avant-garde writers who throw in Sanskrit and German, you can look down on everyone. If your favorites are all Oprah Book Club books, you can at least look down on mystery readers. Mystery readers have sci-fi readers. Sci-fi can look down on fantasy. And yes, fantasy readers have their own snobbishness. I’ll bet this, though: in a hundred years, people will be writing a lot more dissertations on Harry Potter than on John Updike. Look, Charles Dickens wrote popular fiction. Shakespeare wrote popular fiction—until he wrote his sonnets, desperate to show the literati of his day that he was real artist. Edgar Allan Poe tied himself in knots because no one realized he was a genius. The core of the problem is how we want to define ‘literature.’ The Latin root simply means ‘letters.’ Those letters are either delivered—they connect with an audience—or they don’t. For some, that audience is a few thousand college professors and some critics. For others, its twenty million women desperate for romance in their lives. Those connections happen because the books successfully communicate something real about the human experience. Sure, there are trashy books that do really well, but that’s because there are trashy facets of humanity. What people value in their books—and thus what they count as literature—really tells you more about them than it does about the book.

—Brent Weeks

People wonder why the novel is the most popular form of literature; people wonder why it is read more than books of science or books of metaphysics. The reason is very simple; it is merely that the novel is more true than they are.

—G. K. Chesterton

The purpose of literature is to turn blood into ink.

—T. S. Eliot
Adults...struggle desperately with fiction, demanding constantly that it conform to the rules of everyday life. Adults foolishly demand to know how Superman can possibly fly, or how Batman can possibly run a multibillion-dollar business empire during the day and fight crime at night, when the answer is obvious even to the smallest child: because it’s not real.

—Grant Morrison

The one way of tolerating existence is to lose oneself in literature as in a perpetual orgy.

—Gustave Flaubert

That’s why literature is so fascinating. It’s always up for interpretation, and could be a hundred different things to a hundred different people. It’s never the same thing twice.

—Sara Raasch

No fiction is worth reading except for entertainment. If it entertains and is clean, it is good literature, or its kind. If it forms the habit of reading, in people who might not read otherwise, it is the best literature.

—Edgar Rice Burroughs

When you read a great book, you don’t escape from life, you plunge deeper into it. There may be a superficial escape – into different countries, mores, speech patterns – but what you are essentially doing is furthering your understanding of life’s subtleties, paradoxes, joys, pains and truths. Reading and life are not separate but symbiotic.

—Julian Barnes

Do you realize that all great literature — *Moby Dick*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *Crime and Punishment*, the *Bible*, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* — are all about what a bummer it is to be a ...human being?

—Kurt Vonnegut

There is nothing which can better deserve our patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness.

—George Washington
High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water.  
—Mark Twain

My definition of good literature is that which can be read by an educated reader, and reread with increased pleasure.  
—Gene Wolfe

Literature is always personal, always one man’s vision of the world, one man's experience, and it can only be popular when men are ready to welcome the visions of others.  
—W. B. Yeats

It is really hard to be lonely very long in a world of words. Even if you don’t have friends somewhere, you still have language, and it will find you and wrap its little syllables around you and suddenly there will be a story to live in.  
Naomi Shihab Nye

The world of literature has everything in it, and it refuses to leave anything out. I have read like a man on fire my whole life because the genius of English teachers touched me with the dazzling beauty of language. Because of them I rode with Don Quixote and danced with Anna Karenina at a ball in St. Petersburg and lassoed a steer in ‘Lonesome Dove’ and had nightmares about slavery in ‘Beloved’ and walked the streets of Dublin in ‘Ulysses’ and made up a hundred stories in the Arabian nights and saw my mother killed by a baseball in ‘A Prayer for Owen Meany.’ I've been in ten thousand cities and have introduced myself to a hundred thousand strangers in my exuberant reading career, all because I listened to my fabulous English teachers and soaked up every single thing those magnificent men and women had to give. I cherish and praise them and thank them for finding me when I was a boy and presenting me with the precious gift of the English language.  
—Pat Conroy

Literature, real literature, must not be gulped down like some potion which may be good for the heart or good for the brain — the brain, that stomach of the soul. Literature must be taken and broken to bits, pulled apart, squashed — then its lovely reek will be smelt in the hollow of the palm, it will be munched and rolled upon the tongue with relish; then, and only then, its rare flavor will be appreciated at its true worth and the broken and crushed parts will again come together in your mind and disclose the beauty of a unity to which you have contributed something of your own blood.  
—Vladimir Nabokov
To write is to forget. Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life. Music soothes, the visual arts exhilarates, the performing arts (such as acting and dance) entertain. Literature, however, retreats from life by turning into slumber. The other arts make no such retreat—some because they use visible and hence vital formulas, others because they live from human life itself. This isn’t the case with literature. Literature simulates life. A novel is a story of what never was, a play is a novel without narration. A poem is the expression of ideas or feelings a language no one uses, because no one talks in verse.

—Fernando Pessoa

Literature is the safe and traditional vehicle through which we learn about the world and pass on values from one generation to the next. Books save lives.

—Laurie Anderson

Literature duplicates the experience of living in a way that nothing else can, drawing you so fully into another life that you temporarily forget you have one of your own. That is why you read it, and might even sit up in bed till early dawn, throwing your whole tomorrow out of whack, simply to find out what happens to some people who, you know perfectly well, are made up.

—Barbara Kingsolver

We care about moral issues, nobility, decency, happiness, goodness—the issues that matter in the real world, but which can only be addressed, in their purity, in fiction.

—Orson Scott Card

Literature differs from life in that life is amorphously full of detail, and rarely directs us toward it, whereas literature teaches us to notice. Literature makes us better noticers of life; we get to practice on life itself; which in turn makes us better readers of detail in literature; which in turn makes us better readers of life.

—James Wood

Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict. This probably has something to do with the receptive process of the mind. The written word is read and assimilated by a conscious act of the will in alliance with the intellect; little by little it affects the imagination and the emotions. The process is different with a motion picture. When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect, we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly on our feelings.

--Ingmar Bergman
Black literature is taught as sociology, as tolerance, not as a serious, rigorous art form.

—Toni Morrison

The aim of science is to discover and illuminate truth. And that, I take it, is the aim of literature, whether biography or history... It seems to me, then, that there can be no separate literature of science.

—Rachel Carson

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality... in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad of eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.

—C. S. Lewis

Literature was not promulgated by a pale and emasculated critical priesthood singing their litanies in empty churches - nor is it a game for the cloistered elect, the tinhorn mendicants of low calorie despair.

Literature is as old as speech. It grew out of human need for it, and it has not changed except to become more needed.

The skalds, the bards, the writers are not separate and exclusive. From the beginning, their functions, their duties, their responsibilities have been decreed by our species.

—John Steinbeck

Romantic literature is in effect imaginative lying.

—Oscar Wilde

Her constant orders for beheading are shocking to those modern critics of children’s literature who feel that juvenile fiction should be free of all violence and especially violence with Freudian undertones. Even the Oz books of L. Frank Baum, so singularly free of the horrors to be found in Grimm and Andersen, contain many scenes of decapitation. As far as I know, there have been no empirical studies of how children react to such scenes and what harm if any is done to their psyche. My guess is that the normal child finds it all very amusing and is not damaged in the least, but that books like Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and The Wizard of Oz should not be allowed to circulate indiscriminately among adults who are undergoing analysis.

—Martin Gardner
The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.

—Henry James

To make someone an icon is to make him an abstraction, and abstractions are incapable of vital communication with living people. One has only to spend a term trying to teach college literature to realize that the quickest way to kill an author’s vitality for potential readers is to present that author ahead of his time as ‘great’ or ‘classic.’ Because then the author becomes for the students like medicine or vegetables, something the authorities have declared ‘good for them’ that they ‘ought to like,’ at which point the students’ nictitating membranes come down, and everyone just goes through the requisite motions of criticism and paper-writing without feeling one real or relevant thing. It’s like removing all oxygen from the room before trying to start a fire.

—David Foster Wallace

In my profession it isn’t a question of telling good literature from bad. Really good literature is seldom appreciated in its own day. The best authors die poor, the bad ones make money — it’s always been like that. What do I, an agent, get out of a literary genius who won’t be discovered for another hundred years? I’ll be dead myself then. Successful incompetents are what I need.

—Walter Moers

Life isn’t simple. Literature shouldn’t be either.

—Mark Slouka

Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people, and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary.

—Boris Pasternak

But you have read *Madame Bovary*?
(I’d never heard of her books.) ‘No.’

—David Mitchell

You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as *ROBINSON CRUSOE* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—*ROBINSON CRUSOE*. When I want advice—*ROBINSON CRUSOE*. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much—*ROBINSON CRUSOE*. I have worn out six stout *ROBINSON CRUSOES* with hard work in my service.
lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and *ROBINSON CRUSOE* put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

—Wilkie Collins

The fairy tale belongs to the poor...I know of no fairy tale which upholds the tyrant, or takes the part of the strong against the weak. A fascist fairy tale is an absurdity.

—Erik Christian Haugaard

We are human, and nothing is more interesting to us than humanity. The appeal of literature is that it is so thoroughly a human thing — by, for and about human beings. If you lose that focus, you obviate the source of the power and permanence of literature.

—M. H. Abrams

A novel works its magic by putting a reader inside another person’s life. The pace is as slow as life. It’s as detailed as life. It requires you, the reader, to fill in an outline of words with vivid pictures drawn subconsciously from your own life, so that the story feels more personal than the sets designed by someone else and handed over via TV or movies. Literature duplicates the experience of living in a way that nothing else can, drawing you so fully into another life that you temporarily forget you have one of your own. That is why you read it, and might even sit up in bed till early dawn, throwing your whole tomorrow out of whack, simply to find out what happens to some people who, you know perfectly well, are made up. It’s why you might find yourself crying, even if you aren’t the crying kind.

—Barbara Kingsolver

What a tribute this is to art; what a misfortune this is for history.
[In reference to Shakespeare’s *Richard III*]

—Paul Murray Kendall

You can’t enjoy art or books in a hurry.

—E. A. Bucchianeri

Reading good literature is an experience of pleasure...but it is also an experience of learning what and how we are, in our human integrity and our human imperfection, with our actions, our dreams, and our ghosts, alone and in relationships that link us to others, in our public image and in the secret recesses of our consciousness.

—Mario Vargas Llosa
It’s amazing how, age after age, in country after country, and in all languages, Shakespeare emerges as incomparable.

—M. H. Abrams

The idea of some kind of objectively constant, universal literary value is seductive. It feels real. It feels like a stone cold fact that *In Search of Lost Time*, by Marcel Proust, is better than *A Shore Thing*, by Snooki. And it may be; Snooki definitely has more one-star reviews on Amazon. But if literary value is real, no one seems to be able to locate it or define it very well. We’re increasingly adrift in a grey void of aesthetic relativism.

—Lev Grossman

Week before last I went to Wesleyan and read ‘A Good Man Is Hard to Find.’ After it I went to one of the classes where I was asked questions. There were a couple of young teachers there and one of them, an earnest type, started asking the questions. ‘Miss O'Connor,’ he said, ‘Why was the Misfit’s hat black?’ I said most countrymen in Georgia wore black hats. He looked pretty disappointed. Then he said, ‘Miss O'Connor, the Misfit represents Christ, does he not?’ ‘He does not,’ I said. He looked crushed. ‘Well, Miss O'Connor,’ he said, ‘what is the significance of the Misfit’s hat?’ I said it was to cover his head; and after that he left me alone. Anyway, that’s what’s happening to the teaching of literature.

—Flannery O'Connor

Figures are the most shocking things in the world. The prettiest little squiggles of black looked at in the right light, and yet consider the blow they can give you upon the heart.

—H. G. Wells

It may be whispered to those uninitiated people who are anxious to know the habits and make the acquaintance of men of letters, that there are no race of people who talk about books, or, perhaps, who read books, so little as literary men.

—William Makepeace Thackeray

Shakespeare very rarely makes the least attempt to surprise by his catastrophes. They are felt to be inevitable, though the precise way in which they will be brought about is not, of course, foreseen.

—Andrew C. Bradley

What good literature can do and does do—far greater than any importation of morality—is touch the human soul.

—Karen Swallow Prior
‘When The Journal of Words compiled its list of the one hundred best novels written in English, do you know that Pride and Prejudice was number twelve?’ She stopped pacing and glared at Jane. ‘And do you know where Jane Eyre was?’ she asked. She looked at the four of them in turn, but nobody answered her. ‘Number fifty-two!’ she shrieked. ‘Fifty-two! Below that pornographic travesty Lolita!’ She spat the title as if it were poison. ‘Below Huckleberry Finn! Below Ulysses. Have you ever tried to read Ulysses? Have you ever finished it? No, you haven’t. No one has. They just carry it around and lie about having read it.’

—Michael Thomas Ford

My dis-interest in what people speak of as ‘women’s problems,’ ‘women’s literature.’ Have women a special sensibility? No. There are individuals uniquely talented & uniquely equipped to interpret the complex symbolism of the world but they are certainly not determined by gender. The very idea is astonishing. [...] Energy, talent, vision, insight, compassion, the ability to stay with a single work for long periods of time, the ability to be faithful (to both one’s writing and one’s beloved)--these have nothing to do with gender. [...] The sensibility of a Virginia Woolf, for instance. It’s her own, it’s uniquely hers. Not because she is a ‘female’ but because she is, or was, Virginia Woolf. Not more sensitive than Henry James or Proust or James Joyce, consequently not more ‘feminine’ in the narrow & misleading sense people use that term today....But then I suppose critics must have something to write about. [...] 

—Joyce Carol Oates

If it’s not good enough for adults, it’s not good enough for children. If a book that is going to be marketed for children does not interest me, a grownup, then I am dishonoring the children for whom the book is intended, and I am dishonoring books. And words.

—Madeleine L’Engle

Men sometimes speak as if the study of the classics would at length make way for more modern and practical studies; but the adventurous student will always study classics, in whatever language they may be written and however ancient they may be. For what are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? They are the only oracles which are not decayed, and there are such answers to the most modern inquiry in them as Delphi and Dodona never gave. We might as well omit to study Nature because she is old. To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem.

—Henry David Thoreau
I do feel that literature should be demystified. What I object to is what is happening in our era: literature is only something you get at school as an assignment. No one reads for fun, or to be subversive or to get turned on to something. It’s just like doing math at school. I mean, how often do we sit down and do trigonometry for fun, to relax. I’ve thought about this, the domination of the literary arts by theory over the past 25 years -- which I detest -- and it’s as if you have to be a critic to mediate between the author and the reader and that’s utter crap. Literature can be great in all ways, but it’s just entertainment like rock’n’roll or a film. It is entertainment. If it doesn’t capture you on that level, as entertainment, movement of plot, then it doesn’t work. Nothing else will come out of it. The beauty of the language, the characterisation, the structure, all that’s irrelevant if you’re not getting the reader on that level -- moving a story. If that’s friendly to readers, I cop to it.

—T. C. Boyle

Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. Many things I read surpassed my understanding and experience. I had a very confused knowledge of kingdoms, wide extents of country, mighty rivers, and boundless seas. This book developed new and mightier scenes of action. I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the greatest ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice.

—Mary Shelley

It is untrue that fiction is nonutilitarian. The uses of fiction are synonymous with the uses of literature. They include refreshment, clarification of life, self-awareness, expansion of our range of experiences, and enlargement of our sense of understanding and discovery, perception, intensification, expression, beauty, and understanding. Like literature generally, fiction is a form of discovery, perception, intensification, expression, beauty, and understanding. If it is all these things, the question of whether it is a legitimate use of time should not even arise.

—Leland Ryken

The singular power of literature lies not in its capacity for accurate representation of mass commonalities, but its ability to illuminate the individual life in a way that expands our understanding of some previously unseen or unarticulated aspect of existence.

—Nicole Krauss

Literature provides a person with a conceptual framework for recognizing human beings’ recurrent challenges in life. Reading good literature deepens a person’s understanding of the variable ways that somebody might respond to circumstances in
their world, thereby adding to their own potential intellectual and spiritual depth and expands their understanding of the nuances of their own personal behavior.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Where should one turn for guidance in an appraisal of the essence of justice, morality, ethics, religion, science, literature, and the like? Not to the past, for history is willfully misinterpreted; and not to the church, which is ineffective because of the cowardice of its leaders. Even science cannot be helpful because its exponents have succeeded only in destroying the harmony of life. It is therefore the duty of literature to rediscover the truth and beauty of life that other means have failed to find.

—Hymen Chonon Berkowitz

Great literature is literature that speaks to deep, fundamental human truths and experience in a way that is relatable to the reader and that may provoke engagement or facilitate insight into these truths and experiences. If these truths and experiences are about breaches of the normal, then surely horror has a place in literature, and in facts may proffer deep engagement with the most profound aspects of our existence. Sometimes only horror can say what needs to be said.

—Jacob M. Held

Since language is the only tool with which writers can reflect and shape a culture, it must be transformed into art. Language is not a limitation on the art of literature; it is a glorification. It has been the scaffolding inside which nations and philosophies have been built, and the language of literature has added the ornamental pediment by which the culture is remembered.

—E. L. Konigsburg

The purpose of literature is to teach you how to THINK, not how to be practical. Learning to discover the connective tissue between seemingly unrelated events is the only way we are equipped to understand patterns in the real world.

—Catherine Lowell

The stories we read in books, what’s presented to us as being interesting—they have very little to do with real life as it’s lived today. I’m not talking about straight-up escapism, your vampires, serial killers, codes hidden in paintings, and so on. I mean so-called serious literature. A boy goes hunting with his emotionally volatile father, a bereaved woman befriends an asylum seeker, a composer with a rare neurological disorder walks around New York, thinking about the nature of art. People looking back over their lives, people having revelations, people discovering meaning. Meaning, that’s the big thing. The way these books have it, you trip over a rock
you’ll find some hidden meaning waiting there. Everyone’s constantly on the verge of some soul-shaking transformation. And it’s—if you’ll forgive my language - it’s bullshit. Modern people live in a state of distraction. They go from one distraction to the next, and that’s how they like it. They don’t transform, they don’t stop to smell the roses, they don’t sit around recollecting long passages of their childhood—Jesus, I can hardly remember what I was doing two days ago. My point is, people aren’t waiting to be restored to some ineffable moment. They’re not looking for meaning. That whole idea of the novel—that’s finished.

—Paul Murray

The discovery of the horror tale at an early age was fortuitous for me. This sort of tale serves, in many ways, the very same purpose as fairy tales did in our childhood. It operates as a theater of the mind in which internal conflicts are played out. In these tales we can parade the most reprehensible aspects of our being: cannibalism, incest, parricide. It allows us to discuss our anxieties and even to contemplate the experience of death in absolute safety. And again, like a fairy tale, horror can serve as a liberating or repressive social tool, and it is always an accurate reflection of the social climate of its time and the place where it gets birthed.

—Guillermo del Toro

The serious creative writer of today is in the same tradition as the ancient Greek dramatists or the Old Testament prophets. The Greek dramatists used the materials of legend and put them on the stage; the Hebrew prophet spoke sermons or wrote down the essence of his apocalyptic vision; the novelist tells an imagined story in prose about people and things of everyday life. But they all—if they are good—state clearly the incisive truths about man and suggest profound insights into his condition on this earth.

—George D. Crothers

Though we talk of the advance of realism and boldly though we assert that life finds its mirror in fiction, the material of life is so difficult to handle and has to be limited and abstracted to such an extent before it can be dealt with by words that a small pinch of it only is made use of by the lesser novelist. He spends his time moulding and remoulding what has been supplied him by the efforts of original genius perhaps a generation or two ago. The moulds are by this time so firmly set, and require such effort to break them, that the public is seldom disturbed by explosions in that direction.

—Virginia Woolf
If (a biography) does not have a point of view it will be nothing more than a kind of expanded article for an encyclopedia—a string of facts arranged in chronological order with no claim to being a real biography at all. A biography must have a point of view and it must have a frame of reference. But it should be a point of view and a frame of reference implicit in the material and not imposed upon it.

--Marchette Chute

Structurally, a novel should be coherent. Plot, style, characters, and tone should all contribute toward the central effect of the book. On the simplest level this means that what is said in one part of the novel should not contradict what is said in another. At a higher level one might think of requirement as ‘organic structure’—vehicle and theme should merge and be indistinguishable. The theme ought not to be imposed on the material, but should grow—or seem to grow—out of the material itself. Actions and dialogue ought to create, not illustrate, character. And characters ought not to act out ‘ideas.’

--W. J. Stuckey

A novel—a serious novel, that is—ought to take into account the complexity of life. It ought not, in other words, to offer a simple formula which seems to explain or sum up the whole of human nature or experience. Further, attitudes appropriate to moral tracts, though useful perhaps in instructing the young, are not appropriate to novels intended for mature readers. A serious novel explores the implications of the characters and situations with which it deals; it goes beyond mere appearances, and, in fact, sometimes alters the reader’s preconceptions of reality.

--W. J. Stuckey

The novel is really the only major art form that is still working on the artistic premises or assumptions of 50 to 60 years ago. It is a rather stagnant art form compared to some others.

--Susan Sontag

Historian and biographer cherish...an equal respect for the facts, an equal caution regarding accuracy and authenticity. But the two have different criteria for selection of their facts. The biographer is interested in the individual; he must discover personal material about a man or woman. This personal material can be interpreted only in the light of the biographer’s own knowledge of human nature--how else? It is well, therefore, if the biographer be by disposition a person interested in his fellow creatures and in what motivates them.

--Catherine Drinker Bowen
Nothing can substitute for literature and the arts because the experiences they offer are rarely if ever obtainable elsewhere.

--Vernon Hall, Jr.

Art’s function is the widening and better ordering of human experiences. The more of the human personality that is engaged, the better the life.

--Vernon Hall, Jr.

Fiction is an account of events that did not occur. The reader knows that they did not occur. Nevertheless, effective fiction is so close to life that the reader feels a sense of reality. Effective fiction is vivid. It is the imaginative presentation of what might have happened in life. Most people live rather humdrum lives, with each day not unlike the previous day. Because so much of real life is dull, an invented or imagined picture of life, a picture that is unusual or humorous or dramatic or important, becomes of interest. The reader is engrossed by an effective segment of what might have happened in life, is engrossed by a good novel.

--Paul R. Reynolds

The short story is the perfect medium for the fictional evaluation of our less than serene days and our volatile, changing natures. Flexible, short, quickly taken in, it conforms to the tempo and the fragmentation of our lives.

--Whit and Hallie Burnett

Biography is history seen through the prism of a person.

--Louis Fischer

All great literature is fable in the sense that the meaning or moral of the story is greater than the story itself. It says something about the human condition.

--Theodore Sturgeon

The fairy tale is accused of giving children a false impression of the world they live in. But I think no literature that children could read gives them less of a false impression. I think what profess to be realistic stories for children are far more likely to deceive them. I never expected the real world to be like the fairy tales. I think that I did expect school to be like the school stories. The fantasies did not deceive me; the school stories did. All stories in which children have adventures and successes which are possible, in the sense that they do not break the laws of nature, but almost infinitely improbable are in more danger than the fairy tales of raising false expectations....The boy reading the school story of the type I have in mind desires success and is unhappy (once the book is over) because he can’t get it; the boy
reading the fairy tale desires and is happy in the very fact of desiring, for his mind
has not been concentrated on himself.

--C. S. Lewis

The short story...needs the kind of imagination which is able to concentrate at high
power and is most itself when doing so. The tension and pace required by the short
story can be as stimulating to the right writer of it as they are intimidating to the
wrong one....That need to gain an immediate hold on the reader (a hold which must
also be a compulsive one) rules out the writer who is a slow starter: the quick
starter, reacting, asks nothing better. There is also the necessity to project, to make
seen, and make seen with significance—the short story is for the eye (if the mind’s
eye). Also the short story, though it highlights what appears to be reality, is not—
cannot wish or afford to be—realistic: it relies on devices, foreshortenings, ‘effects.’
In the narration there must be an element of conjury.

--Elizabeth Bowen

Contemporary American fiction may be classified as historical, regional, exotic, erot-
ic, erratic, good, and bad, with most works falling into one of another of the last two
categories. Sometimes, especially in the short story, the author gives us a slice of
life. Perhaps he is carving out a reputation for himself. Then again, he may be
sharpening a pencil and the knife slips. ‘But,’ as one critic said, ‘no matter how thin
you slice it, it is still life.’

--Richard Armour

The gap between ‘high-brow' and ‘popular' literature...is one of the most obvious of
contemporary cultural phenomena. The difference between readers in these two
categories is not necessarily one of intelligence. True literacy is not a degree of intel-
ligence or even a degree of skill, but a state of mind and imagination, which is pos-
sible at almost any intellectual level. Most young children are more literate in this
sense than their elders, for their minds and imaginations have not yet been atro-
phied by lengthy exposure to dead stereotypes.

--David Daiches

Fiction doesn’t have to be true, but it has to say true things.

--Theodore Sturgeon

Good short fiction is a lot like a magical illusion: the trick appears to be physically
impossible, and it is performed with a smoothness and ease that only further as-
tounds the audience; yet, the principles behind the illusion are relatively simple.
Both storytellers and magicians are aided by their commitment to knowledge, skill,
practice and hard work.

--Michael Schumacher
Good fiction sets off...a vivid and continuous dream in the reader’s mind. It is ‘generous’ in the sense that it is complete and self-contained: it answers, either explicitly or by implication, every reasonable question the reader can ask. It does not leave us hanging, unless the narrative itself justifies its inconclusiveness. It does not play pointlessly subtle games in which storytelling is confused with puzzle-making. It does not ‘test’ the reader by demanding that he bring with him some special knowledge without which the events make no sense. In short, it seeks, without pandering, to satisfy and please. It is intellectually and emotionally significant. It is elegant and efficient; that is, it does not use more scenes, characters, physical details, and technical devices than it needs to do its job. It has design.

--John Gardner

All art at some time and in some manner becomes mass entertainment, and...if it does not, it dies and is forgotten.

--Raymond Chandler

It is not only fiction, of course, that must end. All art ends—music with silence, the painting with its frame or its wall, literature of any genre at least with the covers of the book....Nearly all art adapts itself to the condition of its having to end. It must seem to end, in other words, and though this fundamental necessity is sometimes bypassed and subverted...the audacity, often the self-consciousness, with which the appearance of ending is avoided simply confirms the strength of the compulsion to end....A formal enclosure, or an unwillingness to enclose, takes place at many levels, and even though a work may remain open at a number of levels, still some of the most ingenious exercises of a writer’s craft may serve to persuade us that his work is finished.

--Philip Stevick

If a story does not teach by example, it is no story; it has no truth.

--Ludwig Lewisohn

Fiction is essentially vicarious experience. Unsophisticated readers frequently require fiction characters with whom they can easily identify. Such readers do not like to identify with people who have very obvious faults, and so they tend to reject novels and stories in which there is any moral complexity or ambiguity to the major character....

The more sophisticated reader is capable of greater leaps of the imagination. He need not identify himself with people of his own age, or own profession, whether present or future, or own nationality, or own race or even his own imagined morality. He finds an increased meaningfulness in fiction that offers genuine insights into
other ways of thinking, experiencing, deciding, precisely because they differ from his own.

--C. Carter Colwell

Credibility is one of the basic criteria of narrative. The function of the artist is to provide some insight into why things happen, how it came that way. It is precisely because the times are so absurd that literature can't afford to be.

--Paddy Chayefsky

The world would be impoverished without fiction. The part of fiction I value is not meaning but the refusal of the novelist to accept the idea of meaning in a usual way....making meanings is not important, but making of a moment in human time should be the goal of the novelist. The novelist is the opposite of a meaning-maker.

--Benjamin DeMott

A novelist should give the reader insight into people in a moment in time. He should ask himself about a person in an instant of time, give us a bit and convey the rest by suggestion. The best novel is referential.

--Benjamin DeMott

The new novelists will not let you suspend disbelief. They destroy the possibility of our inhabiting someone else’s innerness.

--Benjamin DeMott

The role of the novel as entertainment is being ignored. Writers are now more private—as people dancing today dance by themselves.

--Benjamin DeMott

People who believe that reading fiction is a waste of time unless it is turned into a pedagogical exercise overlook the fact that the greatest writing—the truly creative writing—is to be found in poetry, fairy tales, and fiction of many kinds.

--Ruth Hill Viguers

What makes a book universal beyond narrow realism? Perhaps it has a theme that is timeless and timely and is treated in a way that the reader can reach to with feeling and with the start of understanding. This identity is initially different from ‘on my block, around the corner.’ Immediacy in identification is important. It is also important to recognize that this immediacy can be sensed and experienced by others not so close by, and perhaps in another time. Hopes, dreams, frustrations, love, hate, anger, fear, aloneness, loneliness, gladness, joy, discovery are feelings common to everyone. They can be incorporated in books so readers see that human emotions do transcend one’s limited milieu.
Though we may be well aware of all the problems of paraphrasing the ‘meaning’ of a story and of the many assertions that art does not speak but is, we all tend nevertheless to persist in employing the idea that in some sense a story makes a ‘statement’.

‘Statement’ is what the story would say if it were an essay and still able to say what it does say. ‘Statement’ is the specific, if unutterable, quality of all the story’s sensibilities. As a substitute for ‘statement,’ the word ‘theme’ might do but the idea of theme seems to involve working outward from the center of the story toward some general or universal concept which stands as an interpretation of the work.

Regardless whether the novel of the future will be shorter or longer, it will tell a story that will reflect the human character and interest the reader. The men of the future will be just as curious to hear an intriguing story as we are today, which only means that the novel can never go out of style. All literary forms must remain basically the same as long as man himself remains the same.

The novel, the realistic species of long prose fiction, is differentiated from realistic drama by far more than the form in which it is printed. James’s advice to the novelist to disappear into his material, which he must render, present, dramatize, pushes the novel toward drama and away from essay; yet a true novel is not just a realistic play with stage directions spelled out and speakers described rather more fully than is conventional with printed plays. A novel presents the characters’ hidden life with an extensiveness, intimacy, and analytic subtlety which drama forbids, and it is a story controlled by a narrative voice.

The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.

To remain unaware of or to evade central psychological issues in a work of art must weaken the appreciation of aesthetic beauties, if not render such appreciation impossible. Where content and form are inseparable, then surely the content, including all its psychological ramifications, must be understood for a fair appraisal of the work. The deepest study of the works of at least some artists therefore requires investigation of the life situation of the artist.
Every fiction...is to some degree a theory of events. Every fiction is (or attempts to be) a closed system of cause and effect....literary cosmologies are fictions; that is, they are feigned; they are imagined. They are new orders of being whose parts have been abstracted from the actual world....All fictions generate meaning by supposing relationships between one's self and one's circumstance.

--A. D. Van Nostrand

The reader who develops early the habit of exploring in all sorts of directions and looking for the unexpected should be rewarded his whole life through by finding that his day-to-day experience and his changing interests extend his enjoyment of literature, which in turn enhances his pleasure in life.

--Elizabeth Alden Green

We have been so preoccupied with trying to find out how to teach everybody to read anything that we have forgotten the importance of what is read. Yet it is obvious that if we succeeded in teaching everybody to read, and everybody read nothing but pulp magazines, obscene literature, and Mein Kampf, the last state of the nation would be worse than the first. Literacy is not enough.

--Robert Maynard Hutchins

When by these gentle ways (a child) begins to be able to read, some easy pleasant book, suited to his capacity, should be put into his hands, wherein the entertainment that he finds, might draw him on, and reward his pains in reading; and yet not such as should fill his head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay the principles of vice and folly. To this purpose I think Aesop's Fables the best, which being stories apt to delight and entertain a child, may yet afford useful reflections to a grown man; and if his memory retain them all his life after, he will not repent to find them there, amongst his manly thoughts, and serious business.

--John Locke

Literature and the reading life is a pursuit which devours a great deal of time, and yet is apt to leave behind it nothing very substantial.

--Virginia Woolf

The rise of novel in the 19th century had parents very concerned that their children were staying in their rooms all the time, were not being social.

--Richard Gottlieb
The more extensive your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled, the more extensive will be your powers of invention, and what may appear still more like a paradox, the more original will be your composition.

—Sir Joshua Reynolds

The crown of literature is poetry. It is its end and aim. It is the sublimest activity of the human mind. It is the achievement of beauty and delicacy. The writer of prose can only step aside when the poet passes.

—W. Somerset Maugham

A teacher who can arouse a feeling for one single good poem accomplishes more than he who fills our memory with rows and rows of natural objects, classified with name and form.

--Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

This special field of literature in contrast to that of practical and that of scientific concerns, involves...feelings and attitudes. At first glance, the field of feeling and attitudes may seem trivial when thought of in contrast to the great bustling practical business of the world or in contrast to the vast body of organized knowledge which science is and which allows man to master, to a certain degree, nature and his own fate. The field of feeling and attitude may seem to be ‘merely personal’ and ‘merely subjective,’ and therefore of no general interest. But at second thought, we may realize that all the action and knowledge in the world can be valuable only as these things bring meaning to life—to our particular lives especially.

--Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren

Planners, builders, laborers, schemers, executives, make a city, a country, a university, habitable, give them their bones and their blood. Poets and novelists make us appreciate the life we live in them, give them their souls.

—Henry S. Canby

Give me Chaucer in preference. He slaps us on the shoulder, and makes us spring up while the dew is on the grass, and while the long shadows play about it in all quarters. We feel strong with the freshness round us, and we return with a keened appetite, having such a companion in our walk.

—W. S. Landor

Blessed are the weird people—poets, misfits, writers, mystics, painters and troubadours for they teach us to see the world through different eyes.
Poetry is the most subtle of the literary arts, and students grow more ingenious by the year at avoiding it. If they can nip around Milton, duck under Blake and collapse gratefully into the arms of Jane Austen, a lot of them will.

—Terry Eagleton

Since direct political discussion was prohibited, all literature tended to become a criticism of Russian life, and literary criticism but another form of social criticism....If the censor forbade explicit statement, he was skillfully eluded by indirection—by innocent seeming tales of other lands or times, by complicated parables, animal fables, double meanings, overtones, by investing apparently trivial events with the pent-up energies possessing the writer, so that the reader became compelled to dwell upon them until their hidden meanings became manifest.

—Bertram Wolfe

I wonder why murder is considered less immoral than fornication in literature.

—George Moore

The important task of literature is to free man, not to censor him, and that is why Puritanism was the most destructive and evil force which ever oppressed people and their literature: it created hypocrisy, perversion, fears, sterility.

—Anaïs Nin

Harry Potter is about confronting fears, finding inner strength and doing what is right in the face of adversity. Twilight is about how important it is to have a boyfriend.

—Steven King

Literature has taken a back seat to television.

—Tennessee Williams

Television is the literature of the illiterate, the culture of the low-brow, the wealth of the poor, the privilege of the underprivileged, the exclusive club of the excluded masses.

—Lee Loevinger

An autobiography is the story of how a man thinks he lived.

—Herbert Samuel
The nice thing about the Bible is it doesn't give you too many facts. Two and a half lines and it tells you the whole story, and that leaves you a great deal of freedom to elaborate on how it might have happened.

—Howard Nemerov

An artist lives more passionately, more deeply, with more seeking for life and truth and beauty than any man in the world.

--Charlie Chaplin

Everything great in the world comes from neurotics. They alone have founded our religions and composed our masterpieces. Never will the world know all it owes to them nor all they have suffered to enrich us. We enjoy lovely music, beautiful paintings, a thousand intellectual delicacies, but we have no idea of their cost, to those who invented them, in sleepless nights, tears, spasmodic laughter, rashes, asthma, epilepsies, and the fear of death, which is worse than all the rest.

--Marcel Proust

I think I love and reverence all arts equally only putting my own just above the others; because in it I recognize the union and culmination of my own. To me it seems as if when God conceived the world, that was Poetry; He formed it, and that was Sculpture; He colored it, and that was Painting; He peopled it with living beings, and that was the grand, divine, eternal Drama.

--Charlotte Cushman

Artists should follow their own visions and create whatever they want. That is because it is precisely the variety of those unique visions of the human condition that gives art its true value. While the world knows and loves the dramas of Shakespeare and still recites his sonnets, only historians of the Elizabethan period can remember the names of the politicians who were his contemporaries. The moral of this story is clear. The value of great art will outlive the political controversies of the moment.

--Playthell Benjamin

In art, as in literature, ugliness rendered with compassion is beauty.

--W. Joe Innis

The arts are a highway into the soul of the people.

--Arthur Miller

The Bible writers didn’t care that they were bunching together sequences some
of which were historical, some preposterous, and some downright manipulative. Faithful recording was not their business; faith was.

--Jeanette Winterson

The ‘science’ in ‘science fiction’ isn’t just physics and engineering. It can also be linguistics, anthropology, and psychology.

—Ann Leckie

Literature, although it stands apart by reason of the great destiny and general use of its medium in the affairs of men, is yet an art like other arts. Of these we may distinguish two great classes: those arts, like sculpture, painting, acting, which are representative, or as used to be said very clumsily, imitative; and those, like architecture, music, and the dance, which are self-sufficient, and merely presentative.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

The only line that’s wrong in Shakespeare is ‘holding a mirror up to nature.’ You hold a magnifying glass up to nature. As an actor you just enlarge it enough so that your audience can identify with the situation. If it were a mirror, we would have no art.

—Montgomery Clift

Shakespeare uses the supernatural elements to reveal his character’s inner desires and fears.

—John Foster

For years, I had heard about the lack of interest in literature in the U.S. and I had complained about it. I failed to understand how people could fail to be moved by art.

—Rita Dove

The conventional essay, nonfiction as it is, is nothing more than a delivery system for facts....The true essay, however, deals not in knowing but in ‘unknowing’: in uncertainty, imagination, rumination; in wandering and wondering; in openness and in conclusion. Every piece of this is false in one way or another. There are genres whose principal business is fact—journalism, history, popular science—but the essay has never been one of them. If the form possesses a defining characteristic, it is that the essay makes an argument (and does so, unlike academic writing and other forms, for a general rather than a specialized audience). That argument can rest on fact, but it can also rest on anecdote, or introspection, or cultural interpretation, or some combination of all these and more. There are ‘public essays’ and ‘personal essays’ and essays that are both or neither; the form is broad and
various and limitlessly flexible. Yet what distinguishes an op-ed, for instance, from a news report is that the former seeks to persuade, not simply inform. And what makes a personal essay an essay and not just an autobiographical narrative is precisely that it uses personal material to develop, however speculatively or intuitively, a larger conclusion.

—William Deresiewicz

The literature of women’s lives is a tradition of escapees, women who have lived to tell the tale.

—Phyllis Rose

I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman’s inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman’s fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.

Perhaps I shall. Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.

—Jane Austen

There’s nothing inherently wrong with a princess. Historically, princesses are fascinating people with a great deal of consequence. There is a subset of stories about princesses which has them as helpless people waiting a lot and sleeping a lot and powerless to do anything without a man to help. That’s the kind of story we wanted to subvert.

—Shannon Hale

Alexander the Great slept with ‘The Iliad’ beneath his pillow. During the waning moon, I cradle Homer’s ‘Odyssey’ as if it were the sweet body of a woman.

—Roman Payne

Today, the one common feature in American secular culture is its celebration of the self that breaks away from the constrictions of the family and the state, and, in its greatest expressions, from all limits entirely. The great American poem is Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself.’ The great American essay is Emerson’s ‘Self-Reliance.’ The great American novel is Melville’s Moby Dick, the tale of a man on a quest so lonely that it is incomprehensible to those around him. American culture, high and low, is about self-expression and personal authenticity. Franklin Delano Roosevelt called individualism ‘the great watchword of American life.’

--Stephen Marche
The topography of literature, the fact in fiction, is one of my pleasures—I mean, where the living road enters the pages of a book, and you are able to stroll along both the real and imagined road.

—Paul Theroux

We hope to teach mythology not as a study, but as a relaxation from study; to give our work the charm of a story-book, yet by means of it to impart a knowledge of an important branch of education.

—Thomas Bulfinch

If you want to know a country, read its writers.

—Aminatta Forna

Reading literary fiction stimulates cognition beyond the brain functions related to reading, say, magazine articles, interviews, or most online nonfiction reporting.

—Susan Reynolds

We are a narrative, storytelling species. Revealing our own histories, and understanding those of others can really help us appreciate the humanity in all of our fellow individuals.

—Stephen P. Hinshaw

Stories serve multiple purposes. At a basic level they are great entertainment, which is essential for living a happy and healthy life, but on a deeper level stories help us explore issues that are otherwise difficult to address. On one hand a good book helps us escape our troubles, and on the other hand it can help us face up to those troubles by bringing real issues to the fore, often in a more manageable way, since the problems are experienced vicariously through the eyes of another.

—Dean F. Wilson

A knowledge of Greek thought and life, and of the arts in which the Greeks expressed their thought and sentiment, is essential to high culture. A man may know everything else, but without this knowledge he remains ignorant of the best intellectual and moral achievements of his own race.

—Charles Eliot Norton

Literature keeps presenting the most vicious things to us an entertainment, but what it appeals to is not any pleasure of these things, but the exhilaration of standing apart from them and being able to see them for what they are because they aren’t really happening. The more exposed we are to this, the less likely we are to
find an unthinking pleasure in cruel or evil things. As the eighteenth century said in a fine mouth-filling phrase, literature refines our sensibilities.

—Northrop Frye

Our relationship with literary characters, at least to those that exercise a certain attraction over us, rests in fact on a denial. We know perfectly well, on a conscious level, that these characters ‘do not exist,’ or in any case do not exist in the same way as do the inhabitants of the real world. But things manifest in an entirely different way on the unconscious level, which is interested not in the ontological differences between worlds but in the effect they produce on the psyche. Every psychoanalyst knows how deeply a subject can be influenced, and even shaped, sometimes to the point of tragedy, by a fictional character and the sense of identification it gives rise to.

—Pierre Bayard

Historical evidence suggests that anxiety can be allied to artistic and creative genius. The literary gifts of Emily Dickinson, for example, were inextricably bound up with her reclusiveness, which some say was a product of anxiety. (She was completely housebound after age 40.) Franz Kafka yoked his neurotic sensibility to his artistic sensibility; Woody Allen has done the same. Jerome Kagan, an eminent Harvard psychologist who has spent more than 50 years studying human temperament, argues that T. S. Eliot’s anxiety and ‘high reactive’ physiology helped make him a great poet. Eliot was, Kagan observes, a ‘shy, cautious, sensitive child’—but because he also had a supportive family, good schooling, and ‘unusual verbal abilities,’ Eliot was able to ‘exploit his temperamental preference for an introverted, solitary life.

—Scott Stossel

A small amount of good literature can often teach more about the inner life than volumes of psychology.

—Thomas Moore

I read The Old Curiosity Shop before I began Blackwood Farm. I was amazed at the utter madness in that book.

—Anne Rice

In establishing the Academy, Plato didn’t forsake the people of the agora, who, as citizens, had to deliberate responsibly about issues of moral and political import. It was with these issues in mind that he wrote his dialogues—great works of literature as well as of philosophy. The dialogues may not represent his true philosophy (in the Seventh Letter, he explained that he had never committed his teachings to writing), but for more than 2,400 years they’ve been good enough for us.
The counsellor who never reads a novel or never opens a book of poetry is neglecting an important resource for empathic development.

—Dave Mearns

Literature is a beautiful way of keeping the imagination alive, of visiting worlds you would never have time to in your day-to-day life. It keeps you abreast of a wider spectrum of human activities.

—Abraham Verghese

What does it feel like to be a parent? What does it feel like to be a child? And that’s what stories do. They bring you there. They offer a dramatic explanation, which is always different from an expository explanation.

—Richard Russo

Even the great writers of our time have tried and failed and failed some more. Vladimir Nabokov received a harsh rejection letter from Knopf upon submitting *Lolita*, which would later go on to sell fifty million copies. Sylvia Plath’s first rejection letter for *The Bell Jar* read, ‘There certainly isn’t enough genuine talent for us to take notice.’ Gertrude Stein received a cruel rejection letter that mocked her style. Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way* earned him a sprawling rejection letter regarding the reasons he should simply give up writing all together. Tim Burton’s first illustrated book, *The Giant Zlig*, got the thumbs down from Walt Disney Productions, and even Jack Kerouac’s perennial *On the Road* received a particularly blunt rejection letter that simply read, ‘I don’t dig this one at all.’ So even if you’re an utterly fantastic writer who will be remembered for decades forthcoming, you’ll still most likely receive a large dollop of criticism, rejection, and perhaps even mockery before you get there.

—Cody Delistraty

Literature and philosophy both allow past idols to be resurrected with a frequency which would be truly distressing to a sober scientist.

—Morris Raphael Cohen

I want you, as a reader, to experience what I experience, to let that other world, that imaginary world that I have created, tell you things about the real world.

—Terry Brooks

It starts so young, and I’m angry about that. The garbage we’re taught. About love, about what’s ‘romantic.’ Look at so many of the so-called romantic figures in books...
and movies. Do we ever stop and think how many of them would cause serious and drastic unhappiness after The End? Why are sick and dangerous personality types so often shown as passionate and tragic and something to be longed for when those are the very ones you should run for your life from? Think about it. Heathcliff. Romeo. Don Juan. Jay Gatsby. Rochester. Mr. Darcy. From the rigid control freak in *The Sound of Music* to all the bad boys some woman goes running to the airport to catch in the last minute of every romantic comedy. She should let him leave. Your time is so valuable, and look at these guys—depressive and moody and violent and immature and self-centered. And what about the big daddy of them all, Prince Charming? What was his secret life? We don’t know anything about him, other than he looks good and comes to the rescue.

—Deb Caletti

People don’t write sonnets about being compatible, or novels about shared life goals and stimulating conversation. The great loves are the crazy ones.

—Blair Waldorf, *Gossip Girl*

Walt Whitman—he who laid end to end words never seen in each other’s company before outside of a dictionary.

—David Lodge

Peace literature is almost exclusively read, though to good effect, by pacifists, while what is needed is the canvassing of those who have not so far been won to the cause.

—Fredrik Bajer

There are neither good nor bad subjects. From the point of view of pure Art, you could almost establish it as an axiom that the subject is irrelevant, style itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.

—Gustave Flaubert

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the first evidence to America that no hurricane can be so disastrous to a country as a ruthlessly humanitarian woman.

--Sinclair Lewis

Books make vivid the problems of human relations and give access to them in new dimensions.

--Margaret Heaton

One awesome thing about Eeyore is that even though he is basically clinically
depressed, he still gets invited to participate in adventures and shenanigans with all of his friends. And they never expect him to pretend to feel happy, they just love him anyway, and they never leave him behind or ask him to change.

—Unknown

I don’t have many friends, not the living, breathing sort at any rate. And I don’t mean that in a sad and lonely way; I’m just not the type of person who accumulates friends or enjoys crowds. I’m good with words, but not the spoken kind; I’ve often thought what a marvelous thing it would be if I could only conduct relationships on paper. And I suppose, in a sense, that’s what I do, for I’ve hundreds of the other sort, the friends contained within bindings, pages after glorious pages of ink, stories that unfold the same way every time but never lose their joy, that take me by the hand and lead me through doorways into worlds of great terror and rapturous delight. Exciting, worthy, reliable companions—full of wise counsel, some of them—but sadly ill-equipped to offer the use of a spare bedroom for a month or two.

—Kate Morton

When I think of early friendships, I think not of people but of books. Books were my friends, and more often than not, the characters in the books were my imaginary friends, who stepped out of the pages and walked with me to school or sat in bed with me, talking when I was meant to be asleep. What I mean is reading was my friends. And also I mean that I learned about friendship—patience, slowness, listening, care—from reading and from reading about friendship between people.

—Erin Wunker

Choose an author as you choose a friend.

--Earl of Roscommon

Be as careful of the books you read, as of the company you keep; for your habits and character will be as much influenced be the former as by the latter.

--Paxton Hood

I cannot understate the ability to handle classical texts such as Shakespeare.

—Louise Jameson

Everything is becoming science fiction. From the margins of an almost invisible literature has sprung the intact reality of the 20th century.

—J. G. Ballard
I’ve joined a book club now to force me to read novels. The other members ask, ‘What do you have against novels?’ And I say, ‘You can just tell they’re making it up!’

—Alan Alda

Her [Jane Austen] pages present young women destined, with various degrees of initial willingness, for the marriages they eventually deserve.

—Nicholas Dames

Martin Luther King Junior’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’ was little-noticed in April 1963, when his colleagues in the civil-rights movement stitched it together from the fragments he drafted in his cell. Major civil-rights legislation was not then on President John F. Kennedy’s agenda. Yet the letter has gained recognition as the 20th Century’s most influential essay in civil disobedience.

—Clayborne Carson

A narrative conveys information from one person’s brain to another’s in an effective way.

We can learn vicariously through another’s experience from a safe space, without really being involved, which is why storytelling is so powerful. We embark on a journey constructed by someone else and, as we see in ‘Swan Lake,’ we can empathize with what the characters go through without suffering the full force of fresh heartbreak.

‘Swan Lake’ tells a rather straightforward story of good vs. evil. It centers on Princess Odette, who has been put under a spell and must live a double life as a swan by day, woman by night, until she finds true love.

Prince Siegfried pledges himself to her, but he breaks his vow when a seductive villainess named Odile, also known as the ‘Black Swan,’ fools him into betraying Odette.

The ballet ends in tragedy—and paradoxically, we like that. Research shows we tend to empathize more with characters in sad stories, and this may trigger hormones related to consoling and bonding.

—Sarah L. Kaufman

Behind a spoon full of sugar, Austin wants us to see the violence of the colonial plantation, abetted by Anglican apologists. Behind the joining of estates in *Emma*, Austin wants us to see the exclusion of itinerant populations from sustenance. Behind the flirtatious soldiers quartered in Meryton in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austin wants us to hear the fall of the guillotine.

—Nicholas Dames
I like nonsense—it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living. It's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope... and that enables you to laugh at all of life’s realities.

--Dr. Seuss

In French literature, you can choose a la carte; in Spanish literature, there is only the set meal.

—Jose Bergamin

Kids who are trying to ‘make it’ in a broken home need to read books about other kids who face similar situations. They need to know that they are not alone in their experiences—that others feel pain and anger, loneliness and frustration....They can learn the possible alternatives that exist by seeing what others (even fictional ‘others’) do. In this way they may realize that they do have lives of their own independent of their parents.

—Beverly Haley

Society mends its wounds. And that’s invariably true in all the tragedies, in the comedies as well. And certainly in the histories.

—Charlton Heston

There are two methods for the literary study of any book—the first being the study of its thought and emotion; the second only that of its workmanship. A student of literature should study some of the Bible from both points of view.

—Lafcadio Hearn

I think Shakespeare is really the one. Words as music and music as words. Everything he wrote was good, which is really frightening.

—Don Van Vliet

Myths and creeds are heroic struggles to comprehend the truth in the world.

—Ansel Adams

Hemingway’s remarks are not literature.

—Gertrude Stein

Names have become traditional for Santa’s reindeer. One hangover from the Germanic past is ‘Donder and Blitzen,’ which means ‘thunder and lightning.’ All the names are suggestive of liveliness and speed (even Cupid is a winged god)
except for Vixen, which is the word for a female fox, or, by extension, that for a shrewish female human being. It seems the one inappropriate name, but Moore needed a rhyme or near-rhyme for Blitzen, we might suppose.

—Isaac Asimov

[Astrid] Lindgren is intent on bearing sharp-eyed witness to the real world. The incongruities are jarring. Chaos spreads in Europe, while neutral Sweden remains a surreal oasis of comparative calm and comfort. In back-to-back [diary] entries in 1942, she takes note of ‘completely lunatic amounts of blood’ in Stalingrad and of her cozy family Christmas in Stockholm.

—Ann Hulbert

In the 21st century, the image of [Agatha] Christie as a sweet old lady who wrote quaint tales of gentle deaths (often by poison) set in charming English villages is shifting to a more nuanced view. Christie 2.0 is studied at academic conferences and in scholarly books, with a new generation of mystery writers piping up as vocal fans. Agatha Christie, a hack? Prove it, they say. ‘She’s the gold standard, the Shakespeare of crime writers, and she influenced many, many of today’s crime writers,’ says [Sophie] Hannah.

—Jocelyn McClurg

There’s a reason the brilliant Orient Express is [Agatha] Christie’s most popular novel. It’s a closed group of suspects, trapped on a train in a snowstorm, and the solution to the the mystery is the cleverest in all of mystery fiction. We mustn’t spoil it for everyone, but when Mr. Ratchett is discovered murdered in his compartment with 12 stab wounds, there are 12 possible suspects. The novel is absolutely perfect in its construction.

—Sophie Hannah

Of all the amusements of old age, the most grateful and soothing is a renewal of acquaintance with the favorite studies and favorite authors of youth.

—Adam Smith

Trevelyan

Age increases my conviction that one cannot afford to give much time to the classics. Some time, yes. But one needs to enlarge and enrich one’s view of life and the
universe. The ideas of the classics, so far as living, are our commonplaces. It is the modern books that give us the latest and most profound conceptions. It seems to me rather a lazy makeshift to mumble over the familiar.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

A great novel is a kind of conversion experience. We come away from it changed.

—Katherine Paterson

If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would have thus been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

—Charles Darwin

This year I am choosing a timeless work of art, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. I once spent a thrilling six weeks teaching this novel at the University of Windsor, to graduate students—though ‘teaching’ is probably not the most adequate term—and can attest to the power of *Ulysses* to bring an incalculable richness to one’s life. Such virtuosity, such dazzling voices, such intelligence, and such a great sense of humor, in a masterly, sustained work that immerses us in the lives of others, in Dublin, Ireland, June 16, 1904—subsequently immortalized as Bloomsday. *Ulysses* is a true celebration of life, as it is a celebration of the art of the novel. Just read it slowly—one chapter at a time. No need to hurry. A great novel is like a journey—by the time you get to your destination, you will have absorbed it into your life.

—Joyce Carol Oates

I’m grateful for *The Scarlet Letter*, that most prophetic of classic American novels. Hawthorne saw it all—the explosive intersection of power and desire, the punishment of the victim, the hypocrisy of the perpetrator, and the complicity of the culture. But he was also writing about a different time, when people still believed in sin, and were capable of shame. Dimmesdale literally dies of a guilty conscience; we’re living in the age of scripted apologies and defiant denials, led by a proud pussy-grabbing president who is incapable of shame and revels in his own hypocrisy. For all of its darkness, though, *The Scarlet Letter* is about Hester’s resilience and ultimate triumph; it’s a true survivor’s story.

—Tom Perrotta

I’m thankful for the Harry Potter series for a lot of reasons, but mostly because
it has gotten many, many kids reading—and continues to do so. To me that’s the greatest thing any book can do. Reading saves lives, and that series saved thousands of them. It’s why I write children’s books myself.

—James Patterson

I’m thankful always for *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. I have read it many times over the years and am always lifted up by its soaring writing and then made depressed and insane by the injustice it lays out. I love its politics, structure, philosophy, characters, how everything in it matters so much, and for that one section which follows a turtle around, just because. It’s a radical book that feels scarily relevant no matter when I pick it up.

—Diane Cook

Reading literature is one of the few ways I am able to see the world through someone else’s point of view and learn how and why they feel the way they do. When it works, and works well, it can create empathy and understanding in a powerful way.

—Jennifer March

Soloway

‘But why,’ he said with animation, ‘do the English not read their own great literature?’

Victor laughed triumphantly, and said, ‘Because at school they are made to hate it.’

--Olaf Stapledon

Literature recounts history, explores knowledge, narrates universal themes of human existence, activates human conscience, enhances understanding of human motives, and explicates the nuances of human behavior.

--Kilroy J. Oldster

At night
when others are sleeping,
I drown myself
in poetry.

--Kamand Kojouri

Human beings are able to attend to issues longer, to think harder about them, to receive deeper impressions that last longer, if information is presented in a context of emotion—a sort of hot dressing—than if it is presented wholly without affect.

--Mette Hjort
Fitzgerald has charm. It’s a silly word, but it’s an exact word for me. I like *The Great Gatsby* and it’s sad, gay nostalgia.

--Truman Capote

One gets wise by meeting people and meeting people through their literature.

--Girdhar Joshi

If literature stays away from evil, it rapidly becomes boring.

--Georges Bataille

The stupidity of people comes from having an answer for everything. The wisdom of the novel comes from having a question for everything.

--Milan Kundera

We all act as independent learners in charge of designing our autodidactic curricula. Reading the books written by the prophetic genius of history including the literary masterpieces and philosophical treatises awakens the mind. Reading can act as a gateway drug leading to writing and expansion of a personal state of conscious awareness.

--Kilroy J. Oldster

The reading of great books has been a life-altering activity to me.

--Pat Conroy

Literature is the product of a deep-seated need for honesty.

— Anthony Marais

Literature does not occur in a vacuum. It cannot be a monologue. It has to be a conversation, and new people, new readers, need to be brought into the conversation too.

--Neil Gaiman

What I like about lit is…you get all the benefits of having a relationship, with none of the mess.

--Joshua Cohen

I always find that after reading books written by Jane Austen that I speak much more properly, at least for a while.

--Becky Watson
For Japanese people before 1868, Europeans were little more than curious beasts, strange and incomprehensible. Then, after the Meiji Restoration, everything changed. Along with European science and technology, European art flooded into Japan, all forms of it representing themselves as the universal—and most advanced—model. The same was true of novels. The Japanese, with characteristic diligence, began to read masterpieces of European literature, first in the original and then in translation. And such is the power of literature that through the act of reading, little by little the Japanese came to live the lives of Europeans as if they were their own. They began to live the ambitions of Julien Sorel, the happiness of Jane Eyre, the sufferings of young Werther, and the despair of Anna Karenina as if they were their own. They thus began living a new temporality—that which flows in the West, dictated by the Gregorian calendar, marked by major historical events in the West. And by so doing, they eventually joined what the Europeans called ‘humanity.’

--Minae Mizumura

Because we are human we have a long childhood, and one of the jobs of that childhood is to sculpt our brains. We have years—about twelve of them—to draw outlines of the shape we want our sculpted brain to take. Some of the parts must be sculpted at critical times. One cannot, after all, carve out toes unless he knows where the foot will go. We need tools to do some of the fine work. The tools are our childhood experiences. And I’m convinced that one of those experiences must be children’s books. And they must be experienced within the early years of our long childhood.

—E. L. Konigsburg

Literature destabilizes thought by breaking open language and smuggling in sound, rhythm, and image—an invasion of aesthetics. More easily than analytic writing, poetry can emancipate itself from the standard definitions of words, enabling a breakthrough to new (and perhaps wayward or even nonsensical) meaning, which can then develop after the fact—different at each new reading. Literary language is presumptuous. It dips into the unknown in order to get nearer to a truth different from that of the superficially visible. As the poet Franz Josef Czernin described it, it is as though one step after another into emptiness could become a ladder. Literary writing can take the writers themselves by surprise; it can disturb and disappoint them—for stirring up turmoil is inherent in metaphor. Thus with every flash of understanding that comes from hearing or reading a poem, the fundamental work of thinking is taken up anew.

--Marie Luise Knott

Every creative action disturbs the universe.

—E. L. Konigsburg
Since language is the only tool with which writers can reflect and shape a culture, it must be transformed into art. Language is not a limitation on the art of literature; it is a glorification. It has been the scaffolding inside which nations and philosophies have been built, and the language of literature has added the ornamental pediment by which the culture is remembered.

—E. L. Konigsburg

The love for literature is the key to knowledge.

--Lailah Gifty Akita

The stories we read in books, what’s presented to us as being interesting—they have very little to do with real life as it’s lived today. I’m not talking about straight-up escapism, your vampires, serial killers, codes hidden in paintings, and so on. I mean so-called serious literature. A boy goes hunting with his emotionally volatile father, a bereaved woman befriends an asylum seeker, a composer with a rare neurological disorder walks around New York, thinking about the nature of art. People looking back over their lives, people having revelations, people discovering meaning. Meaning, that’s the big thing. The way these books have it, you trip over a rock you’ll find some hidden meaning waiting there. Everyone’s constantly on the verge of some soul-shaking transformation. And it’s—if you’ll forgive my language—it’s bullshit. Modern people live in a state of distraction. They go from one distraction to the next, and that’s how they like it. They don’t transform, they don’t stop to smell the roses, they don’t sit around recollecting long passages of their childhood—Jesus, I can hardly remember what I was doing two days ago. My point is, people aren’t waiting to be restored to some ineffable moment. They’re not looking for meaning. That whole idea of the novel—that’s finished.

--Paul Murray

The purpose of literature is to teach you how to THINK, not how to be practical. Learning to discover the connective tissue between seemingly unrelated events is the only way we are equipped to understand patterns in the real world.

--Catherine Lowell

Great Literature is simply language charged to the utmost with meaning.

--Ezra Pound

Our existence has always and everywhere been tragic, but man has converted these numberless tragedies into works of art. I know of nothing more astonishing or more wonderful than this transformation.

--Maxim Gorky
It would be fairer to say I have traveled widely, without ever leaving my own native soil, I’ve traveled, one might say, through literature, each time I’ve opened a book the pages echoed with a noise like the dip of a paddle in midstream, and throughout my odyssey I never crossed a single border, and so never had to produce a passport, I’d just pick a destination at random, setting my prejudices firmly to one side, and be welcomed with open arms in places swarming with weird and wonderful characters.

--Alain Mabanckou

I travel to the ancient world by reading ancient books.

--Lailah Gifty Akita

The discovery of the horror tale at an early age was fortuitous for me. This sort of tale serves, in many ways, the very same purpose as fairy tales did in our childhood. It operates as a theater of the mind in which internal conflicts are played out. In these tales we can parade the most reprehensible aspects of our being: cannibalism, incest, parricide. It allows us to discuss our anxieties and even to contemplate the experience of death in absolute safety.
And again, like a fairy tale, horror can serve as a liberating or repressive social tool, and it is always an accurate reflection of the social climate of its time and the place where it gets birthed.

--Guillermo del Toro

These (Shakespeare, Milton, and Victor Hugo) not only knit and knot the logical texture of the style with all the dexterity and strength of prose; they not only fill up the pattern of the verse with infinite variety and sober wit; but they give us, besides, a rare and special pleasure, by the art, comparable to that of counterpoint, with which they follow at the same time, and now contrast, and now combine, the double pattern of the texture and the verse. Here the sounding line concludes; a little further on, the well-knit sentence; and yet a little further, and both will reach their solution on the same ringing syllable. The best that can be offered by the best writer of prose is to show us the development of the idea and the stylistic pattern proceed hand in hand, sometimes by an obvious and triumphant effort, sometimes with a great air of ease and nature. The writer of verse, by virtue of conquering another difficulty, delights us with a new series of triumphs. He follows three purposes where his rival followed only two; and the change is of precisely the same nature as that from melody to harmony.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Frustrated love has been the incentive for many great works.

—John N. Mitchell
Only after a writer lets literature shape her can she perhaps shape literature. In working-class France, when an apprentice got hurt, or when he got tired, the experienced workers said, 'It is the trade entering his body.' The art must enter the body, too.

--Annie Dillard

You want to go to a place where you never lose anything and you keep gaining many things? Go to the Land Of Literature where you gain new paths, new ideas, new lives, new goals, and new souls!

--Mehmet Murat ildan

Avoid all courses in writing. Everyone has to find her own way of writing, and the source of finding it is largely out of literature.

--A. Scott Berg

Meaning in art isn’t the same as meaning in science. The meaning of the second law of thermodynamics, so long as the words are understood, isn’t changed by who reads it, or when, or where. The meaning of *Huckleberry Finn* is.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

I began quite a while ago to resist declarations of literary greatness in the sense of singling out any one book as The Great American Novel, or even making lists of the Great American Books. Partly because the supposed categories of excellence omitting all genre writing, and the awards and reading lists and canons routinely and unquestioningly favoring work by men in the eastern half of the United States, made no sense to me. But mostly because I didn’t think and don’t think we have much idea of what’s enduringly excellent until it’s endured [...] Art is not a horse race. Literature is not the Olympics. The hell with The Great American Novel. We have all the great novels we need right now—and right now some man or woman is writing a new one we won’t know we needed till we read it.

—Ursula K. Le Guin

A book did not qualify as literature unless it had polysyllabic words and incomprehensible passages.

—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently.

--Jeanette Winterson
I believe one of the important differences between creating literature and just telling a story around the campfire is that in literature you’re recreating the experience of life, not just relaying a ‘this happened, then that happened’ kind of narrative. The specific details and layers of depth that make the world of the story—and what the character is experiencing in that world—as real as possible are elements I love as a reader and, consequently, elements I strive to use effectively as a writer.

—Lara Campbell McGehee

The growth of the imagination demands windows—windows through which we can look out at the world and windows through which we can look into ourselves. The old stories were windows in just this way.

--Katherine Paterson

To leap over the wall of self, to look through another’s eyes—this is valuable experience, which literature offers.

--X. J. Kennedy

Literature is impossible, in exactly this sense: every new generation has so much ‘catching up’ to do that the real choice that presents itself soon is the following one: one either spends ones entire life just reading all the classics, or one pretends to be ‘contemporary and hip’ and never reads any of the classics because in order to pretend to be contemporary one has to at least superficially read the works of contemporaries. Hence the dilemma: one either does not care about being fashionable, or one is fashionable and just learns to mimic some knowledge about the classics. As time develops this rift just becomes bigger, because the amount of books written grows and grows to insane proportions. Conclusion: one can only be hip in the future if one does not read at all, which is a phenomenon I am already witnessing in the media.

--Martijn Benders

The worst feature of the Common Core is its anti-humanistic, utilitarian approach to education. It mistakes what a child is and what a human being is for. That is why it has no use for poetry, and why it boils the study of literature down to the scrambling up of some marketable ‘skill’ [...] you don’t read good books to learn about what literary artists do...you learn about literary art so that you can read more good books and learn more from them. It is as if Thomas Gradgrind had gotten hold of the humanities and turned them into factory robotics.

--Anthony M. Esolen

An unhappy ending makes it literature rather than romantic fiction.

--Victoria Clayton
My own taste in novel reading is one which I am prepared in a rather especial manner, not only to declare, but to defend. My taste is for the sensational novel, the detective story, the story about death, robbery and secret societies; a taste which I share in common with the bulk at least of the male population of this world. There was a time in my own melodramatic boyhood when I became quite fastidious in this respect. I would look at the first chapter of any new novel as a final test of its merits. If there was a murdered man under the sofa in the first chapter, I read the story. If there was no murdered man under the sofa in the first chapter, I dismissed the story as tea-table twaddle, which it often really was. But we all lose a little of that fine edge of austerity and idealism which sharpened our spiritual standard in our youth. I have come to compromise with the tea-table and to be less insistent about the sofa. As long as a corpse or two turns up in the second, the third, nay even the fourth or fifth chapter, I make allowance for human weakness, and I ask no more. But a novel without any death in it is still to me a novel without any life in it. I admit that the very best of the tea-table novels are great art—for instance, Emma or Northanger Abbey. Sheer elemental genius can make a work of art out of anything. Michelangelo might make a statue out of mud, and Jane Austen could make a novel out of tea—that much more contemptible substance. But on the whole I think that a tale about one man killing another man is more likely to have something in it than a tale in which, all the characters are talking trivialities without any of that instant and silent presence of death which is one of the strong spiritual bonds of all mankind. I still prefer the novel in which one person does another person to death to the novel in which all the persons are feebly (and vainly) trying to get the others to come to life.

—G. K. Chesterton

I think of literature...as a vast country to the far borders of which I am journeying but cannot possibly reach. And I have started too late. I will never catch up.

--Alan Bennett

The night I sat down to read Dostoievski for the first time was a most important event in my life, even more important than my first love. It was the first deliberate, conscious act which had significance for me; it changed the whole face of the world. Whether it is true that the clock stopped that moment when I looked up after the first deep gulp I don’t know any more. But the world stopped dead for a moment, that I know. It was my first glimpse into the soul of a man, or shall I say simply that Dostoievski was the first man to reveal his soul to me?

—Henry Miller

There is no God but God, and his name is William Shakespeare.

--Harold Bloom
Half of all the great art and literature in existence went unrecognized during the lifetimes of its creators.

--Alastair Reynolds

The curious fact is that biology tells us nothing about desire. And, when you think about it, culture—novels, movies, opera, and quite a lot of painting—is about desire, how we manage desire, how we suffer from it, and how it brings us joy when we get things right. A story without desire—and that means without the insistence of desire—will be empty, dry, and more or less aimless. That is one reason we read novels, to see how people fall into awkward moral situations and then try to extricate themselves. This is why there is so much anguish in the world: frustrated desire is every bit as miserable as poverty, because desire is no respecter of one’s position in life: everyone goes through it.

--Peter Watson

This was the curse of the voracious reader, she realized. Real life never quite measured up to the heightened and precise contours of her literary worlds. A real war was never as true as a fictive one.

--Reif Larsen

What is fantasy? On one level, of course, it is a game: a pure pretense with no ulterior motive whatever. It is one child saying to another child, ‘Let’s be dragons,’ and then they’re dragons for an hour or two. It is escapism of the most admirable kind—the game played for the game’s sake. On another level, it is still a game, but a game played for very high stakes. Seen thus, as art, not spontaneous play, its affinity is not with daydream, but with dream. It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not antirational but pararational; not realistic, but surrealist, superrealistic, a heightening of reality. In Freud’s terminology, it employs primary, not secondary process thinking. It employs archetypes, which, Jung warned us, are dangerous things. Dragons are more dangerous, and a good deal commoner, than bears. Fantasy is nearer to poetry, to mysticism, and to insanity than naturalistic fiction is. It is a real wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe. And their guides, the writers of fantasy, should take their responsibilities seriously.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

The great writings interact with one another. They cannot be read in isolation.

--Richard J. Foster
Science may explain how humans came into being, but it has no answer to the slippery question of how humans should live. Only literature makes it possible to pose such questions in the first place. And if there is no answer, only literature can point to the impossibility of ever finding one.

--Minae Mizumura

He did recall that the summer after graduating from college before he joined the state police he had read Shakespeare. It was the pure language that stupefied him. He would be in a diner reading *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and his acquaintances were confident he was studying for some test. The test turned out to be the nature of his mind. Shakespeare seemed even truer than history. Literature was against the abyss while history wallowed in it.

--Jim Harrison

With her it’s as if a text was written so that we can identify the characters, the narrator, the setting, the plot, the time of the story, and so on. I don’t think it has ever occurred to her that a text is written above all to be read and to arouse emotions in the reader.

--Muriel Barbery

It seems to me inevitable that any person who gives thoughtful and imaginative attention to literature must be awakened in his sensibilities, enlarged in his sympathies, sharpened in his critical faculties.

--Denham Sutcliffe

Good art is always dangerous, always open-ended. Once you put it out in the world you lose control of it; people will fit it into their minds in all sorts of different ways.

--Greil Marcus

Anyone who’s read all of Proust plus *The Man Without Qualities* is bound to be missing out on a few other titles.

--Lorrie Moore

The popular culture gives us books that offer entertainment but no ideas. High culture gives us books that offer ideas but no entertainment. The best books manage to do both.

--Gene Edward Veith Jr.

The danger in reviewing and teaching literature for a living (is) you can develop a kind of knee-jerk superiority to the material you’re ‘decoding’

--Maureen Corrigan

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Through books I discovered everything to be loved, explored, visited, communed with. I was enriched and given all the blueprints to a marvelous life, I was consoled in adversity, I was prepared for both joys and sorrows, I acquired one of the most precious sources of strength of all: an understanding of human beings, insight into their motivations.

--Anaïs Nin

For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm. There are not many such books. All the rest is either topical trash or what some call the Literature of Ideas, which very often is topical trash coming in huge blocks of plaster that are carefully transmitted from age to age until somebody comes along with a hammer and takes a good crack at Balzac, at Gorki, at Mann.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Hundreds of thousands of people live in my library. Some are real, others are fictional. The real ones are the so-called imaginary characters in works of literature, the fictional ones are their authors. We know everything about the former, or at least as much as we are meant to know, everything that is written about a given character in a novel, a story or a poem in which she or he figures...The rest doesn’t matter. Nothing is hidden from us. For us, a novel’s characters are real.

--Jacques Bonnet

It’s a powerful moment, when you discover a vocabulary exists for something you’d thought incommunicably unique. Personally, I felt it reading Joseph Conrad’s ‘Lord Jim.’ I have friends who’ve found themselves described in everything from science fiction to detective novels. This self-recognition through others is not simply a by-product of art—it’s the whole point.

--Phil Klay

A classic is a book that has never finished what it wants to say.

--Italo Calvino

What makes Geoffrey Chaucer such compelling reading is his creation of a riveting conversation between the ideal and the everyday.

--John Mark Reynolds

All the great novels are about obsession and people who are obsessed.

--Marty Rubin
In this course I have tried to reveal the mechanism of those wonderful toys—literary masterpieces. I have tried to make of you good readers who read books not for the infantile purpose of identifying oneself with the characters, and not for the adolescent purpose of learning to live, and not for the academic purpose of indulging in generalizations. I have tried to teach you to read books for the sake of their form, their visions, their art. I have tried to teach you to feel a shiver of artistic satisfaction, to share not the emotions of the people in the book but the emotions of its author—the joys and difficulties of creation. We did not talk around books, about books; we went to the center of this or that masterpiece, to the live heart of the matter.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination, and of the heart.

--Salman Rushdie

The thing about Literature is, well, basically it encapsulates all the disciplines—it’s history, philosophy, politics, sexual politics, sociology, psychology, linguistics, science. Literature is mankind’s organized response to the world around him, or her.

--David Nicholls


--Gilbert Highet

Well-wrought poems and works of imaginative literature can do for us what stone-cold prose can never do. They can help us grasp the full dimension of ways of life other than our own.

--James W. Sire

If literature truly possesses a mysterious power, I think perhaps it is precisely this: that one can read a book by a writer of a different time, a different country, a different race, a different language, and a different culture and there encounter a sensation that is one’s very own.

--Yu Hua
On THE AMBER SPYGLASS:
If this plotline was a motorist, it would have been arrested for driving while intoxicated, if it had not perished in the horrible drunk accident where it went headlong over the cliff of the author’s preachy message, tumbled down the rocky hillside, crashed, and burned.

--John C. Wright

A person who knows nothing about literature may be an ignoramus, but many people don’t mind being that.

--Northrop Frye

If I could change the attitude of young men toward literature, I would want them to read not just for escape, but because literature can be more truthful about things like sex, commitment, and aging. It can be more truthful about the stuff that our parents lied to us (and themselves) about, and the stuff that everyone has to lie about. It can all be dealt with truthfully in fiction and poetry.

--Lorin Stein

The principle of art is to pause, not bypass. The principles of true art is not to portray, but to evoke. This requires a moment of pause—a contract with yourself through the object you look at or the page you read. In that moment of pause, I think life expands. And really the purpose of art—for me, of fiction—is to alert, to indicate to stop, to say: Make certain that when you rush through you will not miss the moment which you might have had, or might still have. That is the moment of finding something which you have not known about yourself, or your environment, about others and about life.

--Jerzy Kosiński

People don’t read to enlighten themselves or seek to gain some valuable insight into their own psychology. People read to escape.

--Dermot Davis

One of the reasons that I wanted to study literature was because it exposed everything. Writers looked for secrets that had never been mined. Every writer has to invent their own magical language, in order to describe the indescribable. They might seem to be writing in French, English, or Spanish, but really they were writing in the language of butterflies, crows, and hanged men.

—Heather O’Neill
Literature is a wonderful thing....It is a profound thing. It strengthens people’s hearts and instructs them,... Literature is a picture, or rather in a certain sense both a picture and a mirror; it is an expression of emotion, a subtle form of criticism, a didactic lesson and a document.

--Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Critics and academics have been trying for forty years to bury the greatest work of imaginative fiction in English. They ignore it, they condescend to it, they stand in large groups with their backs to it—because they’re afraid of it. They’re afraid of dragons. They have Smaugophobia. ‘Oh those awful Orcs,’ they bleat, flocking after Edmund Wilson. They know if they acknowledge Tolkien, they’ll have to admit that fantasy can be literature, and that therefore they’ll have to redefine what literature is. And they’re too damned lazy to do it.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

In all the history of literature, Robert G. Ingersoll has never been excelled—except by only one man, and that man was—William Shakespeare. And yet there are times when Ingersoll even surpassed the immortal Bard. Yes, there are times when Ingersoll excelled even Shakespeare, in expressing human emotions, and in the use of language to express a thought, or to paint a picture. I say this fully conscious of my own admiration for that ‘intellectual ocean, whose waves touched all the shores of thought.’

Ingersoll was perfection himself. Every word was properly used. Every sentence was perfectly formed. Every noun, every verb and every object was in its proper place. Every punctuation mark, every comma, every semicolon, and every period was expertly placed to separate and balance each sentence.

To read Ingersoll, it seems that every idea came properly clothed from his brain. Something rare indeed in the history of man’s use of language in the expression of his thoughts. Every thought came from his brain with all the beauty and perfection of the full blown rose, with the velvety petals delicately touching each other.

Thoughts of diamonds and pearls, rubies and sapphires rolled off his tongue as if from an inexhaustible mine of precious stones.

Just as the cut of the diamond reveals the splendor of its brilliance, so the words and construction of the sentences gave a charm and beauty and eloquence to Ingersoll’s thoughts.
Ingersoll had everything: The song of the skylark; the tenderness of the dove; the hiss of the snake; the bite of the tiger; the strength of the lion; and perhaps more significant was the fact that he used each of these qualities and attributes, in their proper place, and at their proper time. He knew when to embrace with the tenderness of affection, and to resist and denounce wickedness and tyranny with that power of denunciation which he, and he alone, knew how to express.

--Joseph Lewis

Literature is the aesthetic exploitation of language.

--Anthony Burgess

Dead parents are gruesome, yes, but anyone who’s anyone in children’s literature has either been orphaned or abandoned; well-adjusted kids from stable two-parent homes don’t go on hero quests.

--Lynn Messina

Poetry, Shakespeare and opera, are like mumps and should be caught when young. In the unhappy event that there is a postponement to mature years, the results may be devastating.

--Dimitris Mita

I’ve been as bad an influence on American literature as anyone I can think of.

--Dashiell Hammett

The most common mistake students of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way that it says it. To read like this is to set aside the ‘literariness’ of the work—the fact that it is a poem or play or novel, rather than an account of the incidence of soil erosion in Nebraska.

--Terry Eagleton

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world, and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are.

--Alasdair MacIntyre

Literature has been called a handbook for the art of being human.

--Camron Wright
Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person—flawed, complex, striving—you've reached beyond stereotype.

--Hazel Rochman

Which of us has read every line of the Iliad, or the Aeneid, or The Divine Comedy, or Paradise Lost? Only men of epic stomach can digest these epic tales.

--Will Durant

Literature enables us to see our world and ourselves more clearly, to understand our lives more fully.

—Kylene Beers & Robert E. Probst

Literature is unique. To understand literature, you read it with your head, but you interpret it with your heart. The two are forced to work together and, quite frankly, they often don't get along.

--Camron Wright

Real literature is something much better than a harmless instrument for getting through idle hours. The purpose of great literature is to help us to develop into full human beings.

--Russell Kirk

Literary art’s sudden, startling truth and beauty make us feel, in the most solitary part of us, that we are not alone, and that there are meanings that cannot be bought, sold or traded, that do not decay and die. This socially and economically worthless experience is called transcendence, and you cannot assign a paper, or a grade, or an academic rank, on that. Literature is too sacred to be taught. It needs only to be read.

--Lee Siegel

Literature is a cake with many toys baked inside—and even if you find them all, if you don’t enjoy the path that leads you to them, it will be a hollow accomplishment. There was a playwright named Heller, American, I believe, who summed it up this way. He said, ‘They knew everything about literature except how to enjoy it.’

--Camron Wright
Marx was troubled by the question of why ancient Greek art retained an ‘eternal charm’, even though the social conditions which produced it had long passed; but how do we know that it will remain ‘eternally’ charming, since history has not yet ended? Let us imagine that by dint of some deft archaeological research we discovered a great deal more about what ancient Greek tragedy actually meant to its original audiences, recognized that these concerns were utterly remote from our own, and began to read the plays again in the light of this deepened knowledge. One result might be that we stopped enjoying them. We might come to see that we had enjoyed them previously because we were unwittingly reading them in the light of our own preoccupations; once this became less possible, the drama might cease to speak at all significantly to us.

The fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns—indeed that in one sense of ‘our own concerns’ we are incapable of doing anything else—might be one reason why certain works of literature seem to retain their value across the centuries. It may be, of course, that we still share many preoccupations with the work itself; but it may also be that people have not actually been valuing the ‘same’ work at all, even though they may think they have. ‘Our’ Homer is not identical with the Homer of the Middle Ages, nor ‘our’ Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries; it is rather that different historical periods have constructed a ‘different’ Homer and Shakespeare for their own purposes, and found in these texts elements to value or devalue, though not necessarily the same ones. All literary works, in other words, are ‘rewritten’, if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a ‘re-writing’. No work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new groups of people without being changed, perhaps almost unrecognizably, in the process; and this is one reason why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair.

--Terry Eagleton

In reality there is no kind of evidence or argument by which one can show that Shakespeare, or any other writer, is ‘good’. Nor is there any way of definitely proving that—for instance—Warwick Deeping is ‘bad’. Ultimately there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is itself an index to majority opinion.

--George Orwell

‘Read the great books, gentlemen,’ Mr. Monte said one day. ‘Just the great ones. Ignore the others. There’s not enough time.’

--Pat Conroy

I don’t fear death—I fear dying before I’ve read Dickens end to end.

--Amy Smith
*Sense and Sensibility*, for instance, came out in three separate volumes, as did *Pride and Prejudice* (so the next time you read one of the ubiquitous time-travel Austen adaptations and somebody picks up a single-volume first edition, you can hit your nerd buzzer and say ‘wrong!’).

--Amy Smith

We seek to understand the universe because it makes our lives better and more rich. Similarly, we tell stories (and think about why and how to tell stories) because it makes human existence richer. Made-up stories matter. They bring us pleasure and solace and nurture empathy by letting us see the world through others’ eyes. They also help us to feel unalone, to understand that our grief and joy is shared not just by those around us but by all those who came before us and all those still yet to come.

--John Green

The type of mind that can understand good fiction is not necessarily the educated mind, but it is at all times the kind of mind that is willing to have its sense of mystery deepened by contact with reality, and its sense of reality deepened by contact with mystery.

—Flannery O’Connor

The pursuit of truth, not of facts, is the business of fiction.

--Oakley Hal

It is a great thing to start life with a small number of really good books which are your very own. You may not appreciate them at first. You may pine for your novel of crude and unadulterated adventure. You may, and will, give it the preference when you can. But the dull days come, and the rainy days come, and always you are driven to fill up the chinks of your reading with the worthy books which wait so patiently for your notice. And then suddenly, on a day which marks an epoch in your life, you understand the difference. You see, like a flash, how the one stands for nothing, and the other for literature. From that day onwards you may return to your crudities, but at least you do so with some standard of comparison in your mind. You can never be the same as you were before. Then gradually the good thing becomes more dear to you; it builds itself up with your growing mind; it becomes a part of your better self, and so, at last, you can look, as I do now, at the old covers and love them for all that they have meant in the past.

--Arthur Conan Doyle

Much literary fiction is read by young men and women in their 20s, as substitutes for experience.

--Neil Cross

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Nothing about a book is so unmistakable and so irreplaceable as the stamp of the
cultured mind. I don’t care what the story is about or what may be the momentary
craze for books that appear to have been hammered out by the village blacksmith in
a state of intoxication; the minute you get the easy touch of the real craftsman with
centuries of civilization behind him, you get literature.

--Dorothy L. Sayers

A great book should leave you with many experiences, and slightly exhausted. You
should live several lives while reading it.

—William Styron

Do you know why teachers use me? Because I speak in tongues. I write metaphors. Every one of my stories is a metaphor you can remember. The great religions are all
metaphor. We appreciate things like Daniel and the lion’s den, and the Tower of
Babel. People remember these metaphors because they are so vivid you can’t get
free of them and that’s what kids like in school. They read about rocket ships and
encounters in space, tales of dinosaurs. All my life I’ve been running through the
fields and picking up bright objects. I turn one over and say, Yeah, there’s a story.
And that’s what kids like. Today, my stories are in a thousand anthologies. And I’m
in good company. The other writers are quite often dead people who wrote in
metaphors: Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Washington Irving, Nathaniel
Hawthorne. All these people wrote for children. They may have pretended not to,
but they did.

--Ray Bradbury

Literature is the extant body of written art. All novels belong to it.
The value judgement concealed in distinguishing one novel as literature and
another as genre vanishes with the distinction.
Every readable novel can give true pleasure. Every novel read by choice is read
because it gives true pleasure.
Literature consists of many genres, including mystery, science fiction, fantasy,
naturalism, realism, magical realism, graphic, erotic, experimental, psychological,
social, political, historical, bildungsroman, romance, western, army life, young
adult, thriller, etc., etc.... and the proliferating cross-species and subgenres such as
erotic Regency, noir police procedural, or historical thriller with zombies.
Some of these categories are descriptive, some are maintained largely as marketing
devices. Some are old, some new, some ephemeral.
Genres exist, forms and types and kinds of fiction exist and need to be understood:
but no genre is inherently, categorically superior or inferior.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

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The passion to teach, to share deeply experienced ‘lessons from life,’ is embedded in all literature.

--Vera B. Williams

For those of us who take literature very seriously, picking up a work of fiction is the start of an adventure comparable in anticipatory excitement to what I imagine is felt by an athlete warming up for a competition, a mountain climber preparing for the ascent: it is the beginning of a process whose outcome is unknown, one that promises the thrill and elation of success but may as easily end in bitter disappointment. Committed readers realize at a certain point that literature is where we have learned a good part of the little we know about living.

--Edith Grossman

I look around and see that many—not all, but many—problems we’ve got could be solved if our culture simply fostered the habit of reading. Reading books of science, philosophy, history. Reading literature of quality, the sort that touches us because of a more profound reason, such as, for instance, because it’s got something to say beyond all the futilities and trifles of life, even while depicting the ordinary in life, at the same time that it says it with style, in a unique, admirable manner. An original one.

We are not a county of readers, notwithstanding. We are the country of football turned into a cult, of guile being ranked high as a cardinal virtue, of Carnival made for exportation. A country where there are more letters in political party acronyms than in all many of our politicians have written in a lifetime. A country where ethics has become a joke theme. Where democracy is but a ridiculous puppet theatre.

Yes, I look around and see that many problems could be solved if we had the habit of reading. But I am not even sure whether there is someone reading these words.

--Camilo Gomes Jr.

The history of literature is the history of the human mind.

—William Hickling Prescott

Literature is at once the cause and the effect of social progress. It deepens our natural sensibilities, and strengthens by exercise our intellectual capacities. It stores up the accumulated experience of the race, connecting Past and Present into a conscious unity; and with this store it feeds successive generations, to be fed in turn by them.

—George Henry Lewes
Fiction allows us to slide into these other heads, these other places, and look out through other eyes. And then in the tale we stop before we die, or we die vicariously and unharmed, and in the world beyond the tale we turn the page or close the book, and we resume our lives.

—Neil Gaiman

A piece of literature can be many things but first of all it must capture its audience. You need to seduce people, entice them into a world of beauty and horror, light and shadow, of passion, of romance, of mystery. That’s the magic of it. Beyond that, of course, you can open a dialogue about the ideas which interest you, but first of all you absolutely must get inside people’s minds.

—Carlos Ruiz Zafon

People who love literature have at least part of their minds immune from indoctrination. If you read, you can learn to think for yourself.

—Doris Lessing

Everybody is wearing a mask. It’s in literature that true life can be found. It’s under the mask of fiction that you can tell the truth.

—Gao Xingjian

Literature is the voice of the age and the state; the character, energy, and resources of the country are reflected and imaged forth in the conceptions of its great minds; they are organs of the time; they speak not their own language, they scarce think their own thoughts; but under an impulse like the prophetic enthusiasm of old, they must feel and utter the sentiments which society inspires.

—Edward Everett

Originality in literature is only a new coat of paint on an old house.

—Austin O’Malley

I realized the amazing power of literature and of the human imagination generally: to make the dead live and to stop the living from dying.

—Ivan Klima

True literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy functionaries, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and skeptics.

—Yevgeny Zamyatin

Literature is the echo of life.

—Alexandre Vinet
All literature is the expression of feeling, of passion, of emotion, caused by a sensation of the interestingness of life.... Even Johnson’s Dictionary is packed with emotion.

—Arnold Bennett

Essays are vegetables in the garden of literature, fairy tales the orchard fruit, poetry—the flowers.

—Terri Guillemets

The test of real literature is that it will bear repetition. We read over the same pages again and again, and always with fresh delight.

—Samual McChord Crothers

A good essay must have this permanent quality about it, it must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out.

—Virginia Woolf

In fiction, as in real life, listen carefully for voices: both the author’s and the characters’. The authorial voice is the voice we hear when we’re reading the author’s prose, whether it’s exposition, narration, or description. Think of the difference between a Hemingway narrative and a Faulkner one: Hemingway’s prose is lean and stripped down, whereas Faulkner’s is intricately and richly embellished. Characters also clearly have distinctive voices that establish personality, attitudes, and disposition. Think of Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield, Moll Flanders. A character’s voice can be apparent in both thought and speech. And speech in fiction, is in real life, clues us in to a character’s take himself, others, and the world at large.

—Jack Smith

The 63 lyrics in that book [Shropshire Lad] first published in 1896, have a purity of speech and intensity of feeling that lent the collection the aura of a classic from the moment of its appearance. ‘You may read it in half an hour,’ said one early reviewer of the book, ‘but there are things in it you will scarcely forget in a lifetime.’ What Houseman writes about, almost without exception, is sorrow: lost love, nostalgia,
mutability, grief, and death. He seems to understand everything about the pain of life, and the beauty of that pain—the way suffering itself can become a source of bittersweet pleasure. He’s a poet who can’t listen to a blackbird singing without hearing a summons to the grave:

Lie down, lie down, young yeoman;
What use to rise and rise?
Rise man a thousand mornings
Yet down at last he lies,
And then the man is wise.

—Adam Kirsch

THE 31 BEST BOOKS TO READ IN HIGH SCHOOL
A huge number of books exist out there, ready and waiting for you to read them. Whether you prefer manga or ancient, epic poems, reading is great for all sorts of reasons. What follows is a list of highly beneficial books to read in high school (or after!). These are remarkable books—books that made history, books that challenge societal perceptions of the world, and books that are quite simply interesting and moving.

1984 (George Orwell)
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Mark Twain)
The Awakening (Kate Chopin)
The Bell Jar (Sylvia Plath)
Black Rain (Masuji Ibuse)
Bless Me, Ultima (Rudolfo Anaya)
Brave New World (Aldous Huxley)
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (Dee Brown)
The Catcher in the Rye (J. D. Salinger)
The Crucible (Arthur Miller)
The Diary of a Young Girl (Anne Frank)
Fahrenheit 451 (Ray Bradbury)
Flowers for Algernon (Daniel Keyes)
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf (Ntozake Shange)
Frankenstein (Mary Shelley)
The Grapes of Wrath (John Steinbeck)
Great Expectations (Charles Dickens)
The Great Gatsby (F. Scott Fitzgerald)
The Joy Luck Club (Amy Tan)
Lord of the Flies (William Golding)
The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit (J. R. R. Tolkien)
The Odyssey (Homer)
Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Ken Kesey)
Pride and Prejudice (Jane Austen)
Romeo and Juliet or Hamlet (William Shakespeare)
Slaughterhouse-Five (Kurt Vonnegut)
Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston)
Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe)
To Kill A Mockingbird (Harper Lee)
The Ugly American (Eugene Burdick and William Lederer)

Conclusion
If you can read through these 30-odd books before you graduate high school, you’ll be in a good shape, from a literary perspective.
Even if you can’t read all of them, picking a few would not be a bad place to start. You might start with those that simply sound the most interesting to you, or you could look for themes in the books that relate to what you’re learning in school.
If you’re studying McCarthyism, for instance, maybe try The Crucible; if you’re studying the Holocaust, maybe try The Diary of a Young Girl.
These stories are immensely powerful. Some are newer, having instantly won their place in the pantheon of classics, while others have proven themselves by withstanding the test of time.
Readers will find that they resonate with some books more than others, and that’s fine; the point is that all of these books have important messages to communicate, and I encourage readers to be open to finding out what those messages are.

What makes a classic book? My eight-year-old asked this very question after spending several days with her nose buried in Charlotte’s Web. ‘Errr—I think it’s a very good book liked by lots people that stands the test of time,’ I replied. ‘If people are still reading the book 50 years after it was published then it’s probably on its way to being a classic.’
Here’s the catch. For me, classic books need to be readable because I’m not studying literature at university these days. There are many important books published decades or even centuries ago that have great significance but I’m not going to recommend them for your reading enjoyment. The prime example is Moby Dick, which I have read and I will never recommend. Life’s too short and that novel is too hard to read.

—Richard Davies
Unfortunately, some teachers still presume literature by Afro-Americans to be merely a weed which sprouted overnight in their carefully cultured garden of classics. Or, even worse, they discount the flowerings of that literature as hallucinations visible only to persons hypnotized by protest, guilt, and sentimentality….Let it suffice to point out that literature by Afro-Americans is not new and... the study and the teaching of that literature are not new.

—Darwin T. Turner

Although the study of Afro-American literature is not as old as the material itself, it is not significantly younger than the formal study of American literature, which has earned academic respectability in this country only within the past eighty years. Two years before the end of the Civil War, William Wells Brown, a former slave, described the achievements of early Afro-American writers in The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements, and by 1915, the words of black writers were being read, memorized, recited, studied, and revered by black students in the schools into which blacks were segregated. During the 1920s four anthologies of Afro-American poetry, one of drama, and two general collections provided readers with examples of those kinds of works which the editors, in critical introductions, distinguished from earlier Afro-American efforts described by Benjamin Brawley in The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States. The spate of anthologies during the Twenties was followed by an almost equally heavy flood of criticism during the Thirties. Vernon Loggins’ The Negro Author (1931) was merely the first book-length critical history in a decade which also witnessed the publication of Sterling Brown’s monumental Negro Poetry and Drama (1937) and the Negro in American Fiction (1937), Brawley’s The Negro Genius (1937), and the first book-length critical biography of a black American author, Brawley’s Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet of His People (1936). In short, long before some of today’s teachers were born, black American literature had been read, taught, and, too often, forgotten.

—Darwin T. Turner

The seemingly insurmountable handicaps of enslavement in a culturally different country which legally and illegally prevented them from learning the culture of the controlling society while it ridiculed and attempted to erase the language and the culture of the African societies from which they had been stolen, Afro-Americans, prior to 1865, edited more than one hundred newspapers, published several volumes of poetry, penned many autobiographies and pamphlets, produced plays, and even wrote novels. Furthermore, their folk tales and songs had enriched America by providing what some scholars have described as the only indigenous American song and story.

—Darwin T. Turner
A knowledgeable teacher...has a variety of reasons for using particular works. He wishes a student to learn that literature can be enjoyed. He wishes a student to learn that literature is one of the media through which human beings have sought to create beauty. He wishes a student to learn that the various genres of literature are modes through which human beings have sought to express their ideas about life. He wishes a student to observe how language is used to communicate ideas. Whatever his literary or aesthetic purpose may be, a knowledgeable teacher of literature can find works by Afro-American writers to help them achieve his purpose. This should be the motivation behind the teaching of Afro-American literature: the use of a neglected subject matter—in other words, the increase in the material which a teacher may use to achieve his purposes.

— Darwin T. Turner

A valuable early work is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), the autobiography of a man who, during the nineteenth century, was a major fighter for rights for black people. Written to silence those skeptics who doubted that the articulate orator had actually been a slave, *Narrative* remains surprisingly readable and exciting more than a century later. Not as erudite and philosophical as Douglass’ later autobiographies, it presents more vividly the picture of young Fred—a bold, handsome, brave, intelligent youth, who swore that no white man would ever whip him again and kept his promise.

—Darwin T. Turner

The best known black intellectual of the generation, W. E. B. Dubois, earned a Ph.D. in history from Harvard. Although Dubois wrote fiction and poetry, his most valuable work for younger readers is the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a collection of essays which perceptively present the spirit and the aspirations of black people. A second collection of writings, *Darkwater* (1920), is both interesting and significant; many readers will find it easier than Dubois’ earlier volume.

—Darwin T. Turner

*Native Son* (1940), is the story of Bigger Thomas, a teen-aged black youth who accidentally kills his employer’s white daughter. Violent, exciting, perhaps too raw to be used below the twelfth year of high school, *Native Son* shocked American readers to awareness of the frustrations and emotions of black ghetto-dwellers more than any earlier novel had succeeded in doing. Such revelations continued in *Black Boy* (1945), the autobiographical description of Wright’s early life, a work which many teachers will find more useful than *Native Son* for a classroom unit. Wright did more than shock white readers. He also alerted critics to the literary capability of black Americans and set standards which black writers were forced to match.

—Darwin T. Turner
One of the most outstanding books by a modern African writer, *Things Fall Apart* is very revealing for most American readers. Not only does it demonstrate how cultured and civilized the Ibo of Africa were before the white man came into their land at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it also shows how destructive the arrival of Western culture was. Thus, it effectively destroys the myth that Africans were better off for being ‘civilized’ by the whites. While the book does not deal directly with the black man in America, it is very helpful in showing what African culture was like before blacks were brought to America. This book can be used successfully in grades 8-12.

*Things Fall Apart* is the story of a powerful African man who is determined to achieve wealth and power in the community, but who loses everything when white men restructure African society.

—Barbara Dodds  
Stanford

High school juniors and seniors are very interested in the artistic qualities of literature when they are given the opportunity of studying works appropriate to their level with a teacher who appreciates their imaginative attempts to develop their own interpretations. Adolescents, far more than most adults, appreciate the beauty of rhythm in words and the mysterious excitement of using and discovering symbols.

Unfortunately, too many teachers try to teach a graduate course in the American novel, spending weeks analyzing in depth *Invisible Man* or *Moby Dick*, when half of their class may be only beginning to venture into the adult section of the library. Students who are delighted to discover the clever ways that Langston Hughes puts words together will sit in rebellious boredom while the teacher tries to explain the allusions in Tolson’s ‘Harlem Gallery.’ High school students like, and need, to study what they can understand and interpret themselves with the guidance of the teacher. Literature that they cannot appreciate on their own and analyze themselves with the assistance of their teacher should be saved for college. A student who is faced with too difficult material too early may feel that literary analysis is a bunch of tricks pulled on him by the teacher, instead of a way of understanding books and people better. Unless this attitude is changed by a later teacher, he may never properly appreciate the value of literary study and may become an anti-intellectual who regards any academic work with suspicion.

—Barbara Dodds  
Stanford

Works of literature seek an impact on the mind and the life of the reader.

—John Pfordresher
In two...studies researchers asked middle school teachers... to state their purposes for using literature in their classrooms. Their responses clustered in the following ways: (a) to promote students’ understandings of themselves, (b) to develop students’ social awareness, (c) to expand students’ problem-solving abilities, (d) to help youngsters acquire reading skills (to become more effective readers), and (e) to transmit to students a knowledge of classical works of literature.

—Nancy Farnan

Middle school English/language arts teachers were asked... about their purposes for bringing literature into the curriculum. The following quotations represent their responses:

➢ ‘To better understand relationships.’
➢ ‘Literature is a way to get at universal values, and allow kids to view themselves, to think about human interaction.’
➢ ‘So kids can better understand their environments and cultures.’
➢ ‘To understand life.’
➢ ‘To relate literature and history, to tie the content areas together.’

—Nancy Farnan

The power of literature rests in the fact that it connects readers to the human condition. It’s language piques readers’ imaginations in ways that allow them to reflect on past experiences and to speculate on new situations. So while an objective analysis of the ideas and elements in a text may contribute to a broader understanding of it, the nature of literature itself is foreign to a totally subjective experience.

—Judith A. Langer

Fortunately, Americans continued to import books from England long after they refused to buy its tea. British writers and illustrators were well-known in the U.S. Beatrix Potter’s The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1901); Rudyard Kipling’s Just So Stories (1902); Kenneth Grahame’s Wind in the Willows (1904) were favorites and continue to be so. Also published during those years and still popular were The Secret Garden (1910) by Frances Hodges Burnett, Peter Pan (1904) by J. M. Barrie, and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. These authors abandoned the sticky sentimentality and the heavy didacticism of earlier children’s books. The stories were exciting; the adventures were daring. They entertained and gave enjoyment to children.

—Alice K. Swinger
Literature is the imaginative use of language. The definition is broad and inclusive. Although simple, it speaks to the heart of what literature is, a writer’s adroit use of language to create images and ideas around which readers construct meaning.

—Bernice E. Cullinan

Ways to use children’s literature in the classroom are as varied as the books, teachers, and children in it. Reading aloud is still the best-known and probably the best-liked method of sharing books. Jenny, a sixth-grader recently reported, ‘The best part of school is when Mrs. Tussy closes the door and reads to us. Sometimes she reads until 10 o’clock!’ The amount of time spent on reading aloud changes with grade level, with more time spent in kindergarten and primary grades than in middle grades. The choices of reading material change as students grow in age and experience, but the purposes remain the same: students and teachers share an intellectual or emotional happening; they experience together a special use of language; they add to their common background of knowledge.

—Alice K. Swinger

The books our children read cannot be exclusively American if we expect them to develop an appreciation of other world cultures. The writer of modern fairy tales was a Dane, Hans Christian Andersen. The folktales most Americans know best were told by the Brothers Grimm of Germany. Leprechauns came from Ireland, the Three Billy Goats Gruff from Norway, Anansi from Africa, and the Baba Yaga from Russia. Heidi, Pippi Longstocking, and Pinocchio are all immigrants with permanent visas. Children’s literature in translation introduces children to those universal values and concerns that good literature embraces in all cultures.

—Alice K. Swinger

The middle school years are often fraught with crises: physically, students see the migration of body parts from children’s proportions to adult sizes; emotionally, they experience the full panoply of human response from anger to delight in heightened decibels; and socially, they believe that there is too much time or not enough time to develop the important relationships of life. In the midst of their busy lives while searching for the right mix of physical, emotional and social stability, young adolescents can sometimes find in good literature a calm space necessary for balance.

—Donna Bessant

Today’s young adult literature is an effective bridge to the classics—and a powerful stimulant to reading. Often misunderstood as being for weaker readers, the best of young adult fiction is highly challenging and exceptionally moral. These novels are always putting a kid in a difficult ethical situation. Adolescents identify with that young person as he or she finds the way to a good decision.

—Leila Christenbury

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Quality in writing is never easy to define, but it has to do with originality and importance of ideas, imaginative use of language, and beauty of literary and artistic style that enables a work to remain fresh, interesting, and meaningful for years and years. These books [children’s trade books] have permanent value. This is not to say that books of good-but-not-great quality have no value... These works have won no literary prizes but many younger readers enjoy them; and because books such as these encourage newly independent readers to read more, they have worth...[However] the best children’s books offer readers enjoyment as well as memorable characters and situations and valuable insights into the human condition.

—Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson

‘Popular choice’ books are often formulaic writings, seem easier to read and understand, and provide exciting stories or well-talked about subjects. The books are useful in a number of ways, including keeping readers reading and in bringing information to readers not easily found elsewhere. Including popular choice books along with the quality works of literature supports the philosophy that ‘the more you read, the better you read.’

—Donna Bessant

Literature is often taught as one of the ornaments of life, necessary for the best life, but a luxury for the ordinary one.

—Northrop Frye

The phantasmagoria of current events is not real society, but only the transient appearance of real society. Real society, the total body of what mankind has done and can do, is revealed to us only by the arts and sciences; nothing but the imagination can apprehend that reality as a whole, and nothing but literature, in a culture as verbal as ours, can train the imagination to fight for the sanity and the dignity of mankind.

—Northrop Frye

Nothing that we can teach a student is an acceptable substitute for the faith that a higher kind of contact with literature is possible.

—Northrop Frye
Why is it? In school we learn one of the most amazing and difficult feats man has ever accomplished—how to read—and at the same time we learn to hate to read the things worth reading most!

It’s happened to us all—with assignment reading! It happened to me. The teacher assigned *Moby Dick*. I didn’t want to read it. So I fought it. I disliked it. I thought I won.

But I lost. My struggles to keep at arms length from *Moby Dick* cost me all the good things that can come from learning to come to terms with those special few books we call the ‘classics.’

—Steve Allen

Classics are the diary of man.

—Unknown

Often fairly realistic, lots of young adult novels don’t have a happy ending. The language mirrors adolescent use. The community may see it as coarse. Principals may worry about that. But my argument to principals, is that if they’re in the business of teaching, they may want to teach the community about the importance of this literature: that it is useful for kids to read books about kids like themselves, with whose problems they can identify.

—Ted Hipple

Among the social and psychological benefits for teenagers reading young adult novels, say experts, is the experience of finding answers to questions about personal identity and one’s place in the scheme of things. As adolescents identify with interesting fictional characters, they use books as a vehicle for asking important questions.

For instance, a student will read *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen and might be disturbed by questions about how his parents are getting along. In class, that student might raise questions about Brian, the novel’s protagonist, using Brian as a façade to ask questions about his own situation.

—Pamela Sissi Carroll

When you study and read about an individual’s thoughts and feelings and really come to understand a character’s viewpoints, you feel good because it makes you value your own thoughts and feelings. This only happens in literature. Other areas of study, such as math or science, are not concerned with individuals. Only in literature do you get to have such a close relationship with people in a nontthreatening way.

—Alleen Pace Nilsen
Young adult novels are also important because they specifically focus on the developmental tasks of adolescents in ways that nothing else does. Adolescence is so fleeting that it is easy to neglect it in favor of preparing only for the future—as if life doesn’t matter when you’re 16 years old. But let’s face it, it does. Educators do students a disservice if they’re always planning everything based on what they think students will need in the future rather than addressing who they are as 14-, 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds. If we ignore the fact that 14-year-olds matter, then we eliminate the chance that we’re going to value what it means for a student to grow as a 14-year-old.

—Pamela Sissi Carroll

In choosing literature that is most appropriate for 14-year-olds, there should be an ‘acid test.’ Let’s say you’ve just completed teaching A Tale of Two Cities, and you believe your students loved it. My question for you is How many of your kids came up to you and said, ‘Gosh, you got anything more like that? You got any more Dickens for me to read?’ The answer is almost always, none. Whereas if you teach a good adolescent novel, you’ll always have kids say, ‘Hey, you got something else like this? Did that author write anything else?’ My problem with the classics is that they are the right piece of literature at the wrong time. Great Expectations, for example, which would be perfect for 12th grade British literature, is almost always taught in 8th or 9th grade before most students are ready to appreciate it. If a book is so difficult the teachers have to provide surface-level study questions, that book is probably not an appropriate choice for that age level. The number one goal should be to create lifelong readers. Adolescent literature will do that. But the way we force kids to read some of the classics, they never want to read anything.

—Jim Cope

What have you read today? The newspaper? A few pages of a novel? Chances are you read a variety of literature, both for pleasure and to learn something about the world, education, or any of your other interests. In classrooms, teachers and students are discovering that literature can be a good source for content beyond reading and literacy skills. Literature is breaking out of the language arts classroom and becoming part of instruction in science, social studies, and other subjects. Teachers are finding that literature, whether as a tool for learning content or as the foundation of the curriculum, can motivate and enrich teaching and learning. In the words of one middle school student: ‘Books make it come alive!’

—Karen Rasmussen
In nobler books we are moved with something like the emotions of life; and this emotion is very variously provoked.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Students have to learn content, including geography, dates, and political contexts. But books can put a human face on historical events. That [ability] is the greatest power of integrating literature with social studies, science, math, and history.

—Joan Ruddiman

One reason to integrate literature into the content areas is because it provides access to different topics, ideas, and points of view in ways accessible to students. Textbooks tend to present issues widely and on the surface and without different viewpoints. The challenge for teachers using literature to teach content, especially with middle school students, is to move beyond ‘I like this book’ in class discussion. For example, when students read about Nelson Mandela in reading class as they study the colonization of Africa and its effect in social studies, they can talk about books as they relate to political and cultural content. This makes discussions less personally sensitive because it’s not about the kids directly. And such reading helps kids understand the global insights theme of the curriculum.

—Joan Ruddiman

English teacher Jeff Newton has one rule for his students at Spotswood High School in Rockingham County, Va. You are not allowed to read a book you do not like. Students have a hard time believing this rule, Newton says, so he keeps it posted at the front of his classroom. He insists that books read without passion are hardly worth reading at all. That is why, in Newton’s classroom, paperback books of every kind—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, young adult, contemporary, the classics—offer something to interest every student. Believing that he could reach all his students with the right books, Newton persuaded his district language arts supervisor to purchase trade books instead of new literature anthologies when their textbooks were up for adoption. Now, instead of five-pound literature books, Newton’s students can choose from more than 700 paperbacks in his classroom library. ‘If we want kids to be readers, let’s give them real books,’ he suggests. To ignite the reading passion, you start with what they will read. This doesn’t mean that I don’t cajole, nudge, coax, or sometimes stick their face in a book that I think will grab them, but my primary goal is to create readers so that they keep reading when they’re out of school, Newton explains. Students who don’t develop the pleasure-reading habit simply don’t have a chance.

—Larry Mann
Classics like *Great Expectations* and the *Scarlet Letter* were best sellers in their time. These novels were highly relevant for people in those times and places, but this isn’t their time anymore. There’s nothing wrong with the classics, but they’re just not a great fit for a lot of students.

—Louann Reid

We’re in this business to create readers and to keep them reading—not to stop them cold. When we present the whole world as 19th century England, with the choices that Jane Austen’s heroines have, and say ‘This is literature!’ many kids turn around and say, ‘Thanks, but no thanks.’

—Leila Christenbury

[High school student] Keri shares her thoughts on *Heartbeat* by Daniel Steele:
I love this book. It’s basically a story about me. I think it was great that even though Adrian did not want to get rid of her and Steven’s baby, she stood up for herself. I think no girl should be forced into getting rid of her baby if the father don’t want it... Adrian was going through the same situation as I am going through right now. I just hope that when it comes to my life, Mark will change his mind. I don’t want my baby to grow up without his father being around. I just want us to be one big family once again. I’m on my third book for the six weeks. I’ve read over for 600 pages already. I don’t need any help. Thanks, anyway.

—Larry Mann

There are things literature can teach that nothing else can. Literature can be a vehicle for teaching kids to be human. Books like *Crime and Punishment*, for example, allow students to learn in a deep way what it means to be human.

—Carol Jago

Literature is man-centered. It is the attempt of the human imagination to come to terms with an alien universe, that which is out there, set over against ourselves. Literature doesn’t so much describe this world as try to allay our anxieties about it by associating our minds with it in two ways, by analogy and metaphor. Freud said that an analogy proves nothing but it makes us feel more at home. This is what literature attempts to do: it makes us feel more at home in a hostile environment. At the core of all literature is a myth which goes something like this: once man lived in a paradisal garden or golden age in which he and the universe were in harmony. Man lost his perfect home and became alienated from the rest of the universe and became subject to time and death. But he hopes to regain this lost world again, and his efforts to do so are attempts to regain his human identity. All literature, in one way or another, ‘fits’ into this broad quest for our human identity.

—Audrey Renwicke

Gibson
Literature tends to look in either of two opposing directions: upward, toward a world of wish fulfillment in which all obstacles are overcome, or downward, toward the world we do not want, a world of nightmare and bondage. We must lead students to see mankind as ‘one man’ and all his stories and poems and plays as making up ‘one story.’

—Northrop Frye

A piece of literature is like a Chinese vase in that it is a work of art and we cannot teach a work of art. Teaching literature is impossible; that is why it is so difficult. The difficulties involved in doing the impossible have lead teachers to place increasing emphasis on teaching the students to experience and appreciate literature. But we cannot directly teach a literary experience or literary appreciation. When a child in the classroom sings a song, recites a ballad, or reads a story, he is certainly having an experience, but this experience is something between him and the song he sings or the story he reads or the poem he recites. It is of primary importance but we do not teach it.

—Northrop Frye

We must be careful to be teachers of literature and not of sociology. We do our students a disservice putting Go Tell it on the Mountain in a black literature course. Certainly, the black experience in America is not the same as the white middle-class experience, but Go Tell it on the Mountain is an initiation story and should be compared to other initiation stories. It too is a novel of working-class life but it ends on a very positive note. In putting Baldwin’s book in a course called Black Literature, we are segregating the black imagination as well as black people. Perhaps it is time to emphasize that there is no difference between the black imagination and the white imagination, between the working-class imagination and the middle-class imagination, that literature is an expression of the human imagination, which at all times and in all places expresses the same wishes and the same nightmares.

—Audrey Renwick

Gibson

Literature is produced by, and appeals to, the imagination. The imagination is a creative and constructive power: it is different from reason, though it is intelligent, and different from feelings, though it is sensitive. If we are responding to someone else’s poem, we should respond to it at first with intelligence and feeling, as we do to anything else outside ourselves. But sooner or later we come up against the question of how our own powers of creation can be related to what the poet has made. For, however unlikely it is that we could make anything like King Lear or Paradise Lost, our response even to that level of creation still has in it some quality
of recognition. Lear on the heath is not like anything we have actually experienced, either in waking life or in dreams. Nevertheless he reminds us that besides actual worlds and fantasy worlds, we do have an imaginative world of our own, a world of possibilities, so to speak, and that Lear is within range of something that we can imagine. We know very little about our own imaginative worlds: even a great genius may not know much about what his genius is producing. Hence we are, at least at first, totally inarticulate about what we can imagine, until something in literature, say a poem, comes along and expresses it. Then we realize that the poem corresponds to something in the world that we have lived in and lived with, but knew nothing about it until the poem spoke for us.

This imaginative world that remains within us, hidden and mysterious, until literature begins to call it forth, is a world with a shape to it. We have just said that each work of literature has a context within literature: it lights up a specific corner or area of our imaginative experience; and the other works of literature that are most like it are in neighboring areas.

—Northrop Frye

Every society has a verbal culture, which includes ballads, folk songs, folk tales, work songs, legends, and the like. As it develops, a special group of stories, the stories we call myths, begins to crystallize in the center of this verbal culture. These stories are taken with particular seriousness by their society, because they express something deep in that society’s beliefs or vision of its situation in destiny. Myths, unlike other types of stories, stick together to form a mythology, and this mythology begins to take on the outlines of the imaginative world....Creation myths and other myths that account for the origins of things appear at one end of it, and myths of a final dissolving or transforming of the world may appear at the other, though this is normally a later development. Literature as we know it, as a body of writing, always develops out of a mythical framework of this kind. The heaven or paradise or Mount Olympus of the mythology becomes the idealized world of romance and pastoral and idyl, and its hell or Tartarus or Hades becomes the abhorred or grotesque world of irony.

The mythology framework of western culture has been provided mainly by the Bible, with the mythology of Greece and Rome forming a counterpoint against it. During the last century or so we have been learning more and more about the similarities of these mythical patterns to those produced by other societies all over the world, which, of course, in itself gives the study of literature an important function in a world where we have to meet so many other peoples on their terms as well as ours.

—Northrop Frye
The social importance of teaching literature, then, does not stop, as so many people think it does, when children have acquired the skills of reading and writing. Nobody denies the importance of these skills: all social participation depends on them. But in themselves they are passive skills: the knowledge of how to read leads in itself merely to reading such things as traffic signs, to learning how to do what one is told. If we go on with the study of literature, it turns out to be, not something to fill in our spare time with, but an organization of human experience. It presents the human situation, as we ordinarily know it, as a dissolving flux, but in structured forms like romance, tragedy, irony, comedy. To reach this kind of transformed imaginative reality, its rhythms have to be more concentrated, its imagery bolder, and its conventions at once more stylized and more varied, than anything we can use for ordinary experience. Literature in this sense is cultural mythology, the social vision which is not in itself belief or action, but the imaginative reservoir out of which beliefs and actions come.

—Northrop Frye

‘Adolescence,’ in short, is not really a process that young people must all go through. A great deal of it is really a deliberate creation of adult social anxieties. In order to maintain the adult dream of a happy clean world of fun-loving middle-class children, we have to assume that a person takes twenty-odd years to grow into a genuine human being. During this period, everything he is ‘not ready for’ should be kept from him, which in practice tends to mean that all genuine education should be postponed as long as possible....Whatever is socially undesirable, such as violence, is also to be kept from him, on the theory, if that is the word, that if he never reads about violence it cannot occur to him to become violent. Sex and violence, therefore, come to be associated with adult books, books one reads outside of school or after one has finished school, which is a major reason why the popular taste in reading, and entertainment generally, whether adolescent or adult, is so prurient and sadistic. I think a little more emphasis on genuine literature in school might make this tendency less automatic.

—Northrop Frye

In literature there is much to admire, but the end of literary study is not admiration of something remote, but the recognition that it corresponds to something within ourselves. Admiration is thus succeeded by possession, as we make what we read part of our own vision, and understand something of its function in shaping that vision. So far, it is true that education has been for the sake of the student: one wants literature to be something he can appropriate, and its study a process of transferring its power of vision to him. It is often said that there is no disinterested learning process for its own sake; that every such process is conditioned by the society it is in. Hence all scholarship is in a sense political: if it claims to be disinterested, it is really only defending the status quo. There is another way of
saying that all our beliefs and actions take shape around the social division constructed by the imagination. The important thing is to realize that no social vision is ever definitive; there is always more outside it. The circle of stories (or ocean of story, as it is called in India) is there to keep us continually expanding and reshaping that vision. It exists for us; it exists for itself; perhaps we may even feel, for a few moments in our lives, that it really is ourselves on an infinite plane.

—Northrop Frye

Our eyes must always be directed toward that dynamic interaction between the work of art and the personality of the reader. The aim will be to increase the student’s ability to achieve a full, sound reading of the text, and to broaden the personal context of emotions and ideas into which this response will be incorporated. The development of literary appreciation will depend upon a reciprocal process: An enlargement of the student’s understanding of human life leads to increased aesthetic sensitivity making possible more fruitful human insight from literature.

—Louise M. Rosenblatt

Young adult literature relates directly to students’ lives and, therefore, allows them to connect with and make meaning of what they read. And, because they enjoy what they read, they have a better chance of becoming lifelong readers. It is with this literature that students can bring that prior knowledge to the printed page. The prior knowledge will, indeed, enable readers to make the connections to comprehend what is there.

—Jill Adams & John H. Bushman

Young adult literature is a powerful tool to help students realize that reading is a pleasurable activity and to help them develop into confident, critical readers.

—S. K. Herz and D. R. Gallo

What makes a book a classic? Most educators agree that a book becomes a classic because it is timeless. But why have these particular books withstood the test of time? They’re still read and loved by young readers in our own time because each of them contains enthralling adventures, memorable characters, and valuable lessons that are as educational and entertaining today as when they were written. Literature is one of the richest resources our culture has to offer today’s generation of children.

—Reader’s Digest
Literature is the total body of stories and symbols that provides hypotheses or models of human behavior and experience.  

—Northrop Frye

In the modern world, where human imperfections are all too evident, heroes stand tall as examples of the best humankind has to offer... Legends survive because heroes inspire us all to join them in the fight to make the world a better place....Young readers need heroes...to personify the best of humankind. They spur young readers to search for the heroism inside themselves, to do good, and to briefly face the challenges of growing up.

—Reader’s Digest

The development of the imagination is one of the most important parts of childhood. When imagination flourishes, so does creativity, understanding, and a love of learning and intellectual adventure that will serve the child well as he or she grows to maturity in our complex and challenging world.

The great psychologist Carl Jung, describing the role of fantasy and the imagination and the mind’s development, wrote, ’Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable.’

Educators agree with Jung’s assessment of the importance of the imagination in a child’s development. By cultivating the imagination, children learn to visualize concepts and become familiar with new, challenging ideas. By exercising the imagination, the child steps beyond the bounds of the ordinary world and into a universe with limitless possibilities.

—Reader’s Digest

The sense of a lively enjoyment provided by mysterious adventures have kept them popular among all readers for over 150 years. Tales of mystery, intrigue, and suspense entice even the most reluctant readers, testing their ability to find solutions to complex riddles. We enjoy our unique sense of satisfaction at the end of every mystery story. By the final page, the successful solution has set everything in its proper place. The ordered world offered by these unravelings is remarkably pleasing to readers young or old.

Mystery stories... help your child in several ways:

➤ Mystery stories encourage careful reading, since every clue is important.
➤ Mystery stories develop logical skills and help children learn to make their own connections.
Young readers participate in mystery stories, and gain valuable experience in thinking for themselves.

Mysteries also help develop the ability to reason when they show readers how investigators of genius uncover solutions that explain the apparently unexplainable. The experience of carefully gathering and weighing evidence will exercise any child’s sense of logic.

—Reader’s Digest

Nature is a formidable contestant and sets the stage for some of literature’s most memorable adventures. Just as the ferocity of nature grips the imagination while inspiring wonder and respect, nature stories...kindle the spirit of adventure in every child. The importance of self-confidence, cooperation, and leadership is taught anew in the age-old struggle for survival. In reading these stories, your child will come face-to-face with the fiercest adversary, nature, and learn its most important lessons....By revealing the vast force, beauty, and diversity of the natural world, the adventures...help children develop their sense of wonder. Readers may even discover humility in their relationship with nature, sharing Bhagat’s realization that ‘there was nothing great and nothing little in this world.’ Above all else, the stories—in addition to providing the enormous satisfaction that comes from hearing a well-told story—cultivate a powerful respect for nature and all its creatures. These books will nurture your child’s appreciation for the natural world. By exploring its wonders and illuminating its mysteries these...books bring the miracles of nature alive.

—Reader’s Digest

There’s no doubt that some kinds of Eurocentric books have dominated the mainstream for a long time and that some cultures have been largely ignored. But the best way to promote them is together; not patronizingly as something cute and exotic and apart, but as good books.

—Hazel Rochman

We cannot...overlook the works of Twain that...address the issues of race and stereotype. Clearly, Twain used his writing to work through issues of race for himself and his society, and when I read Twain’s satires, I feel that he ‘gets it.’ Despite the culture surrounding him, Twain understood deeply that racism is wrong. For Twain to have depicted in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn a young hero who questioned racial inequality and an African American who was caring, compassionate, and strongly committed to his freedom was revolutionary indeed.

—Jocelyn Chadwick
The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson more than nods at Twain’s interest—or, rather more appropriately, his concern—about race. In this novel Twain turns on its proverbial ear the misconception of racial inferiority as evidenced through language acquisition. Roxy, a slave woman who gives birth to a child sired by the slave master, switches her baby with that of the slave master’s wife to avoid having her son sold down South. Through the strength of Roxy’s character and the results of her actions, Twain makes clear that racial inferiority is not inherent (as many in his time believed) and that voice and language can be acquired by anyone who is put in the right environmental circumstances.

—Jocelyn Chadwick

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn must remain in classrooms throughout the country. It is educative not only for African Americans, but for anyone sitting in an American literature survey course. Does it stand in lieu of a good, substantive American history class that addresses African American’s experiences under slavery? Of course not, but it certainly rounds out that experience. This is especially true in school districts that for budgetary or other reasons do not have access to many novels by African Americans who were Twain’s contemporaries. But even if the district does have a budget that allows it to purchase class sets of Francis Harper’s Iola Leroy, for example, it is still important to include a Twain novel, especially Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, in the curriculum.

—Jocelyn Chadwick

A value is some aspect of human experience to be preserved, fought for, striven for, sacrificed for. If education is a value to me, then I sacrifice other things for education; if family is a value, then I sacrifice other things for family; if work is a value—etc. Americans profess a common set of values: Judeo-Christian values, political values, legal values, educational values, social values, economic and even cultural values. These values have often been observed more in the breach, and there has been no end of criticism of Americans for their values. Among the earliest and most impassioned of these critics must rank black writers who, from the beginning, have been questioning these values.

—Mary Rose Shaughnessy

For those who truly know the passions of reading, favorite books provide an outlet for the mind when it’s in overload. They convey a sense of what’s right about life; they bring reality home; they champion the notion that chivalry lives; they soothe the emotional wound. They give rise to problems and situations which are similar to our own concerns, and then they provide solutions to the safety of the story and it’s characters.

—Jeanneine P. Jones
Books are the preservation of all that has been and all that is; they are the prediction of all that will come. They are the foundation of our culture, a record of our heritage.

—Jeanneine P. Jones

Reading, to the young adolescent, is often synonymous with time wasted.

—Jeanneine P. Jones

Those students who experience difficulty in our freshman sequence do so not because they have not previously read particular works but rather because they are deficient in analytical/interpretive skills, because they do not read expository prose well, because they do not write expository prose well. With respect to belletristic literature, it is more important that students know that they must read a text closely before they begin to interpret than that they know a few works well.

—Professor James Quivey

SEVEN OBJECTIVES FOR LITERATURE INSTRUCTION

Through their study and enjoyment of literature, students should:

➣ Realize the importance of literature as a mirror of human experience, reflecting human motives, conflicts, and values
➣ Be able to identify with fictional characters in human situations as a means of relating to others; gain insights from involvement with literature
➣ Become aware of important writers representing diverse backgrounds and traditions in literature
➣ Become familiar with master pieces of literature, both past and present
➣ Experience literature as a way to appreciate the rhythms and beauty of the language
➣ Develop habits of reading that carry over into adult life.

—National Council of Teachers of English
Educators for too long have adopted the ‘chocolate box’ model of learning—putting more and more isolated chocolates of varied flavors in an attempt to expand students’ thinking. A thorough, conceptual understanding cannot be accomplished by studying subjects in isolation. Understanding means making connections across the subject areas....The benefits of using literature to link the academic disciplines are twofold: it provides for a richer, more meaningful understanding of subject matter, and it provides a relevant way to introduce students to the pleasures and rewards of reading.

—David N. Perkins

Although book lists go against my teacherly instincts, I think we could come up with some sort of point system for renewing educators’ contracts and certifying congressmen as eligible to stand for reelection: one point, say, for Steve Garvey’s autobiography or for books by Dick Francis, John Grisham, and Erma Bombeck; five points for Anne Tyler, Tobias Wolff, and Edward Hoagland; 10 points for Stephen Jay Gould, David Halberstam, Gore Vidal, and Kelvin Trilling; 15 points for books in a foreign language, books on modern physics and mathematics, poetry books, and Edward Abbey.

We could argue about how many points dead authors are worth. I worry about people who scream for something they call standards in the schools and then try to convince kids that the only good author is one who’s been dead at least 100 years. I’d also award bonus points for familiarity with Squirrel Nutkin, Miss Nelson, Max, the Scroobius Pip, Henry and Mudge, The Stupids, Ramona, Madeline, Eloise, Amelia Bedelia, The Cat in the Hat, The Pinballs, Anastasia, and the hundreds of their literary fellows.

—Susan Ohanian

I like to tell the story of the first book club order I placed for the third-graders in that bottom reading group. In September I had to order seven books myself to make the minimum order of 10, and two of the student orders were for posters. In January the book club offered an Amelia Bedelia book. My students ordered 48 copies. They ordered for themselves, for their cousins, for their neighbors. When Leslie got her copy, she clutched it to her chest and burst into tears. ‘I’m so happy,’ she kept blubbering. When Charles got his, this troubled boy, who is mainstreamed into my class from a sheltered setting for the emotionally disturbed, opened it to the title page and stared for a long time. ‘This is mine, right? That means I can write my name right here —that way you do in your books.’

—Susan Ohanian
Research studies through the years have given ample support of the fact that students who read more become better readers. In classrooms where literature is readily accessible, or sufficient time is given to reading and where teachers place a high value on reading, students can be found engaged in reading for pleasure and information.

—Shane Templeton

All of us, whether we teach high school or first grade, need to grapple with...issues of literary content and merit because we aren’t teaching for today, we’re teaching for the future. I was Denise’s English teacher for a long time. Denise, a student so recalcitrant she failed seventh grade twice, still writes to me. She tells me about taking her own children to the library every week. She says her kids like Flat Stanley almost as much as I do. Denise writes about introducing her children to the Stupids, and Frog and Toad, and to Madeline. She writes, ‘I can’t wait until they’re old enough for my favorite book. You know what that is. The Great Gilly Hopkins.’ I like to think that the Denise’s children will be readers because in being a reader myself I was able to help Denise become one. A belligerent, foul-mouthed teenager, Denise found a soul mate in Gilly; Gilly helped her look at the world and at herself in new ways. I have a letter Denise wrote me in October of ninth grade. She reported she was doing pretty well in school; she’d been suspended only twice. Need I add that the Denise was innocent of irony? She wrote that she was trying to decide whether to become a teacher or a bartender.

A year later, in 10th grade, she limited her options by dropping out of school. But she left school with something she learned in her long stay in seventh grade; she dropped out with the knowledge that books could enrich her life.

—Susan Ohanian

Books are the preservation of all that has been and all that is; they are the prediction of all that will come. They are the foundation of our culture, a record of our heritage.

—Jeanneine P. Jones

Some claim that, a big source of reading problems is the deadening quality of what children are given to read. Children who go through the considerable work of learning to read can lose their appetite for it if all they get is drab monosyllabic vignettes in ‘readers.’ According to a Department of Education study, elementary schools tend to use basal readers up to the later grades—far beyond the point for which they were originally intended.

—William J. Bennett
School is disappointing. If science is exciting and art is exhilarating, the schools and universities have achieved the not inconsiderable feat of rendering both dull. As every scientist and poet knows, one discovers both vocations in spite of, not because of, school. It takes years to recover from the stupor of being taught Shakespeare in English Lit and Wheatstone’s bridge in Physics.

—Walker Percy

The great thing about literature is that you can imagine; the great thing about film is that you can’t.

--James Monaco

Those who decide to use leisure as a means of mental development, who love good music, good books, good pictures, good plays, good company, good conversation—what are they? They are the happiest people in the world.

--William Lyon Phelps

Need I point out that dramatic literature—with its unique demands upon the reader to infer, to interpret, and to imaginatively flesh out the bones of a script—should be a vital part of... a [school] program? What is closer to experience than a play which is, by its very nature, a selection of life’s most vivid and eventual moments? And what can speak more directly to the emotions than a form which communicates not only verbally but visually and aurally as well?

—Dorothy E. Matthews

Ancient Greeks considered plays as part of a religious festival, an annual community affair where people of all ages assembled to see enactments of legends with which they were already familiar. Theater to them meant a form of ritual: the plays hammered home the necessity for men to live lives of moderation, avoiding excess pride lest they offend the gods. The acting area itself, an outside circle or dancing place, reminded the audience of the seriousness of the drama, for in its center was an altar to the gods and within its circumference a stately chorus chanted odes counseling prudence and humility. How different is the idea of a theater revealed in Elizabethan drama! Plays were presented for commercial profit by professional acting companies, so the tastes and desires for the theater-goer were naturally catered to. A love of physical action, an exuberant patriotism, a sense of humor, and a taste for the spectacular and grotesque—witches, ghosts, insanity, blood, and gore—the fact that the audiences attended the theater primarily to be entertained certainly can account for the multilevel appeal in Shakespeare.

—Dorothy E. Matthews
Many differences between Greek and Shakespearean plays can also be seen if one considers the physical theater. Actors in the time of Sophocles performed in an outdoor area that could be most aptly compared to a modern football field. In order to be seen by spectators sitting in the top rows, the players had to wear padded costumes and elevated shoes; in order to be heard they spoke through crude amplifiers constructed within their large cumbersome masks. Is it any wonder the script does not call for rollicking stage action? Since speeches were often not audible to everyone, they were often accompanied by pantomimic gestures and choreographed reactions on the part of an ever-responsive chorus. Certainly one would not expect the dialogue in a Greek play to be subtle or fast-moving. On the other hand, the Shakespearean actor was physically close to his observers, who almost surrounded him in a small intimate theater. This proximity offered Elizabethan playwrights good opportunity to communicate with the audience through familiar asides, facial expressions, and soliloquies. The fairly large apron stage projecting into the seating area allowed much freedom of movement for actors, who could stage battles, fence, or engage in any kind of horseplay the dramatist might care to devise. A Shakespearean script reflects the flexibility that the Elizabethan theater, with its many unlocalized acting areas, provided.

—Dorothy E. Matthews

Through tragedy, the great Athenian poets were not articulating a pessimistic or fatalistic view of human experience; nor where they bent on filling audiences with despair. Instead, they were giving voice to timeless human experiences—of suffering and grief—that, when viewed by a large audience that had shared those experiences, fostered compassion, understanding and a deeply felt interconnection. Through tragedy, the Greeks faced the darkness of human existence as a community.

—Bryan Doerries

It has been suggested that ancient Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans. Sophocles himself was a general. The audiences for whom these plays were performed were undoubtedly composed of citizen-soldiers. Also, the performers themselves were most likely veterans or cadets. Seen through this lens, ancient Greek drama appears to have been an elaborate ritual aimed at helping combat veterans return to civilian life after deployments during a century that saw 80 years of war. Plays like Sophocles’ Ajax read like a textbook description of wounded warriors, struggling under the weight of psychological and physical injuries to maintain their dignity, identity and honor.

—Bryan Doerries
Years later—long after I had failed, in high school, to master the math courses that would have allowed me to go on to study calculus—my father would occasionally remark that it was too bad, because it’s impossible to see the world clearly if you don’t know calculus...Years after all this, whenever my father made this comment...I’d invariably reply by saying that you couldn’t really see the world clearly without having read the *Aeneid* in Latin, either. And then he’d make that little grimace that we all knew, half a smile, half a frown, twisting his face, and we’d laugh a sour little laugh, and retreat to our corners.

—Daniel Mendelsohn

Children’s books are more than just entertainment. They reflect how a society sees its young and itself. By shaping the attitudes and aspirations of children, they help shape the world those children will grow up to inherit.

—Nathan Perl-Rosenthal

In premodern times, the French scholar Philippe Aries famously argued, there was no childhood in the sense that we understand it. Children were imagined as little adults, just the way that they were depicted in many paintings. Books for them were made to match. When New England children studied the alphabet in the *New England Primer*, for instance, they learned that they had to choose whether they would be sinners or saints, whether they wanted to live or die.

In the early 19th century, a ‘Romantic vision of childhood’ (as the historian Steven Mintz calls it) supplanted these earlier ideas. Middle-class Victorians re-conceived of childhood as an idyll, free from worry and fears of all kinds. They thought that it had to be so, because they imagined their children as fragile and incapable beings. To enjoy this period of life, children had to be shielded from the discomfiting realities of grown-up existence. It is no surprise that Victorian books for children skewed toward sanitized fairy tales, tame fantasies, and anachronistic histories. More than a century later, these notions continue to echo in the vast number of children’s books that paint a rosy, untroubled picture of the world, as though that were all young minds were able to bear.

—Nathan Perl-Rosenthal

To go back and read Swift and Defoe and Samuel Johnson and Smollett and Pope—all those people we had to read in college English courses—to read them now is to have one of the infinite pleasures in life.

—David McCullough

I lay my eternal curse on whosoever shall now or at any time hereafter make schoolbooks of my work and make me hated as Shakespeare is hated. My plays were not designed as instruments of torture.

—George Bernard Shaw
A very, very up-to-the-minute young lady in one of Raymond Weaver’s literature classes at Columbia asked him whether he had read a best-seller of the moment. When he confessed that he had not, she cried reproachfully, ‘Oh, you’d better hurry up; it’s been out for over three months!’ ‘Young lady,’ said Weaver severely, ‘have you read Dante’s Divine Comedy? No? Well, you’d better hurry up; it’s been out for over six hundred years.

—Bennet Cerf

Fiction gives us a second chance that life denies us.

—Paul Theroux

A German novel is a book in which two people want each other in the first chapter but do not get each other until the last chapter. A French novel is a book in which two people get each other in the first chapter and from then on until the last chapter don’t want each other any more. A Russia novel, finally, is one in which two people neither want each other nor get each other, and about this 1,450 very melancholy pages are written.

—Counterpoints

I’d give ten thousand pounds not to have read Huck Finn so that I could have the joy again of reading it for the first time.

—Unknown Englishman

Technology is the campfire around which we tell our stories.

—Laurie Anderson

When Lena Roy was 7 years old, her teacher read the first chapter of A Wrinkle in Time aloud to her second grade class. After school, Lena ran to her grandmother’s house, which was around the corner from her school on the upper West Side of Manhattan, to finish the book on her own. She curled up in bed and devoured it. She felt just like the hotheaded, stubborn heroine Meg Murray, and took comfort in the fact that a flawed adolescent girl could save the world. ‘It was almost like your permission to be a real person,’ Royce says. ‘You don’t have to be perfect.’…What’s different about Roy is that her grandmother happens to be Madeleine L’Engle, the book’s author, who revolutionized serious young adult fiction with her clever mash-up of big ideas, science fantasy and adventure—and the geeky girl action hero way ahead of her time.

—Natalie Escobar

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The famed Greek dramatist's [Aeschylus] (c. 525-456 B.C.) tragic trilogy is thought
to have reframed the Trojan War as a reckoning with contemporary Athenian
democracy. An estimated total of more than 80 of his works are lost to history.
Seven plays survive.

—Duncan Barile

The bravest and brainiest girls in literature have been breaking the rules for 150
years: Jo March—Little Women (1868); Anne Shirley—Anne of Green Gables (1908);
Nancy Drew—Nancy Drew Books (1930); Laura Ingalls—Little House on the Prairie
(1932); Ramona Quimby—Ramona Series (1955); Scout Finch—To Kill a Mockingbird (1960); Meg Murray—A Wrinkle in Time (1962); Harriet M. Welsch—Harriet
the Spy (1964); Claudia Kincaid—The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler
(1967); Margaret Simon—Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret (1970); Cassie Logan—Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976); Esperanza Cordero—The House on
Mango Street (1984); Claudia Kishi—The Baby-Sitters Club (1986); Hermione Granger—Harry Potter Series (1997); Toswiah Green—Hush (2000); Esperanza Ortega—Esperanza Rising (2002); Liesel Meminger—The Book Thief (2005); Katniss
Everdeen—The Hunger Games Series (2008); Hà—Inside Out and Back Again (2011); and Star Carter—The Hate U Give (2017).

—Natalie Escobar

Much has been made about the death of the novel and the end of literature as it’s
seen to be assailed by technology, by the web, by the many and varied new forms of
entertainment and culture. I don’t share that pessimism because I think it is one of
the great inventions of the human spirit.

---Richard Flanagan

It’s so easy to lose faith and become lost in all of the politics of the world. That’s why
we need the arts. To sublimate our frustration and anger into something beautiful.
Freud called sublimation a virtuous defence mechanism because it is in the arts
that we can find our humanity.

---Kamand Kojouri

I knew exactly when the fever had struck. I had been reading Hamlet in an English
class at school. Everyone else stumbled, puzzling over the strange words. Then it
had been my turn, and the language had suddenly woken in me, so that my heart
and lungs and tongue and throat were on fire. Later, I understood that this was
why people spoke of Shakespeare as a god. At the time, I felt like weeping. Some-
body had released me from dumbness, from utter isolation. I knew that I could live
inside these words, that they would give me a shape, a shell.

---Amanda Craig
A caricature is putting the face of a joke on the body of a truth.  
—Joseph Conrad

In an age when other fantastically speedy, widespread media are triumphing, and running the risk of flattening all communication onto a single homogeneous surface, the function of literature is communication between things that are different simply because they are different, not blunting but even sharpening the differences between them, following the true bent of written language.  
—Italo Calvino

Henry Miller wrote novels, but he calls his protagonist Henry, often Henry Miller, and his books are in this gray area between memoir and novel.  
—Leslie Fiedler

A reader who quarrels with postulates, who dislikes Hamlet because he does not believe that there are ghosts or that people speak in pentameters, clearly has no business in literature. He cannot distinguish fiction from fact, and belongs in the same category as the people who send checks to radio stations for the relief of suffering heroines in soap operas.  
—Northrop Frye

All literature is political.  
—LeVar Burton

Great literature for young readers lends insight into their own lives, as well as those of others, and gives children a new way of looking at the world. The language is rich and fresh. It delights, informs, surprises. It instructs as it entertains. It helps a child find a secure place in a complex world.  
—Theodore Clymer

Great literature has something important to say to a reader. It helps a reader discover how people think about and respond to life’s everyday challenges. The message may be pointed, as in Aesop’s fable ‘The Tortoise and the Hare,’ or subtle, as in Robert Frost’s poem, ‘Nothing Gold Can Stay.’  
—Theodore Clymer

Getting to know authors and understanding that they are people with issues and experiences similar to one’s own helps readers to understand the world of writing....In order for children to thrive in today’s world, they need to encounter a range of experience the includes all of the areas of human activity and provides a basis for understanding our commonality....Great literature leads to more great lit-
erature. It follows that as children read stories and books they love they will want

to read more.

—Theodore Clymer

Through their study and enjoyment of literature, students should:

- Realize the importance of literature as a mirror of human experience,
  reflecting human motives, conflicts, and values
- Be able to identify with fictional characters in human situations as a means
  of relating to others; gain insights from involvement with literature
- Become aware of important writers representing diverse backgrounds and
  traditions in literature
- Become familiar with masterpieces of literature, both past and present
- Develop effective ways of talking and writing about varied forms of literature
- Experience literature as a way to appreciate the rhythms and beauty of the
  language
- Develop habits of reading that carry over into an adult life.

—National Council of
Teachers of
English

COLLEGE BOARD RECOMMENDED READING LIST FOR
COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS

Anonymous Beowulf
Achebe, Chinua Things Fall Apart
Agee, James A Death in the Family
Austen, Jane Pride and Prejudice
Baldwin, James Go Tell It on the Mountain
Beckett, Samuel Waiting for Godo
Bellow, Saul The Adventures of Augie March
Bronte, Charlotte Jane Eyre
Bronte, Emily Wuthering Heights
Camus, Albert The Stranger
Cather, Willa Death Comes for the Archbishop
Cervantes, Miguel de Don Quixote
Chaucer, Geoffrey The Canterbury Tales
Chekhov, Anton The Cherry Orchard
Chopin, Kate The Awakening
Conrad, Joseph Heart of Darkness
Cooper, James Fenimore The Last of the Mohicans
Crane, Stephen The Red Badge of Courage
Dante Inferno
Defoe, Daniel Robinson Crusoe
Dickens, Charles A Tale of Two Cities
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor Crime and Punishment
Douglass, Frederick Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Dreiser, Theodore An American Tragedy
Dumas, Alexandre The Three Musketeers
Eliot, George The Mill on the Floss
Ellison, Ralph Invisible Man
Emerson, Ralph Waldo Selected Essays
Faulkner, William As I Lay Dying
Faulkner, William The Sound and the Fury
Fielding, Henry Tom Jones
Fitzgerald, F. Scott The Great Gatsby
Flaubert, Gustave Madame Bovary
Ford, Ford Madox The Good Soldier
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von Faust
Hugo, Victor The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Huxley, Aldous Brave New World
Ibsen, Henrik A Doll's House
James, Henry The Portrait of a Lady
James, Henry The Turn of the Screw
Joyce, James A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
Kafka, Franz The Metamorphosis
Kingston, Maxine Hong The Woman Warrior
Lee, Harper To Kill a Mockingbird
Lewis, Sinclair Babbitt
London, Jack The Call of the Wild
Mann, Thomas The Magic Mountain
Marquez, Gabriel Garcia One Hundred Years of Solitude
Melville, Herman Bartleby the Scrivener
Melville, Herman Moby Dick
Miller, Arthur The Crucible
Morrison, Toni Beloved
O'Connor, Flannery A Good Man is Hard to Find
O'Neill, Eugene Long Day's Journey into Night
Orwell, George 1984
Orwell, George Animal Farm
Pasternak, Boris Doctor Zhivago
Plath, Sylvia The Bell Jar
Poe, Edgar Allen Selected Tales
Proust, Marcel Swann's Way
Pynchon, Thomas The Crying of Lot 49
Remarque, Erich Maria All Quiet on the Western Front
Rostand, Edmond Cyrano de Bergerac
Roth, Henry Call It Sleep
Salinger, J.D. The Catcher in the Rye
Shakespeare, William Hamlet
Shakespeare, William Julius Caesar
Shakespeare, William Macbeth
Shakespeare, William A Midsummer Night's Dream
Shakespeare, William Romeo and Juliet
Shaw, George Bernard Pygmalion
Shelley, Mary Frankenstein
Silko, Leslie Marmon Ceremony
Solzhenitsyn, Alexander One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
Sophocles Antigone
Sophocles Oedipus Rex
Steinbeck, John The Grapes of Wrath
Stevenson, Robert Louis Treasure Island
Stowe, Harriet Beecher Uncle Tom's Cabin
Swift, Jonathan Gulliver's Travels
Thackeray, William Vanity Fair
Thoreau, Henry David Walden
Tolstoy, Leo War and Peace
Turgenev, Ivan Fathers and Sons
Twain, Mark The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Voltaire Candide
Vonnegut, Kurt Jr. Slaughterhouse-Five
Walker, Alice The Color Purple
Wharton, Edith The House of Mirth
THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN’S ROLE IN PROMOTING READING

Strategies to promote reading within the building, attract students to the library, and help students appreciate the library through the initiative of the library staff:

- Book of the day—Each day school announcements will ‘advertise’ a book. The announcement reader can summarize the description on the book jacket to interest students in the book. The library staff will display the book in the library for a day and then check it out.
- Extended library hours —8 a.m. to 4 p.m. with students using the library before school with a pass.
- Racks of paperback books—Create high interest, attractive, and easy-access book displays for students.
- Spontaneous rewarding of students for carrying a leisure-reading book with them during the school day. The principal could ask to see students’ library books at any time and reward them with certificates or other incentives.
- Sponsor reading competitions such as Battle of the Books among homerooms or between schools.
- Conduct research scavenger hunts.
- Hold a luncheon for select students and give them the first opportunity to preview new books.
- Encourage teachers to hold events and activities in the library so that students come to view the library as an interesting and popular school destination.
- Sponsor a paperback book exchange.
- Create bibliographies for different interests and also for various problems students face.
- Promote the library and library activities in the school newspaper and parent newsletter.
- Award certificates or other incentives after a student reads and completes a librarian-created survey/questionnaire.
- Prepare a brochure or other handout for students and parents explaining library services and policies.
Deliver book talks or talks on topics that students can later explore in specific books.

Create a bulletin board or display case where students can post their reviews of favorite books they have read. Encourage them, also, to post their reviews on such websites as Amazon.

—Dan L. Miller

New Journalism: Amidst war protests, hippies, civil rights demonstrations, rock-and-roll festivals, assassinations, feminism, youth power, experimentation with drugs, and sexual revolution, many reporters and writers found that traditional literary categories could not capture the tumultuous changes of the 1960s. Concerned that fiction neglected the people and events of America at that time and that journalism ignored the complexity of the era, reporters and writers forged a new genre by applying the writing techniques and characteristics of the novel and short story to nonfiction, journalistic prose. Journalists like Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Michael Herr joined fiction writers such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Joan Didion to create a nonfiction form characterized by its use of dialogue, scenic construction, point of view, and personal voice, all traditionally the terrain of fiction. The genre’s many critics denied the originality of the form and worried about its threats to the objectivity and accuracy of traditional reportage. For New Journalists, the emerging genre was more responsive to cultural changes and more accurately, more thoroughly, and more interestingly conveyed the issues, events, and people of the 1960s and early 1970s. The New Journalism drew greater attention to nonfiction as a creative literary form and encouraged experimentation with genre and style.

—The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature

When I started out in the early 1930s, there were a great many magazines that published short stories. Unfortunately, the short-story market has dwindled to almost nothing.

--Irwin Shaw

When journalism is silenced, literature must speak. Because while journalism speaks with facts, literature speaks with truth.

--Seno Gumira Ajidarma

An author departs, he does not die.

—Dinah Maria Mulock
The English people, a lot of them, would not be able to understand a word of spoken Shakespeare. There are people who do and I’m not denying they exist. But it’s a far more philistine country than people think.

—Colin Firth

Literary fiction can be almost free, and has very few side effects.

—Emanuele Castano

Myths can’t be translated as they did in their ancient soil. We can only find our own meaning in our own time.

—Margaret Atwood

Commenting acidly on a writer whom I perhaps too naively admired, my old classics teacher put on his best sneer to ask: ‘Wouldn’t you say, Hitchens, that his writing was somewhat journalistic?’ This lofty schoolmaster employed my name sarcastically, and stressed the last term as if he meant it to sting, and it rankled even more than he had intended. Later on in life, I found that I still used to mutter and improve my long-meditated reply. Émile Zola—a journalist. Charles Dickens—a journalist. Thomas Paine—another journalist. Mark Twain. Rudyard Kipling. George Orwell—a journalist par excellence. Somewhere in my cortex was the idea to which Orwell himself once gave explicit shape: the idea that ‘mere’ writing of this sort could aspire to become an art, and that the word ‘journalist’—like the ironic modern English usage of the word ‘hack’—could lose its association with the trivial and the evanescent.

--Christopher Hitchens

When England was experiencing its darkest days during World War II, Winston Churchill went home at night and read Jane Austen.

—Peggy Sullivan

Can you explain the difference between historical fiction and creative nonfiction? Are they interchangeable or are there definite differences between the two? In a work of historical fiction, the story takes place in the past, but characters, actions, and other details are fictionalized. Creative nonfiction, on the other hand, is a broad term that encompasses many different types of writing (and, it seems worth noting, not all of it is historical). Creative nonfiction that covers the past uses the tools of dramatization but does not fictionalize….Creative nonfiction that includes historical eras or events does not fictionalize. While it might read like a novel, its task is to remain factually accurate….Both historical fiction and creative nonfiction that covers historical events or eras serve to illuminate real events from the past in
a compelling and dramatic way. But each has a different relationship with factual accuracy.

—Brandi Reissenweber

Enjoyment is what keeps some less-than-excellent classics alive. While there are many books that live on through the generations because of their timeless excellence—and I note the current centenaries of *Pinocchio* and *Heidi*—there are others that endure because people remember them from their childhood and introduce them to new generations. The healthy tolerance and curiosity of children allow them to respond happily to these, even when the charm of the book or its special message has outlived its time. Much as I enjoyed it as a child, I have to put Black Beauty in this category. I remember my parents, both of them enthusiastic horseback riders, explaining to me about bits and bridles and parts of the horse’s body so that I would understand why Beauty suffered so. They enhanced my enjoyment of the book, just as the teachers who read The Box Car Children year after year make it popular without enhancing the quality of the book. For classics, too, there is a time to live and a time to die.

—Peggy Sullivan

[Citing the National Endowment for the Arts Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America] For all the splash of amazon.com and the ubiquity of huge chain bookstores, are people in the United States reading more than they used to? A recent report...on literary reading in the United States answers with a gloomy no....According to the literary segment of the survey, literary reading in the United States is declining at a clip. The report’s definition of ‘literary reading’ encompasses any novel, short story, play, or collection of poetry, regardless of its literary quality. ...The rate of decline in literary reading is accelerating....Adult literary reading is declining in all age groups, especially in the youngest age groups. In 1982, adults ages 18-34 were the most likely group to read literature. In 2002, this group was the least likely to read literature....If the decline in reading continues at this rate, ‘literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century.’

—Amy M. Azzam

The late S. S. McClure, pioneer magazine and book publisher, was waylaid on the way to his inner office one morning by a determined lady who demanded, ‘Did you keep your promise and read the manuscript I gave you?’ To be rid of her, he answered, ‘I did. We can’t use it.’ She appeared crestfallen and murmured, ‘I suppose the little verses at the beginning of each chapter detracted from the story. Maybe they should come out.’ ‘No, no,’ said the publisher suavely. ‘Those little verses add to the interest. I’d leave them in by all means.’ ‘Mr. McClure,’ the lady answered triumphantly, ‘there are no little verses at the head of each chapter. You simply haven’t read the manuscript as you said you
would. I’m going to sit right here until you do.’ McClure realized he was trapped, and with a sigh, sat down to skim through the manuscript as quickly as possible. He decided to accept it, however. The lady was Mrs. Ovid Butler Jamison of Indianapolis, determined to set her brother astride the high road to literary fame. Her brother’s name was Booth Tarkington. The manuscript was *Monsieur Beaucaire*.

—Bennett Cerf

The Algonquin’s famous boniface, the late Frank Case, loved William Faulkner personally, but was no admirer of his torturous prose and grim pictures of depravity in the old South. Faulkner met him in the lobby one morning and complained, ‘I have kind of an upset stomach today.’ ‘Ah,’ sympathized Case, ‘something you wrote, no doubt.’

—Bennett Cerf

In 1885 Concord, Massachusetts, home town of Thoreau, banned *Huckleberry Finn* as ‘trash suitable only for the slums.’ In 1929 Russia blacklisted Sherlock Holmes for his ‘disgraceful occultism and spiritualism.’ In 1931 China banned *Alice in Wonderland* on the ground that ‘animals should not use human language’ and that it was ‘disastrous to put animals and human beings on the same level.’

—Bennett Cerf

The celebration of G. B. Shaws 90th birthday sent Statistician M. Pitkin scurrying to the files to see if any writing man of the first order could challenge his record for longevity. Here are some figures he unearthed, arranged in ascending scale. Chatterton died (by his own hand) at 18; Keats at 26; Marlow (in a tavern brawl) at 29; Shelley at 30; Byron at 36; Burns at 37; Jane Austin at 42; De Maupassant at 43; Virgil, Molière, and Balzac at 51; Shakespeare and Thackeray at 52; Dante and Pope at 56; Dickens at 58; Chaucer, Racine, and Hawthorne at 60; Aristotle, Coleridge, and Zola at 62; Milton at 66; Conrad at 67; Cervantes at 69; Defoe at 70; Melville at 72; Sam Johnson at 75; Washington Irving at 76; Browning at 77; Ibsen at 78; Emerson at 79; Plato and Wordsworth at 80, Meredith at 81; Tolstoy at 82; Goethe and Tennyson at 83; Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin at 84; Carlyle at 86; and Hardy at 88.

—Bennett Cerf

In Budapest in 1921, Ferenc Molnar took his young bride to the premier of *Liliom*. She wept so bitterly that she implored him never to write anything like it again. Today Molnar confesses ruefully, ‘I’m afraid I never did.’

—Bennett Cerf

The editor of every anthology of American short stories includes O. Henry as a matter of course, but, unfortunately, he usually picks one of a dozen standbys that have
become shopworn and over familiar by repetition—‘A Municipal Report,’ for instance, or ‘The Gift of the Magi.’ Hidden away in the bulk of the six hundred stories O. Henry left behind when he died in 1910 are countless others that have a habit of popping up in magazines and columns.... At the height of his career, O. Henry boasted that he could turn out one complete story—and down one complete bottle of whiskey—a day. He was always far behind in his commitments. 'If only magazine editors wouldn’t eat in the same restaurants I do,’ he said petulantly. 'I find it impossible to resist them—especially when I owe them stories they’ve paid me for six months ago!’ He lunched one day with Charles Hanson Towne, then editor of Smart Set, and Robert Davis, of Munsey’s, and admitted that he owed stories to nine magazine editors. In the middle of the meal, he excused himself and moved to another table where he held a whispered consultation with Richard Duffy, of Ainslee’s. When he returned, he remarked gaily, ‘Change that figure from nine to ten.’

—Bennett Cerf

O. Henry’s great ambition, according to Vincent Starrett, was to write a full-length novel, and many of his stories were begun with that purpose in mind. Inevitably, however, he had to tack a hurried ending to them in order to fulfill some particular pressing obligation. One editor lost his temper completely and sent a message reading, ‘If your copy is not delivered today, I promise to arrive in personal and kick you downstairs. P. S. I always keep my promises.’ O. Henry replied, ‘If I worked with my feet, I would keep mine. too.’

—Bennett Cerf

Censorship had become such a menacing problem in England in the 17th century that John Milton was moved to write his famous plea for liberty of the press, ‘Areopagitica.’ ‘As good almost kill a man as kill a good book,’ was his cry, which has echoed through the centuries.

—Bennett Cerf

Two full years after Forever Amber had been published, the State of Massachusetts suddenly decided to brand the book obscene, and vendors of same liable to criminal action. Happily, the attempt proved futile, but it did boost the sale to two million, and provided Attorney General George Rowell, spearheading the prosecution, with the opportunity to present this absorbing statistical analysis of the book:

70 references to sexual intercourse
39 illegitimate pregnancies
7 abortions
10 descriptions of women dressing, undressing, or bathing in the presence of men
5 references to incest, 10 to the badger game
Mr. Rowell concluded his indictment by declaring, ‘The references to women’s bosoms and other parts of their anatomy were so numerous I did not even attempt to count them.’

In short, the prosecution provided a perfect capsule formula for a foolproof best-seller.

—Bennett Cerf

Bad timing has killed more than one book that might have been a rousing success with more adroit handling. One of the first victims of a publisher's failure to consider current public interest was Henry David Thoreau.

In his journal, Thoreau laments that his *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (now generally accepted as an American classic) was published in 1849, when the entire country could think of nothing but the gold rush in California. Who wanted a book about familiar New England at a time like that? ‘The edition was limited to one thousand copies,’ writes Thoreau, ‘and eventually I had to buy most of them myself.…I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself’

—Bennett Cerf

A Hollywood communiqué heralds a third—or is it fourth?—remake of *Little Women*. Considering the fortunes that have been made on this beloved American classic, and the fame it is brought to players on the stage and screen, it is interesting to note that the author herself, Louisa May Alcott, thought very little of its chances when she finished it in 1867. In fact, she offered to sell it for one thousand dollars outright in lieu of royalties. Her publisher considered her doubts well-founded, but he took the manuscript (written in laborious longhand) home for further consideration. That night he called several times to his usually attentive niece, but got no answers. He found her so engrossed in the Alcott story that she was oblivious to the outside world. The next morning he made out a contract....You may recall a story that went the rounds the last time *Little Women* played at Radio City Music Hall. A drugstore nearby featured a full window display of the Little, Brown and Grosset editions of the novel. A lady pointed it out to her companion, and exclaimed, ‘Look at that! The picture only opened yesterday, and two publishers have put it out in book form already!’

—Bennett Cerf

A matter of three or four hours by motor from New York, over perfect roads, lie of the tranquility and beautiful hills known as the Berkshires....Literary history had been made in these hills. On Greylock, or Saddleback, as it is sometimes called,
Thoreau had spent a chilly night in 1853, and complained later that mice had made a fine meal of his shoes while he unsuspectingly was studying old documents he had found in the shack on the summit. In Lenox, a few miles south, was the hill down which Edith Wharton’s Ethan Frome had coasted to tragedy. In Stockbridge was the old summer home of the Longfellows, called ‘The Oxbow.’ Nearby Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Russell Lowell did their best work. Herman Melville finished *Moby Dick* at almost the same time that his neighbor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, wrote the last pages of his *House of the Seven Gables*.

Of the tortured friendship of Hawthorne and Melville, many tales are told. Periods of mutual confidence and esteem would be followed by months when the two scarcely spoke to each other. The moody Hawthorne usually was responsible for the quarrels; he depressed Melville one night to a point where he almost threw the priceless manuscript of *Moby Dick* into the fireplace. Hawthorne’s son Julian, wrote in his memoirs, ‘The two people who visited our house most often when we were children were Mr. Melville and the milkman, Luther Butler. We like the milkman better. We drank his milk—and he never read Father’s books!’ Melville’s final break with Hawthorne was a crushing blow, and the comparative failure of *Moby Dick* completed his disillusionment. The reviewers of his day failed utterly to realize the true worth of the book; his publisher lamented the fact that the $700 advance he had paid on it probably would never be earned back!

—Bennett Cerf

I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends...But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex.

—Virginia Woolf (1929)

Hunter S. Thompson once transcribed *The Great Gatsby* just so he could experience what it felt like to write a masterpiece.

—Don Vaughan

Shakespeare made liberal use of jesters, also known as fools, in his plays both comic and tragic. Puck, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, sprinkles his love potion on the wrong handsome sleeping dude, thus pivoting the plot in a way both humorous and disastrous. The Fool in *King Lear* explains things with biting, rueful wit and provides a voice of reason from which Lear can still learn, even though he’s made a mess of things.

—Elizabeth Sims
Satire is so accessible, it never gets stale. It ages like a fine French cheese. Classrooms still study Mark Twain. Studios continue to make blockbuster movies with Jack Black out of a 1726 Jonathan Swift novel. Voltaire’s *Candide* is, to this day, an internationally touring opera. And in 2015, Spike Lee adapted a comedy based on a play by Aristophanes—a satirist who died some 2,500 years ago.

—Scott Dikkers

Satire is any kind of humor (wordplay, jokes, songs, stories, plays, movies—you name it) that has astute subtext. This subtext points out an injustice, or wrong or failure in the human condition—one that’s universally relatable or that we all can learn from. That means the literal words of satire don’t tell the whole story. They’re merely the vehicle. Subtext is the secret message hidden underneath the jokes. The subtext of George Orwell’s classic *Animal Farm*, for example, is that power corrupts. The subtext of the 1933 Marx Brothers movie, *Duck Soup*, is that human governments are hopeless to control the world.

—Scott Dikkers

Novelists and playwrights have been paying the bills for centuries by shining a harsh and humorous late on the duplicity and absurdities of the high, the mighty and the mighty-conceited….Shakespeare knew this. As did Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde and Jane Austen.

—Dinty W. Moore

When I read Dickens, I feel him as an empathetic writer. I just feel that he thinks well of me. He thinks that I’m as smart as he is, so he’s telling the story very honestly and very frankly. Dickens resided long enough in that story to really find out why Scrooge was so stingy, then to supply exactly the right medicine in the form of those three ghosts to bring Scrooge up. He was loving Scrooge all along, even when Scrooge was a stinker. Dickens had that beautiful attitude of saying, ‘I know there’s more to you than that, Ebenezer. Let me just keep looking at you.’

—George Saunders

**AMERICA’S MOST SURPRISING BANNED BOOKS**

1. 1961: Tarzan series, Edgar Rice Burroughs

Edgar Rice Burroughs’ classic series about a man living in the jungle was pulled from the shelves of a public library in the appropriately named town of Tarzana, California. Authorities thought the adventure stories unsuitable for youngsters, since there was no evidence that Tarzan and Jane had married before they started cohabiting in the treetops. Ralph Rothmund, who ran Burroughs’ estate, protested that the couple had taken marital vows in the jungle with Jane’s father
serving as minister. ‘The father may not have been an ordained minister,’ said Rothmund, ‘but after all, things were primitive in those days in the jungle.’

2. Mid-1960s: Where the Wild Things Are, Maurice Sendak

Author Maurice Sendak had a hard time getting his classic children’s book Where the Wild Things Are published, as many editors feared that troublemaker Max’s imaginary adventure into a fantasy land was too dark and frightening. When the book was finally published in 1963, the book was banned because adults found it problematic that Max was punished by being sent to bed without dinner, and they also bristled at the book’s supernatural themes. A 1969 column in Ladies Home Journal deemed the book ‘psychologically damaging for 3-and 4-year-olds.’

3. Mid-1960s: Harriet the Spy, Louise Fitzhugh

Harriet the Spy was banned from shelves because the titular character spies. Some schools blocked Louise Fitzhugh’s book from shelves when it came out in the 1960s because of concerns that the 11-year-old child’s penchant for peeping on her neighbors, jotting down her brutally honest observations, and being generally disagreeable could negatively influence kids by setting a bad example. Early critics argued that Harriet ‘didn’t spy, but rather gossiped, slandered, and hurt other people without feeling sorry about her actions.’

4. 1969: The Dictionary

You might assume the dictionary is the least likely place a teen would search for illicit content, but school administrators in Alaska believed otherwise. Both American Heritage and Merriam Webster have been banned in various libraries and schools. In 1987, for example, the Anchorage School Board banned the American Heritage Dictionary for its ‘objectionable’ entries—particularly slang words, including ‘bed,’ ‘knocker,’ and ‘balls.’

5. 1977: Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, William Steig

William Steig’s Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, about an unassuming donkey transformed into a rock after finding a magic pebble, portrays a sweet-natured character wishing for the impossible. But the anthropomorphic animals in the award-winning children’s book did not sit well with all audiences. In 1977, police associations in 12 states urged the libraries to remove the book, because it portrays police as pigs.

6. 1983: The Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank
*Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank, chronicles the tragic experience of a Jewish family in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands, where the 13-year-old and her family hid until they were caught and sent to concentration camps in August 1944. The book has been challenged numerous times for sexually explicit passages, and, in 1983, the *Alabama State Textbook Committee* called for rejecting the book because it was ‘a real downer.’

7. 1989: *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss

Beloved children’s author Dr. Seuss took a stand for the environment in 1971 with *The Lorax*, which describes the destruction of an imagined forest of woolly Truffula trees. The narrator chops down the trees to use their foliage to knit clothing. While some readers may have been offended by the book’s use of the word ‘stupid,’ it was the logging industry that was insulted by the anti-deforesting plot line.

8. 1990: *Little Red Riding Hood*, Trina Schart Hyman

When kids read *Little Red Riding Hood*, they take away the message that they shouldn’t talk to strangers—especially those with big, shiny teeth. But when school officials in Culver City, California, looked at an illustrated version of the tale by Trina Schart Hyman, they saw a different message: Alcohol is yummy. They were outraged that young Ms. Hood is pictured with a bottle of wine in her basket, which granny later glugs down. ‘Showing the grandmother who has consumed half a bottle of wine with a red nose is not a lesson we want to teach,’ said an official.


The Brothers Grimm infamously pushed children’s fairy tales to the limits—sometimes landing the 19th-century authors on the banned list. *Hansel and Gretel*, the tale of two siblings who get into trouble for eating sweets reserved for a witch, has been rejected before, but, in 1992, it was challenged again, this time by two self-proclaimed witches who said the tale gives witches a bad name.


Since Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* was published in 1993, it’s been ‘one of the most controversial books in American schools,’ Slate reports. The dystopian young adult novel, about a 12-year-old boy’s discovery of the truths behind the seemingly perfect so-
ciety in which he resides, is most commonly banned for being ‘unsuited to age group,’ for ‘violence,’ or for being ‘sexually explicit’ because of the tough themes it grapples with, including euthanasia and drug use.

11. Mid-1990s: *Where’s Waldo?*, Martin Hanford

*Where’s Waldo?* rose to popularity in the mid-1990s, challenging young readers to find the lanky, bespectacled Waldo in various crowded scenes. The problem wasn’t the perpetually lost protagonist; it was a sunbathing woman suffering a wardrobe malfunction the size of a pinhead in a corner of one of Martin Hanford’s drawings. The exposed breast got the book banned in Michigan and New York.


School authorities in Merrimack, New Hampshire, found nothing amusing about Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, in which a girl washes ashore after a shipwreck, disguises herself as a page, and falls in love with her male master. That jolly cross-dressing and fake-same-sex romance was deemed in violation of the district’s ‘prohibition of alternative lifestyle instruction,’ and copies of the play were pulled from schools.

13. 1999: *James and the Giant Peach*, Roald Dahl

Roald Dahl’s fantastical novel about a boy escaping his miserable life with his aunts by entering a magical, house-sized peach has repeatedly been banned because it contains the word ‘ass.’ Other schools bristled at the fact that *James and the Giant Peach* mentions snuff, tobacco, and whiskey. In Wisconsin in 1999, the book was banned because of concerns the spider licking its lips could be interpreted as sexual.


Even arachnophobes love *Charlotte’s Web*, a heartwarming tale about the friendship between a pig named Wilbur and a wordy barn spider called Charlotte. But a parents group in Kansas decided that any book featuring two talking animals must be the work of the devil, and so had E. B. White’s 1952 work barred from classrooms. The group’s central complaint was that humans are the highest level of God’s creation, as shown by, they said, the fact we’re ‘the only creatures that can communicate vocally. Showing lower life forms with human abilities is sacrilegious and disrespectful to God.’

15. 2007: Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling
While pretty much every child was devouring the final book in the Harry Potter series in 2007, one school was pulling all seven Potter books from its library shelves. The pastor of St. Joseph School in Wakefield, Massachusetts, deemed their sorcery-heavy storylines inappropriate for a Catholic school. Parents said the pastor thought most children were ‘strong enough to resist the temptation,’ but his job was to ‘protect the weak and the strong.’


The children’s picture book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* made a surprise appearance on the banned books list in January 2010 thanks to the Texas Board of Education. Author Bill Martin Jr. happens to have the same name as an obscure Marxist theorist, and no one ‘bothered’ to see if they were the same person.

17. 2010: *What’s Happening To My Body?*, Lynda Madaras

*What’s Happening To My Body?*, a classic guide to those awkward puberty years, was deemed inappropriate and banned by 21 school libraries in Texas. The father who brought the complaint in December 2010 was shocked that the book would be available to his 8-year-old. The *ALA* says the book has been one of the top banned and challenged titles by parents in the last decade.

—*The Week Magazine*

  *Staff*

What we call education and culture is for the most part nothing but the substitution of reading for experience, of literature for life, of the obsolete fictitious for the contemporary real.

--George Bernard Shaw

The test of literature is, I suppose, whether we ourselves live more intensely for the reading of it.

--Elizabeth Drew

The reading public is intellectually adolescent at best, and it is obvious that what is called significant literature will only be sold to this public by exactly the same methods as are used to sell it toothpaste, cathartics and automobiles.

--Raymond Chandler

Only the very weak-minded refuse to be influenced by literature and poetry.

--Cassandra Clare
A children's story that can only be enjoyed by children is not a good children's story in the slightest.

—C. S. Lewis

Fools have a habit of believing that everything written by a famous author is admirable.

—Voltaire

Everyone likes to look down on someone. If your favorites are all avant-garde writers who throw in Sanskrit and German, you can look down on everyone. If your favorites are all Oprah Book Club books, you can at least look down on mystery readers. Mystery readers have sci-fi readers. Sci-fi can look down on fantasy. And yes, fantasy readers have their own snobbishness. I'll bet this, though: in a hundred years, people will be writing a lot more dissertations on Harry Potter than on John Updike. Look, Charles Dickens wrote popular fiction. Shakespeare wrote popular fiction—until he wrote his sonnets, desperate to show the literati of his day that he was real artist. Edgar Allan Poe tied himself in knots because no one realized he was a genius. The core of the problem is how we want to define ‘literature’. The Latin root simply means ‘letters’. Those letters are either delivered—they connect with an audience—or they don’t. For some, that audience is a few thousand college professors and some critics. For others, its twenty million women desperate for romance in their lives. Those connections happen because the books successfully communicate something real about the human experience. Sure, there are trashy books that do really well, but that’s because there are trashy facets of humanity. What people value in their books—and thus what they count as literature—really tells you more about them than it does about the book.

—Brent Weeks

You should never read just for ‘enjoyment.’ Read to make yourself smarter! Less judgmental. More apt to understand your friends’ insane behavior, or better yet, your own. Pick ‘hard books.’ Ones you have to concentrate on while reading. And for god’s sake, don’t let me ever hear you say, ‘I can’t read fiction. I only have time for the truth.’ Fiction is the truth, fool! Ever hear of ‘literature’? That means fiction, too, stupid.

—John Waters

The act of reading imbues the reader with a sensitivity toward the outside world that people who don’t read can sometimes lack. I know it seems like a contradiction in terms; after all reading is such a solitary, internalizing act that it appears to represent a disengagement from day-to-day life. But reading, and particularly the reading of fiction, encourages us to view the world in new and challenging ways...It al-
lows us to inhabit the consciousness of another which is a precursor to empathy, and empathy is, for me, one of the marks of a decent human being.

--John Connolly

Maxims and aphorisms—let us remember that wisdom is the true salt of literature, and the books that are most nourishing are richly stored with it, and that is the main object to seek in reading books.

--John Morley

Literature is always trying to show other parts of this immense universe in which we live. It’s endless.

—Nathalie Sarraute

Romance and novel paint beauty in colors more charming than nature, and describe a happiness that humans never taste. How deceptive and destructive are those pictures of consummate bliss!

—Oliver Goldsmith

I have good reason to be content, for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths.

--John Keats

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege....But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself....Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.

—C. S. Lewis

No longer an underground movement appealing to a small following of enthusiasts, graphic novels have emerged as a growing segment of book publishing, and have become accepted by librarians and educators as mainstream literature for children and young adults—literature that powerfully motivates kids to read....Graphic novels are books written and illustrated in the style of a comic book. The term graphic novel was first popularized by Will Eisner to distinguish his book A Contract with God (1978) from collections of newspaper comic strips. He described graphic novels as consisting of ‘sequential art’—a series of illustrations which, when viewed in order, tell a story. Although today’s graphic novels are a recent phenomenon, this basic way of storytelling has been used in various forms for centuries—early cave drawings, hieroglyphics, and medieval tapestries like the famous Bayeux Tapestry can be thought of as stories told in pictures. The term graphic novel is now general-
ly used to describe any book in a comic format that resembles a novel in length and narrative development.

—scholastic.com

The fiction stacks at the Homewood Library, their volumes alphabetized by author, baffled me. How can I learn to choose a novel? That I could not easily reach the top two shelves helped limit my choices a little. Still, on the lower shelves I saw too many books: Mary Johnson, Sweet Rocket; Samuel Johnson, Rasselas; James Jones, *From Here to Eternity*. I checked out the last because I had heard of it; it was good. I decided to check out books I had heard of. I had heard of the *Mill on the Floss*. I read it, and it was good. On its binding was printed a figure, a man dancing or running; I had noticed this figure before. Like so many children before and after me, I learned to seek out this logo, the Modern Library colophon.

—Annie Dillard

For me, the best smell in the world is my battered, tearstained copy of *Where the Red Fern Grows* from childhood. You know that feeling you get when you’re just about to experience an old favorite? When you’re about to bite into a favorite dish, or run your favorite trail, or sleep in your own bed after being away from home? That’s what that book will always smell like to me.

—Ginni Chen

[Anthony] Trollope fails many tests for me—I do not find him rereadable, as all my truly favourite novelists are. He is sentimental and slapdash; when you read a name like Parson Quiverful, you yell, 'Try harder, Trollope!' Sentimental without (unlike Dickens) the ability to make me cry. And yet...like the creators of really good soap opera, he can start a fairly trivial trail and make you absolutely obsessed with discovering the outcome.

— AN Wilson

We shouldn’t teach great books; we should teach a love of reading. Knowing the contents of a few works of literature is a trivial achievement. Being inclined to go on reading is a great achievement.

—B. F. Skinner

There are metaphors more real than the people who walk in the street. There are images tucked away in books that live more vividly than many men and women. There are phrases from literary works that have a positively human personality. There are passages from my own writing that chill me with fright, so distinctly do I feel them as people, so sharply outlined do they appear against the walls of my room, at night, in shadows... I’ve written sentences whose sound, read out loud or silently (impossible to hide their sound), can only be of something that acquired
absolute exteriority and a full-fledged soul.

--Fernando Pessoa

Just because it’s fiction doesn’t mean it’s any less true.

--Jodi Picoult

You don’t read Gatsby...to learn whether adultery is good or bad but to learn about how complicated issues such as adultery and fidelity and marriage are. A great novel heightens your senses and sensitivity to the complexities of life and of individuals, and prevents you from the self-righteousness that sees morality in fixed formulas about good and evil.

--Azar Nafisi

The unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp. The reader, reading it, makes it live: a live thing, a story.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

Fiction can show you a different world. It can take you somewhere you’ve never been. Once you’ve visited other worlds, like those who ate fairy fruit, you can never be entirely content with the world that you grew up in. Discontent is a good thing: discontented people can modify and improve their worlds, leave them better, leave them different.

And while we’re on the subject, I’d like to say a few words about escapism. I hear the term bandied about as if it's a bad thing. As if ‘escapist’ fiction is a cheap opiate used by the muddled and the foolish and the deluded, and the only fiction that is worthy, for adults or for children, is mimetic fiction, mirroring the worst of the world the reader finds herself in.

If you were trapped in an impossible situation, in an unpleasant place, with people who meant you ill, and someone offered you a temporary escape, why wouldn’t you take it? And escapist fiction is just that: fiction that opens a door, shows the sunlight outside, gives you a place to go where you are in control, are with people you want to be with (and books are real places, make no mistake about that); and more importantly, during your escape, books can also give you knowledge about the world and your predicament, give you weapons, give you armour: real things you can take back into your prison. Skills and knowledge and tools you can use to escape for real.

As JRR Tolkien reminded us, the only people who inveigh against escape are jailers.

--Neil Gaiman
Fiction should be a place of lollipops and escape. Real life is depressing enough—I, for one, don’t want to read about make believe misery, too.

--Nicole Christie

People don’t expect too much from literature. They just want to know they’re not alone with being confused.

--Jonathan Ames

We don’t read novels to have an experience like life. Heck, we’re living lives, complete with all the incompleteness. We turn to fiction to have an author assure us that it means something.

--Orson Scott Card

Poetry, plays, novels, music, they are the cry of the human spirit trying to understand itself and make sense of our world.

—L. M. Elliott

His gaze settles on the discarded book. He leans, reaching until his fingertips graze Dante’s Inferno, still on its bed of folded sheets. ‘What have we here?’ he asks. ‘Required reading,’ I say. ‘It’s a shame they do that,’ he says, thumbing through the pages. ‘Requirement ruins even the best of books.’

--Victoria Schwab

Poetry is not the most important thing in life... I’d much rather lie in a hot bath reading Agatha Christie and sucking sweets.

--Dylan Thomas

The most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature, since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations.

--Iris Murdoch

Fiction has two uses. Firstly, it’s a gateway drug to reading. The drive to know what happens next, to want to turn the page, the need to keep going, even if it’s hard, because someone’s in trouble and you have to know how it’s all going to end ... that’s a very real drive. And it forces you to learn new words, to think new thoughts, to keep going. To discover that reading per se is pleasurable. Once you learn that, you’re on the road to reading everything. And reading is key. There were noises made briefly, a few years ago, about the idea that we were living in a post-literate world, in which the ability to make sense out of written words was somehow redundant, but those days are gone: words are more important than they ever were: we navigate the
world with words, and as the world slips onto the web, we need to follow, to communicate and to comprehend what we are reading. People who cannot understand each other cannot exchange ideas, cannot communicate, and translation programs only go so far.

—Neil Gaiman

There are no bad authors for children, that children like and want to read and seek out, because every child is different. They can find the stories they need to, and they bring themselves to stories. A hackneyed, worn-out idea isn’t hackneyed and worn out to them. This is the first time the child has encountered it. Do not discourage children from reading because you feel they are reading the wrong thing. Fiction you do not like is a route to other books you may prefer. And not everyone has the same taste as you.

Well-meaning adults can easily destroy a child’s love of reading: stop them reading what they enjoy, or give them worthy-but-dull books that you like, the 21st-century equivalents of Victorian ‘improving’ literature. You’ll wind up with a generation convinced that reading is uncool and worse, unpleasant.

And the second thing fiction does is to build empathy. When you watch TV or see a film, you are looking at things happening to other people. Prose fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you, and you alone, using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You’re being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you’re going to be slightly changed. Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals.

—Neil Gaiman

Well-meaning adults can easily destroy a child’s love of reading: stop them reading what they enjoy, or give them worthy-but-dull books that you like, the 21st-century equivalents of Victorian ‘improving’ literature. You’ll wind up with a generation convinced that reading is uncool and worse, unpleasant.

—Neil Gaiman

I was in China in 2007, at the first party-approved science fiction convention in Chinese history. And at one point I took a top official aside and asked him Why? SF had been disapproved of for a long time. What had changed?
It’s simple, he told me. The Chinese were brilliant at making things if other people brought them the plans. But they did not innovate and they did not invent. They did not imagine. So they sent a delegation to the US, to Apple, to Microsoft, to Google, and they asked the people there who were inventing the future about them-
selves. And they found that all of them had read science fiction when they were boys or girls.

Fiction can show you a different world. It can take you somewhere you’ve never been. Once you’ve visited other worlds, like those who ate fairy fruit, you can never be entirely content with the world that you grew up in. Discontent is a good thing: discontented people can modify and improve their worlds, leave them better, leave them different.

—Neil Gaiman

What would happen if we never read the classics? There comes a point in life, it seems to me, where you have to decide whether you’re a Person of Letters or merely someone who loves books, and I’m beginning to see that the book lovers have more fun.

--Nick Hornby

IMAGINATION—the seed of all genius.

—Dan L. Miller

The use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

Mr. Thurber accomplishes something which very few writers do. He has a style combining accuracy, liveliness and quiet—qualities which do not often go together. He has a sense of the wildly incredible things that happen to human beings who think all the time that they are acting with the greatest prudence and common sense. He has you hypnotized. You believe that people really are like the people he writes about and draws. And looking back on it, you see no reason to change your mind. They are.

—Gilbert Seldes

Mr. Thurber’s humor grows almost entirely out of the action of a very keen and inordinately logical mind when confronted with a world which doesn’t make sense. The Thurber method is a natural result of extreme reasonableness in an unreasonable world, and an acute appreciation of the fact that things don’t make sense.

—Richard Lockridge

Thurber is a funny man, no doubt of it; he is also one of the most discerningly and disturbingly bitter. He has a peculiar brand of wisdom not untouched with madness. Long may he flourish.

—Stanley Walker
I could read the great books but the great books don't interest me.

--Charles Bukowski

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is famous for teaching generations of schoolchildren a lesson in empathy and about what it means to walk someone else’s shoes. On the surface it might seem trite, yet how often are we asked to look at things from the point of view of the other, and what are the limits of our empathy? Even Atticus Finch can’t be made to walk in Bob Ewell’s shoes. How often are we asked to truly listen? These days, I feel trapped in my social media silo, where the news I read is a reflection of my politics and the opinions I want to hear. I have to resist slipping into a dogmatic mindset. Have we not created a new form of segregation for ourselves? These questions make up the complex fabric of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Harper Lee implores us to look for nuance, to exit our echo chambers and see the world in more than black and white.

—Laura Vingoe-Cram

From the youngest possible age [the Brontë sisters] wrote, at all hours of the day and night, in every corner of the house, on every scrap of paper. They wrote together. They wrote of each other. The domain of their imagination was a shared space brimming with emotion and fantasy, laid over the everyday world like an invisible map.

—Vanessa Porteous

In a word, literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourse of my book-friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness. The things I have learned and the things I have been taught seem of ridiculously little importance compared with their ‘large loves and heavenly charities.’

--Helen Keller

Even masters of fiction know that they must deeply study the truth they’re repurposing. Ernest Hemingway immersed himself in the culture of bullfighting before he ever dared write about it. Jane Austen had experienced love—and disappointment—before she wrote about true romantic connection. And while their own personal reflections are not the stories we read, their experiences—and the vulnerability that seeps into their writing—is what makes those pieces in endure.

—Maria Walley

The role that [literature] plays in the lives of young readers, and the role that it can play in the lives of all readers, is to create conversation: to be able to engage across lines of socioeconomics, race, gender and sexuality, and to be the jumping off point for that conversation. A lot of times people are scared to have very hard conversa-
tions, or what they perceive to be very hard conversations, and what literature can do is introduce those conversations through characters and make it a safer entry into talking about stuff. When people feel passionate about good books, they want to share them. They want to engage in discussions around them. It also changes people. It stops the routines.

—Jacqueline Woodson

One of the things I love so much about Ursula Le Guin’s *A Wizard of Earthsea* and Robin McKinley’s *Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast* is their deep understanding of landscape, not only as a place to walk through but landscape serving as a character.

—Jane Yolen

*Where the Wild Things Are* is an onion book. Every time you read it, you find another layer. Even though it’s only 10 sentences, 37 pages, 337 words, you ask another question each time you read it….There’a lot going on in that book—if you just read it once, you never get it all. You just get the little story. But it has stories upon stories within it, and I want to know more. Some of it I’ll never know, and some of it I can guess at.

—Jane Yolen

The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* illustrates the greatest heights and the lowest depths of America’s history and potential, while, more than any other work, showing the power of literacy—that when a person can read and write, he gains the ability to create his own narrative, and to shape his life and the surrounding world.

—Carey Cranston

Shakespeare’s collected plays: Four hundred years after the playwright’s death, his influence spans the planet. He was uncannily modern in his inventiveness and gift for engaging the popular imagination; in his depiction of spirited, independent women; and in his appreciation of the contingencies of life in a chaotic world reeling from accelerating change and loss.

—Michiko Kakutani

Dr. Seuss’s *Yertle the Turtle* shows the consequences of abusing power. Yertle the Turtle yelled and screamed at those who supported him, and his lack of gratitude led to his fall from power. The book can teach all of us that as we rise, we need to thank and uplift those who help us.

—Marley Dias
Men speak about peace but prefer war. Men head the majority of governments and control the increasingly lethal weapons, using women and gods as moral shields. Unsparing in its portrayal of men's nature, *The Iliad* should be read by everyone who hopes to understand mankind.

—Esmeralda Santiago

Maya Angelou's poem 'Human Family'—Her signature plea, 'We are more alike my friends, than unalike,' is truly universal.

—Don Marine

I encountered *The Pilgrims Progress* by John Bunyan, and the sincerity of the traveller in that book was overwhelming.

—Lionel Blue

Some people claim that it is okay to read trashy novels because sometimes you can find something valuable in them. You can also find a crust of bread in a garbage can, if you search long enough, but there is a better way.

--Jim Rohn

Back in 1827, a slender volume of poetry was published in Boston. It was anonymous; the author chose to identify himself only as a ‘Bostonian.’ Strictly speaking, this was true. He had been born there, but the day he found his not-too-enthusiastic publisher, he was revisiting his native city for the first time. He was literally starving, and his clothes were threadbare and tattered; perhaps he thought that a graceful nod to his birthplace might spur of the sale of his sheaf of poems. Today...only six copies of the first edition of that little volume are known to exist. One of them was sold recently at auction for $10,000. The title: *Tamerlane and other Poems*; the author: Edgar Allan Poe.

—Bennett Cerf

Reading fiction is important. It is a vital means of imagining a life other than our own, which in turn makes us more empathetic beings. Following complex story lines stretches our brains beyond the 140 characters of sound-bite thinking, and staying within the world of a novel gives us the ability to be quiet and alone, two skills that are disappearing faster than the polar icecaps.

--Ann Patchett

I was there to get a Ph.D. in English literature. That’s not true. I was there to read a lot of books and to discuss them with bright, insightful, book-loving people, an expectation that I pretty quickly learned was about as silly as it could be. Certainly there were other people who loved books, I’m sure there were, but whoever had notified them ahead of time that loving books was not the point, was, in fact,
a hopelessly counterproductive and naive approach to the study of literature, neglected to notify me. It turned out that the point was to dissect a book like a fetal pig in biology class or to break its back with a single sentence or to bust it open like a milkweed pod and say, ‘See? All along it was only fluff,’ and then scatter it into oblivion with one tiny breath.

--Marisa de los Santos

No encounter occurred that day, and I was glad of it; I took out of my pocket a little Homer I had not opened since leaving Marseilles, reread three lines of the Odyssey, learned them by heart; then, finding sufficient sustenance in their rhythm and reveling in them at leisure, I closed the book and remained, trembling, more alive than I had thought possible, my mind numb with happiness.

--André Gide

I am reading The Lord of the Rings. I suddenly wanted to. I almost know it by heart, but I can still sink right into it. I know no other book that is so much like going on a journey.

--Jo Walton

We are liable to miss the best of life if we do not know how to tingle, if we do not learn to hoist ourselves just a little higher than we generally are in order to sample the rarest and ripest fruit of art which human thought has to offer.

--Vladimir Nabokov

Through our reading we can travel to other times and other places, into other people’s minds and hearts and souls: it is a transcendent experience.

--Louise DeSalvo

Literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything.

--André Breton

If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.

--Albert Einstein

I am one who could have forgotten the plague, listening to Boccaccio’s stories; and I am not ashamed of it.

--Elizabeth Barrett

Browning
In some literature, I’ve read, weather is used as a metaphor. The darker and stormier the weather outside the more diabolical the deeds done. When the clouds roll away, however, the rain has washed away all the blood in the streets and the world is clean and new again, as if all the violence and destruction of the storm served a divine purpose.

--Benjamin R. Smith

I long ago abandoned myself to a blind lust for the written word. Literature is my sandbox. In it I play, build my forts and castles, spend glorious time. It is the world outside that box that gives me trouble. I have adapted tamely, though not conventionally, to this visible world so I can retreat without much inconvenience into my inner world of books.

--Rabih Alameddine

If you read a story that really involves you, your body will tell you that you are living through the experience. You will recognize feelings that have physical signs—increased heart rate, sweaty palms, or calm, relaxed breathing and so on, depending on your mood. These effects are the same you would feel in similar real-life experiences—fear, anger, interest, joy, shame or sadness. Amazingly, you can actually ‘live’ experience without moving anything but your eyes across a page.

--Joseph Gold

Literature was the passport to enter a larger life; that is, the zone of freedom. Literature was freedom. Especially in a time in which the values of reading and inwardness are so strenuously challenged, literature is freedom.

--Susan Sontag

Here’s what I love: when a great writer turns me into a Jew from Chicago, a lesbian out of South Carolina, or a black woman moving into a subway entrance in Harlem. Turn me into something else, writers of the world. Make me Muslim, heretic, hermaphrodite. Put me into a crusader’s armor, a cardinal’s vestments. Let me feel the pygmy’s heartbeat, the queen’s breast, the torturer’s pleasure, the Nile’s taste, or the nomad’s thirst. Tell me everything that I must know. Hold nothing back.

—Pat Conroy

I think the reason novels are regarded to have so much more ‘information’ than films is that they outsource the scenic design and cinematography to the reader... This, for me, is a powerful argument for the value and potency of literature specifically. Movies don’t demand as much from the player. Most people know this; at the end of the day you can be too beat to read but not yet too beat to watch television or listen to music.

—Brian Christian
What are we after when we open one of those books? What is it that makes a classic a classic? ... in old-fashioned terms, the answer is that it will elevate your spirit. And that’s why I can’t take much stock in the idea of going through a list of books or ‘covering’ a fixed number of selections, or anyway striving for the blessed state of having read this, or the other. Having read a book means nothing. Reading a book may be the most tremendous experience of your life; having read it is an item in your memory, part of your receding past... Why we have that odd faith in the magic of having read a book, I don’t know. We don’t apply the same principle elsewhere: We don’t believe in having heard Mendelssohn’s violin concerto...

I say, don’t read the classics—try to discover your own classics; every life has its own.

—Rudolf Flesch

Just as pilots gain practice with flight simulators, people might acquire social experience by reading fiction.

—Raymond A. Mar

Every reader must have experienced that depressing moment about fifty pages into a Russian novel when we realize that we have lost track of all the characters, the variety of names by which they are known, their family relationships and relative ranks in the civil service. At this point we can give in to our anxiety, and start again to read more carefully, trying to memorize all the details on the off-chance that some may prove to be important. If such a course is followed, the second reading is almost certain to be more incomprehensible than the first. The probable result: one Russian novel lost forever. But there is another alternative: to read faster, to push ahead, to make sense of what we can and to enjoy whatever we make sense of. And suddenly the book becomes readable, the story makes sense, and we find that we can remember all the important characters and events simply because we know what is important. Any re-reading we then have to do is bound to make sense, because at least we comprehend what is going on and what we are looking for.

—Frank Smith

‘Paradise Lost’ was printed in an edition of no more than 1,500 copies and transformed the English language. Took a while. Wordsworth had new ideas about nature: Thoreau read Wordsworth, Muir read Thoreau, Teddy Roosevelt read Muir, and we got a lot of national parks. Took a century. What poetry gives us is an archive, the fullest existent archive of what human beings have thought and felt by the kind of artists who loved language in a way that allowed them to labor over how you make a music of words to render experience exactly and fully.

—Robert Hass
If you like fantasy and you want to be the next Tolkien, don’t read big Tolkien-esque fantasies—Tolkien didn’t read big Tolkien-esque fantasies, he read books on Finnish philology. Go and read outside of your comfort zone, go and learn stuff.

—Neil Gaiman

Literature cannot be imposed; it must be discovered.

—Amy Joy

The endless piles of genre fiction are the key to happiness. They’re the key to picking out the things that actually make you happy in this world instead of the things that you’re told are good for you. Ninety percent of everything you read is going to be crap one way or the other, so make sure it’s the crap that makes you smile, and don’t apologize for it.

—Steven Lloyd Wilson

Historical novels are, without question, the best way of teaching history, for they offer the human stories behind the events and leave the reader with a desire to know more.

—Louis L’Amour

With so much reading ahead of you, the temptation might be to speed up. But in fact it’s essential to slow down and read every word. Because one important thing that can be learned by reading slowly is the seemingly obvious but oddly under-appreciated fact that language is the medium we use in much the same way a composer uses notes, the way a painter uses paint. I realize it may seem obvious, but it’s surprising how easily we lose sight of the fact that words are the raw material out of which literature is crafted.

—Francine Prose

Read a lot. But read as a writer, to see how other writers are doing it. And make your knowledge of literature in English as deep and broad as you can. In workshops, writers are often told to read what is being written now, but if that is all you read, you are limiting yourself. You need to get a good overall sense of English literary history, so you can write out of that knowledge.

—Theodora Goss

Reading a great work of literature can truly be likened to having a conversation with a great mind.

—Jennie Chancey
In high school, we barely brushed against Ogden Nash, Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, or any of the other so-unserious writers who delight everyone they touch. This was, after all, a very expensive and important school. Instead, I was force-fed a few of Shakespeare’s Greatest Hits, although the English needed translation, the broad comedy and wrenching drama were lost, and none of the magnificently dirty jokes were ever explained. (Incidentally, Romeo and Juliet, fully appreciated, might be banned in some U.S. states.) This was the Concordance again, and little more. So we’d read all the lines aloud, resign ourselves to a ponderous struggle, and soon give up the plot completely.

—Bob Harris

Editors can be stupid at times. They just ignore that author’s intention. I always try to read unabridged editions, so much is lost with cut versions of classic literature, even movies don’t make sense when they are edited too much. I love the longueurs of a book even if they seem pointless because you can get a peek into the author’s mind, a glimpse of their creative soul. I mean, how would people like it if editors came along and said to an artist, ‘Whoops, you left just a tad too much space around that lily pad there, lets crop that a bit, shall we?’. Monet would be ripping his hair out.

—E. A. Bucchianeri

The fiction and poetry of many of the finest writers of the past century or so and I’m thinking here of Conrad, Proust, Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf, Kafka, Plath, Ellison, Lowell, Sexton, Roth, and Coetzee, to name but a few, have been deeply autobiographical. The link between the life and the work is one of the things we’re curious about and look for when we pick up the latest book by a favorite author.

—James Shapiro

Beautiful things grow rich with the emotion that they have aroused in succeeding generations. That is why old things are more beautiful than modern. The Ode on a Grecian Urn is more lovely now than when it was written, because for a hundred years lovers have read it and the sick at heart taken comfort in its lines.

—W. Somerset Maugham

We read to find life, in all its possibilities.

—Claire Messud

Literature enlarges our being by admitting us to experiences not our own. They may be beautiful, terrible, awe-inspiring, exhilarating, pathetic, comic, or merely piquant. Literature give the entree to them all. Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom realize the enormous extension of our being that we owe to authors. We realize it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. he may be full of
goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. My own eyes are not enough for me. Even the eyes of all humanity are not enough. Very gladly would I learn what face things present to a mouse or a bee. (...) In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in a Greek poem, I see with a thousand eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself: and am never more myself than when I do.

—C. S. Lewis

Literature, the best of it, does not aim to be literature. It wants and strives, beyond that artifact part of itself, to be a true part of the composite human record—that is, not words but a reality.

—Mary Oliver

Stories are the wealth of humanity!

—Pierce Brown

My favourite hiding place was in the world of Charles Dickens.

—Anna Jane Greenville

The tremendous pleasure that can come from reading Shakespeare, for instance, was spoiled for generations of high school students who were forced to go through Julius Caesar, As You Like It, or Hamlet, scene by scene, looking up all the strange words in a glossary and studying all the scholarly footnotes. As a result, they never really read a Shakespearean play.

—Mortimer J. Adler

We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become.

--Ursula K. Le Guin

I would not be the person I am without the authors who made me what I am—the special ones, the wise ones, sometimes just the ones who got there first. It’s not irrelevant, those moments of connection, those places where fiction saves your life. It’s the most important thing there is.

—Neil Gaiman

If you will only read, and listen, you will admit a multiplicity of voices and points of view, consider them with some humility, allow them gracious entrance however strident or discordant some of them may sound, then you will grow and change, and
each of these voices will become a constituent part of who you become, an atom of a growing being.
It is literature and only literature that can do this.

—Rick Gekoski

He made it a rule never to touch a book by any author who had not been dead at least 30 years....It's not that I don't believe in contemporary literature...but I don't want to waste valuable time reading any book that has not had the baptism of time. Life is too short.

—Haruki Murakami

Literature is map of humanity, the documenter of civilization. Books introduce us to the landscape of the greatest minds of every century.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

‘Why do the English not read their own great literature?’
‘Because at school they are made to hate it.’

—Olaf Stapledon

Nineteenth-century realism was a revolt against romanticism, with its use of the supernatural and its unreal picture of life—after all, how many Ahab's are out there feverishly chasing whales, and how many Roderick Ushers are immured in darkened gothic castles, about to descend into a dark tarn?
Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne are the major literary exponents of American Romanticism, but as with any literary movement, it ran its course. Under the aegis of William Dean Howells and Henry James, literary realism evoked the kind of life ordinary people lived, at first the middle or business class. Gritty naturalism in the hands of Stephen Crane soon brought this down to the working class and to the seamy side, prefiguring the hard-boiled fiction almost a century later of Raymond Carver (with other precursors, of course, such as Flannery O'Connor).
Still, the gritty, or—as it’s sometimes called—‘low-rent’ fiction didn’t supplant the work of a New Yorker realist like John Updike, who typically reflects a world many readers take in during the ordinary course of their day in contemporary suburbia, the freeway, and the shopping mall....Impressions of lived experience—that’s realism.

—Jack Smith

From the 1970s onward, feminist critics began examining Little Women from a new perspective, alert to the inherent discord between text and subtext. As the literary scholar Judith Fetterley argued in her 1979 essay ‘Little Women: Alcott's Civil War,’ the novel is about navigating adolescence to become a graceful little woman,
but the story itself pushes back against that frame. The character who continually resists conforming to traditional expectations of demure femininity and domesticity (Jo) is the true heroine, and the character who unfailingly acquiesces (Beth) dies shortly after reaching adulthood.

—Sophie Gilbert

Ah, the deliciousness of discovering a masterwork. My heart begins to lift. I can see myself sitting all day in my chair, immersed in lives, plots, and sentences, intoxicated by words and chimeras, paralyzed by satisfaction and contentment, reading until the deepening twilight, until I can no longer make out the words, until my mind begins to wander, until my aching muscles are no longer able to keep the book aloft. Joy is the anticipation of joy.

—Rabih Alameddine

School children, who have enjoyed reading a romance or a detective thriller or a novel about terror and conquest, make the invariable mistake of studying literature in the college. They make the mistake of learning theory in place of art; they acquire impediments in their own enjoyment of the books by allowing a set of theories to govern their own reading.

—Anuradha Bhattacharyya

One way poetry connects is across time. . . . Some echo of a writer’s physical experience comes into us when we read her poem.

—Jane Hirshfield

To evade such temptations is the first duty of the poet. For as the ear is the antechamber to the soul, poetry can adulterate and destroy more surely then lust or gunpowder. The poet’s, then, is the highest office of all. His words reach where others fall short. A silly song of Shakespeare’s has done more for the poor and the wicked than all the preachers and philanthropists in the world.

—Virginia Woolf

When people say that poetry is a luxury, or an option, or for the educated middle classes, or that it shouldn’t be read at school because it is irrelevant, or any of the strange and stupid things that are said about poetry and its place in our lives, I suspect that the people doing the saying have had things pretty easy. A tough life needs a tough language—and that is what poetry is. That is what literature offers—a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn’t a hiding place. It is a finding place.

—Jeanette Winterson
W. H. Auden proposed that Kafka was to the alienated, absurd 20th century what Dante or Shakespeare had been to their times—the writer who captured the essence of the age.

—Adam Kirsch

How could poetry and literature have arisen from something as plebian as the cuneiform equivalent of grocery-store bar codes? I prefer the version in which Prometheus brought writing to man from the gods. But then I remind myself that... we should not be too fastidious about where great ideas come from. Ultimately, they all come from a wrinkled organ that at its healthiest has the color and consistency of toothpaste, and in the end only withers and dies.

—Alice Weaver Flaherty

The novel is a formidable mass, and it is so amorphous—no mountain in it to climb, no Parnassus or Helicon, not even a Pisgah. It is most distinctly one of the moister areas of literature—irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp. I do not wonder that the poets despise it, though they sometimes find themselves in it by accident. And I am not surprised at the annoyance of the historians when by accident it finds itself among them.

—E. M. Forster

Most people in this country are looking for literature that is useful. They feel that just exploring their feelings is good enough—they should be reading about leveraged buy-outs or how to get thin. We live in a culture that is so absolutely, madly focused on commercialism and on creating money and completely turned away from any other kind of creative value. People don’t generally turn to poetry unless they’re bereaved or have fallen in love. Or in adolescence, when their feelings are very strong and turbulent. I think most of us are dying for lack of spirit in this culture.

—Erica Jong

Despite our enchantment with words provocatively strung together, from graffiti to advertising copy, Americans are ambivalent about poetry. We early find ourselves chanting insults, bouncing balls, choosing sides, or skipping rope in measured and rhymed verses that become engraved in our minds. In school, generations of us learned by heart texts that echoed through life: Poe’s ‘Bells,’ Scott’s ‘Lochinvar,’ Browning’s ‘How They Brought the Good News From Ghent to Aix,’ Kipling’s ‘Gunga Din,’ anonymous ballads. Yet few Americans would confess to liking poetry in any form, let alone to actually reading it, even occasionally.

—Morris Freedman
The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.

—Oscar Wilde

Did you ever hear Dylan Thomas? What music! If you had put your hands over your ears, not pressing the drum too closely, you could get that sway, that rhythm that breaks through even without the words. It was a charming experience. Somebody advised me to try it while Thomas was reading. I did when listening to Fern Hill. I went right through the poem with him with my ears almost closed to words as such but with the music beating through.

—May Miller

Poetry is a genre of literature that is frequently neglected or overlooked....Studies show that poetry is the most neglected component in the language arts curriculum, and that teachers tend to neglect poetry based on their prior experiences with analyzing poems.

—Gregory Denman, Jon Shapiro, and Shane Templeton

‘What book have you re-read the most?’ It should come as no surprise...the vast majority cited classics like The Grapes of Wrath, The Great Gatsby and Pride and Prejudice. That’s not because modern books are any worse than their predecessors, of course, but simply because those from the canon are time-tested. As over the years other novels have been written off as hollow or dated, the works of these literary greats endure.

—Tyler Moss

When we look at dystopian fiction throughout the ages, we’re basically looking at the same [topic]: restriction on freedom; sometimes speech, sometimes reading, sometimes other freedoms. I don’t think this is anything new, because if it were, we wouldn’t have had Orwell, Huxley or Bradbury writing about it.

—Christina Dalcher

What’s considered shocking today won’t be shocking tomorrow. One of the most interesting lessons you learn in a used bookstore is that the paperbacks that were sensational—those considered groundbreaking or edgy or a bit naughty back in the day—eventually seem tame and a little quaint. Published in 1956, Peyton Place was the sort of book that got people riled up, with plot points revolving around extra-marital sex, incest (!) and abortion. Nowadays those storylines each have a sublist on the Amazon Bestsellers page.

—Jeff Somers
While good novels act as a time capsule of the period in which they were written, the truly great works of literature are transcendent—their themes universal and prophetic. Frankenstein first came to Shelley in a dream when she was only 18 years old. The text itself imagines what might happen when we push the boundaries of scientific discovery. It explores the essence of life, what it means to be human, where the boundaries of scientific ethics blur, and how it feels to be different and alone in the world.

—Susie Kearley

Centuries ago Voltaire stated that ‘the multiplicity of facts and writings is becoming so great that everything must soon be reduced to extracts.’ Considering that we are now in an age of information glut, we have apparently arrived. Regardless of whether Voltaire was prophetic, there are a number of advantages to using quotations as a staple in the English classroom.

Quotations are short. Considering the fast-paced, media culture in which our students are immersed, a quotation ranging from five to six words to three or four sentences is readily acceptable to the adolescent in a hurry. As a change of pace from short stories, poems, and novels, it’s refreshing to delve into the genre of the quotation to stimulate thought and focus on the development of communication skills.

—Dan L. Miller

Whether taken from 200 B.C., Victorian England, or the Roaring ’20s, quotations yield insight both into the nature of the age and also into the nature of the people who originated the quotes. Quotations embody habits of thought, customs, and moral values. By carefully selecting from the writing of one period, one can unfold, little by little, characteristics and values of that particular age. Similarly, by selecting passages from a particular author’s writings, a teacher can illustrate the style, techniques, values, and the unique traits of that writer.

Alexander Pope’s poetry was didactic, satiric, witty, and technically superb. He dealt with 18th-century generalizations about a rational universe, optimism, and deism. Pope’s poetry concerned itself most often with what was correct, whether in literature or social conduct. By presenting to students and discussing with them these lines from Pope’s writing, one could give a good overview of the poet and even whet the appetites of some students to read Pope in more depth.

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance. (‘An Essay on Criticism’)

Two err is human, to forgive divine. (‘An Essay on Criticism’)

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All nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right.
(‘An Essay on Man’)

Satire’s my weapon, but I’m too discreet
To run amok, and tilt at all I meet.
(‘Imitations of Horace’)

I never knew any man in my life who could not bear a another's mis-
fortunes perfectly like a Christian.
(‘Thoughts on Various Subjects’)

It is with narrow-souled people as with narrow necked bottles; the less
they have in them the more noise they make in pouring out.
(‘Thoughts on Various Subjects’)

—Dan L. Miller

The entertainment value of literature, is, perhaps, its single most important justifi-
cation. Teachers can provide students with a great deal of pleasure through the ju-
dicious selection of quotations that are humorous, that are a clever play on words,
or that present a distinctly fresh view of life.

Poetry is a kind of gasp, and there it is, a spark on the page.
Fiction, on the other hand, is like swamp fire. (Joy Kogawa)

From the moment I picked your book up until I laid it down I was
convulsed with laughter. Someday I intend reading it. (Groucho Marx)

—Dan L. Miller

Every animal leaves traces of what it was; man alone leaves traces of what he cre-
ated.

—Jacob Bronowski

What is art but a way of seeing?

—Saul Bellow
Developmentally appropriate literature that addresses the topic of bullying is a critical component of a program to combat this problem. Not only must the literature be readable, it must also be relevant to young adolescent lives. If students connect to the literature, identify with the protagonist, and relate the theme to their own experiences, they will achieve a higher level of comprehension. This increased understanding of the text can lead to changes in affect and behavior. If the literature deals with the terrible consequences of bullying, it could help the victim and the bully. The victim may derive comfort or coping strategies from reading about another in a similar situation. In addition, the bully might begin to identify with a fictional victim, leading to empathy and the possibility for change.

—Carol Hillsberg and Helene Spak

A good story has more power than an essay in demonstrating how to behave. Students in middle school are capable of taking a story to a high level and turning it into something personal and meaningful. A program that fights bullying through the use of excellent stories offers an effective means to undercut the power and presence of bullies at school.

—Carol Hillsberg and Helene Spak

Up until the English Restoration, what writers referred to as characters were in fact types—broad sketches often premised on a certain set of qualities meant to define a recognizable category of individual: the Gossip, the Prude, the Scold, the Cuckold, and so on. This reliance on types has a long history, dating back to Theophrastus, the student of Aristotle, who authored a guidebook outlining specific ‘moral types.’ English writers especially found Theophrastian character types useful, all the way through the 19th century, and not just in satire. John Dryden and other playwrights of the Restoration relied on types, but they intended for the audience to associate those types with prominent and well-known individuals of the day. From Robinson Crusoe To Moll Flanders—were recognizable as bona fide human beings. The trend intensified with the rise of the realist and naturalist schools in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, and became entrenched in our thinking with the advent of cinema.

—David Corbett

*Black Beauty* was one of many books that marked my childhood, took my breath away, and made me feel like a writer. I was breathing in language, story, word beauty, and the worlds of my passions for animals and landscapes and I was breath-
ing my first baby steps into the world of language mastery and the joy of a perfectly chosen word.

—Pam Allyn

Plot is people. Human emotions and desires founded on the realities of life, working at cross purposes, getting hotter and fiercer as they strike against each other until finally there’s an explosion—that’s Plot.

—Leigh Brackett

Read these three things every night: What you’ve got to do from this night forward is stuff your head with more different things from various fields . . . I’ll give you a program to follow every night, very simple program. For the next thousand nights, before you go to bed every night, read one short story. That’ll take you ten minutes, 15 minutes. Okay, then read one poem a night from the vast history of poetry. Stay away from most modern poems. It’s crap. It’s not poetry! It’s not poetry. Now if you want to kid yourself and write lines that look like poems, go ahead and do it, but you’ll go nowhere. Read the great poets, go back and read Shakespeare, read Alexander Pope, read Robert Frost. But one poem a night, one short story a night, one essay a night, for the next 1,000 nights. From various fields: archaeology, zoology, biology, all the great philosophers of time, comparing them. Read the essays of Aldous Huxley, read Lauren Eisley, great anthropologist. . . I want you to read essays in every field. On politics, analyzing literature, pick your own. But that means that every night then, before you go to bed, you’re stuffing your head with one poem, one short story, one essay—at the end of a thousand nights, Jesus God, you’ll be full of stuff, won’t you?

—Ray Bradbury

[Read as many short stories from the turn of the century as you can, but] stay away from most modern anthologies of short stories, because they’re slices of life. They don’t go anywhere, they don’t have any metaphor. Have you looked at The New Yorker recently, have you tried to read one of those stories? Didn’t it put you to sleep immediately? They don’t know how to write short stories.

—Ray Bradbury

Novels are compendiums of bad behavior, and literature is the gossip about it.

—Ethan Canin

A page of Addison or of Irving will teach more of style than a whole manual of rules, whilst a story of Poe’s will impress upon the mind a more vivid notion of powerful and correct description and narration than will ten dry chapters of a bulky textbook.

—H. P. Lovecraft
The test of a writer is whether you want to read him again years after he should by the rules be dated.

—Raymond Chandler

I’ve come to the stage when I know what I want to do with my future. I want to write, and that’s all, and I need no study of such quaint American writers as Cotton Mather or Philip Freneau — both of whom we are studying in American Lit — to increase my perception or outlook on literature and life. For a person whose sole burning ambition is to write — like myself — college is useless beyond the Sophomore year. By that time he knows that further wisdom comes from reading men like Plato and Montaigne — not Cotton Mather — and from getting out in the world and living. All of the rest of the scholarship in English literature is for pallid, prim and vapid young men who will end up teaching and devoting 30 years of their sterile lives in investigating some miserably obscure facet of the life of some minor Renaissance poet. Sure, scholarship is necessary, but its [sic] not for me. I’m going to write, and I’ll spend the rest of my days on a cattle-boat or jerking sodas before I teach.

—William Styron

One can talk of a book more readily than one can of his own problems without the embarrassment of explicit self revelation…literature may contribute to one’s understanding of his own emotional responses to a person or situation by starting an inner readjustment which will modify his response to the next person or situation encountered.

—Joseph S. Zaccaria, Harold Alton Moses, & Jeff S. Hollowell

When the adolescent becomes aware of the fact that his present experiences and anxieties are not unique and that others have had the same impulses and conflicts, he may be better able to handle them. Frequently, literature is the only means by which he can see he is ‘normal’ and allay guilt and fear thereby.

—Louise Rosenblatt

Storytelling is in our DNA. It’s what differentiates humans from other species: we don’t just communicate information. We tell stories.

—Gabriela Pereira
From George Eliot to Colette, who wrote best-selling novels under her husband’s name, women throughout history have assumed male pseudonyms in order to get published.

—Rachel Donadio

If a plot is a novel’s skeleton, and characters are the muscle, then theme is its soul.

—Janice Hardy

Quotations can function in any number of effective ways in the English classroom, and because of their brevity, the effect of the message, and their general usefulness, teachers should consider quotations as a staple of the unit lesson plan.

—Dan L. Miller

Art is not a metonym for truth telling. All art is a form of a falsifying; otherwise why would anyone need art to tell us what we already know? Art makes us stand back and see what lies outside the four corners of a canvas, it makes us look inside ourselves and realize the sublime truth that previously eluded us. Art makes us realize what already lies within ourselves waiting for the resolute seeker to discover. Art frequently concentrates on the blemishes of nature. When one sees nature disfigured, it reveals both sides of the same notion.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

Language is our identity tool and by using experience, observation, and imagination, we each discover the words that give voice to our lives. To tell our stories is the human method of perforating our isolation tanks, the means to encapsulate what we previously learned, and the mechanism that allows us to enter the universal dialogue of compassion. Sharing the pandemonium of our life’s stories full of grime, love, noise, and steeped in emotional chaos is the act that ultimately binds us to our family, friends, and community. All lovers know each other’s stories. Farmers, villagers, big city hobnobs, and the citizens from all nations share a conjoined thread through storytelling that seriously investigates the collective human condition.

—Kilroy J. Oldster

When ‘Ethan Frome’ first appeared I was severely criticized by the reviewers for what was considered the clumsy structure of the tale. I had pondered long on this structure, had felt its peculiar difficulties, and possible awkwardness, but could think of no alternative which would serve as well in the given case: and though I am far from thinking ‘Ethan Frome’ my best novel, and am bored and even exasperated when I am told that it is, I am still sure that its structure is not its weak point.

—Edith Wharton
Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space.

—Orson Scott Card

A metaphor is like a simile.

—Unknown

I picture myself when I was young, reading and re-reading novels by Sharon Creech, Louis Sachar, and E. L. Konigsburg, and I imagine someone patting my head and telling me these books were nice, but they weren’t real novels. Books—not my community, my education, or any other institution—created the person I am today. These ‘not-real’ novels shaped my soul. It is impossible to say who I’d be without them; my identity is permanently linked to the reading I did when I was younger.

—Nicki Porter

All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you: the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was.

—Ernest Hemingway

Literature was not born the day when a boy crying ‘wolf, wolf’ came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big gray wolf at his heels; literature was born on the day when a boy came crying ‘wolf, wolf’ and there was no wolf behind him.

—Vladimir Nabokov

A story is not like a road to follow … it’s more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you.

—Alice Munro

A short story must have a single mood and every sentence must build towards it.

—Edgar Allan Poe

The primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story.

—Wilkie Collins
Without Wodehouse I am not sure that I would be a tenth of what I am today—whatever that may be. In my teenage years, his writings awoke me to the possibilities of language. His rhythms, tropes, tricks and mannerisms are deep within me. But more than that, he taught me something about good nature. It is enough to be benign, to be gentle, to be funny, to be kind.

—Stephen Fry

The struggle of literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said; what stirs literature is the call and attraction of what is not in the dictionary.

—Italo Calvino

The purpose of a story is to teach and to please at once, and what it teaches is how to recognize the snares of the world.

—Umberto Eco

The good writing of any age has always been the product of someone’s neurosis, and we’d have a mighty dull literature if all the writers that came along were a bunch of happy chuckleheads.

—William Styron

Every story has already been told. Once you’ve read Anna Karenina, Bleak House, The Sound and the Fury, To Kill a Mockingbird and A Wrinkle in Time, you understand that there is really no reason to ever write another novel. Except that each writer brings to the table, if she will let herself, something that no one else in the history of time has ever had.

—Anna Quindlen

Digression is the soul of wit. Take the philosophic asides away from Dante, Milton or Hamlet’s father’s ghost and what stays is dry bones.

—Ray Bradbury

[A young adult novel] ends not with happily ever after, but at a new beginning, with the sense of a lot of life yet to be lived.

—Richard Peck

Romanticism is the abuse of adjectives.

—Alfred De Musset

Hemingway doesn’t have a sense of humor. He never has anything funny in his
stories. —Elmore Leonard

Dickens is estimated to have invented thirteen thousand characters. Thirteen thousand! The population of a small town! —Nick Hornby

Our books are the deepest glimpses into our souls, the most raw and real anybody will ever find us. —Melodie Ramone

I don’t know what I was hoping for. Some small praise, I guess. A bit of encouragement. I didn’t get it. Miss Parrish took me aside one day after school let out. She said she’d read my stories and found them morbid and dispiriting. She said literature was meant to uplift the heart and that a young woman such as myself ought to turn her mind to topics more cheerful and inspiring than lonely hermits and dead children.

‘Look around yourself, Mathilda,’ she said. ‘At the magnificence of nature. It should inspire joy and awe. Reverence. Respect. Beautiful thoughts and fine words.’

I had looked around. I’d seen all the things she’d spoken of and more besides. I’d seen a bear cub lift its face to the drenching spring rains. And the sliver moon of winter, so high and blinding. I’d seen the crimson glory of a stand of sugar maples in autumn and the unspeakable stillness of a mountain lake at dawn. I’d seen them and loved them. But I’d also seen the dark of things. The starved carcasses of winter deer. The driving fury of a blizzard wind. And the gloom that broods under the pines always. Even on the brightest days. —Jennifer Donnelly

Magazines all too frequently lead to books and should be regarded by the prudent as the heavy petting of literature. —Fran Lebowitz

Why are we reading, if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened and its deepest mystery probed? Can the writer isolate and vivify all in experience that most deeply engages our intellects and our hearts? Can the writer renew our hope for literary forms? Why are we reading if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom, courage, and the possibility of meaningfulness, and will press upon our minds the deepest mysteries, so we may feel again their majesty and power? —Annie Dillard
Ours is a culture and a time immensely rich in trash as it is in treasures.

—Ray Bradbury

Wuthering Heights. Emily Bronte was quite young when she wrote it, and had never been outside of Haworth churchyard. She had never known any men in her life; how could she imagine a man like Heathcliff?

—Jean Webster

The novel is perhaps the highest art form because it so closely resembles life: it is about human relationships. It's technique, page by page, resembles our technique of living day by day—a way of relating.

—Joyce Carol Oates

A novel must show how the world truly is, how characters genuinely think, how events actually occur. A novel should somehow reveal the true source of our actions.

—Kevin Hood

Flowers don’t tell, they show. That’s the way good books should be too.

—Stephanie Skeem

Think of Shakespeare and Melville and you think of thunder, lightning, wind. They all knew the joy of creating in large or small forms, on unlimited or restricted canvases. These are the children of the gods.

—Ray Bradbury

The most worthless literature of the world has been that which has been written by the men of one nation concerning the men of another.

—Stephen Crane

I went to the library. I looked at the magazines, at the pictures in them. One day I went to the bookshelves, and pulled out a book. It was Winesburg, Ohio. I sat at a long mahogany table and began to read. All at once my world turned over. The sky fell in. The book held me. The tears came. My heart beat fast. I read until my eyes burned. I took the book home. I read another Anderson. I read and I read, and I was heartsick and lonely and in love with a book, many books, until it came naturally, and I sat there with a pencil and a long tablet, and tried to write, until I felt I could not go on because the words would not come as they did in Anderson.

—John Fante
Like *The Great Gatsby* and *Moby-Dick*, *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Cask of Amontillado* are among the top 100 books assigned in American college English classes....The stories and poems scribbled by the half-mad Romantic have shaped our national obsession with tales of chaos and darkness. Says Kirsten Mollegaard, an English professor at the University of Hawaii at Hilo who has examined Poe’s fame: ‘No other American writer has had as enduring and pervasive an influence on popular culture.’

—Michael Capuzzo

Poe change world literature with the first detective story, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, published in 1841. In other words, he ‘made possible about 80 percent of contemporary literature and television programming,’ says J.W. Ocker....Poe created the forerunner of all fictional detectives to come. In 1901, Arthur Conan Doyle, who created Sherlock Holmes, called Poe the ‘father of the detective tale’ and complained that Poe had ‘covered its limits so completely that I fail to see how his followers can find any fresh ground which they can confidently call their own.’ Poe’s fictional ‘tales of ratiocination,’ as Poe himself called them, also introduced a style of deduction that influenced real-world crime-solving.

—Michael Capuzzo

Earlier European Gothic fiction emphasized the supernatural, castles and curses; Poe brought horror down to earth and made us fear the ordinary and everyday. The deranged narrator in the *Tell-Tale Heart* decides to murder his housemate because he has an evil eye—or maybe just because he wants to. It was the first story of sociopathic horror.

—Michael Capuzzo

After reading Edgar Allan Poe. Something the critics have not noticed: a new literary world pointing to the literature of the 20th Century. Scientific miracles, fables on the pattern A + B, a clear-sighted, sickly literature. No more poetry but analytic fantasy. Something monomaniacal. Things playing a more important part than people; love giving away to deductions and other forms of ideas, style, subject and interest. The basis of the novel transferred from the heart to the head, from the passion to the idea, from the drama to the denouement.

—Jules De Goncourt

The novelist Willa Cather called 1922 the year ‘the world broke in two,’ the start of a great literary, artistic and cultural upheaval. In 1922, *Ulysses* by James Joyce and T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ were published, and the Harlem Renaissance blossomed with the arrival of Claude McKay’s poetry in *Harlem Shadows*.

—Glenn Fleishman
What is queer literature? Basically, anything in which the main character or characters are queer, where a queer lifestyle is featured or where queer concerns are addressed. Coming-out stories were, and remain, a popular form. Some may ask: Why is queer lit even a thing? Well, people are tribal; readers are tribal. We like to read about characters who reflect us because it’s a way we can learn how to deal with life and its challenges. Queer readers had been mentally editing the novels they read for years, changing one character or another’s sex in their imaginations. Highly unsatisfying—and totally beside the point of queer existence.

—Elizabeth Sims

The novel is a formidable mass, and it is so amorphous—no mountain in it to climb, no Parnassus or Helicon, not even a Pisgah. It is most distinctly one of the moister areas of literature—irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp. I do not wonder that the poets despise it, though they sometimes find themselves in it by accident. And I am not surprised at the annoyance of the historians when by accident it finds itself among them.

—E. M. Forster

All Jane Austen novels have a common storyline: an attractive and virtuous young woman surmounts difficulties to achieve marriage to the man of her choice. This is the age-long convention of the romantic novel, but with Jane Austen, what we have is Mills & Boon written by a genius.

—P. D. James

The first (if not necessarily the prime) function of a novelist, of ANY artist, is to entertain. If the poem, painting, play or novel does not immediately engage one’s surface interest, then it has failed. Whatever else it may or may not be, art is also entertainment. Bad art fails to entertain. Good art does something in addition.

—Brigid Brophy

In Catcher in the Rye, the protagonist Holden Caulfield mentions reading books that make him wish he could be friends with the author and be able to call him on the phone and so forth. I would consider a literary work that made someone feel this way a success. Furthermore, it’s the only kind of success in literature that means anything to me.

—Thomas Ligotti

Kids gag at having morals crammed down their throats. But there is a moral inherent in any damn thing you write that has a dramatic point...Still I never set out to prove a point—except for ‘Yertle the Turtle’, a deliberate parable of the life of Hitler.

—Dr. Seuss
Literature might be called the art of story, and story might in turn be called a universal language, for every culture we know of has a tradition of storytelling. No doubt stories have touched your life, too, from bedtime stories you may have heard as a child to news stories you see on TV or read in a newspaper. We might even say that a major goal of living is to created the story of our own lives, a story we hope to take pleasure and pride in telling.

—Andrea A. Lunsford

Editors can be stupid at times. They just ignore that author’s intention. I always try to read unabridged editions, so much is lost with cut versions of classic literature, even movies don’t make sense when they are edited too much. I love the longueurs of a book even if they seem pointless because you can get a peek into the author’s mind, a glimpse of their creative soul. I mean, how would people like it if editors came along and said to an artist, ‘Whoops, you left just a tad too much space around that lily pad there, let’s crop that a bit, shall we?’. Monet would be ripping his hair out.

—E. A. Bucchianeri

For readers worldwide, the attraction of romance novels seems to be that they provide hope, strength, and the assurance that happy endings are possible. Romance makes the promise that no matter how bleak things sometimes look, in the end everything will turn out right and true love will triumph—and in an uncertain world, that’s very comforting.

—Leigh Michaels

The...great therapeutic power of literature—it doesn’t just echo our own experience, recognise, vindicate and validate it—it takes us places we hadn’t imagined but which, once seen, we never forget. When literature is working—the right words in the right place—it offers an orderliness which can shore up readers against the disorder, or lack of control, that afflicts them.

—Blake Morrison

Novels...put readers in someone else’s shoes, which encourages empathy and is valuable for socializing people. The simple act of appreciating someone else’s suffering is likely to put your own in perspective, making books the ideal therapy for adolescents (at any age).

—Shannon Rupp

If the book (Invisible Man) was only of interest because I am a Negro, it should be forgotten. If it failed to say something about people, I have failed.

—Ralph Ellison
Although the bibliotherapists sometimes prescribe philosophy, poetry and creative nonfiction books, novels are more common. So why is fiction more therapeutic? Research has shown that literary fiction enhances our ability to empathize with others, to put ourselves into another’s shoes; to become more intuitive about other people’s feelings (as well as our own), and to self-reflect on our problems as we read about and empathize with a fictional character who is facing similar problems. When we find ourselves weeping with or for the character in the story, we are also weeping for ourselves; a sort of catharsis. When our character finds happiness in the end, well perhaps so can we. When the story drops us into a hurricane, we learn from that, and if we are ever faced with a real one, it will not be an entirely new experience. We may discover ourselves coping in ways that we can only have learned from that novel we read years before.

—Jenni Ogden

A novel is not an allegory… It is the sensual experience of another world. If you don’t enter that world, hold your breath with the characters and become involved in their destiny, you won’t be able to empathize, and empathy is at the heart of the novel. This is how you read a novel: you inhale the experience. So start breathing!

—Azar Nafisi

A book enters the life of an individual, a deep relation is formed, and the person changes in some significant way.

—Stephen Bonnycastle

Rich literature is an effective antidote to the intrinsic impulsiveness of adolescents, especially in an electronic era. If it is true that the medium is often the message, curricula that depend on careful reading and thoughtful conversation are powerful models for the responsible, informed, respectful communication essential to all healthy human relationships. In addition, literature-based education shows students that art is not an irrelevant pastime typically reserved for Sunday afternoons. On the contrary, fine literature etches life’s complexities clearly and when well taught inspires us to discover wisdom for our own lives....good teachers connect ideas in literature to choices in real life. Conversations begun in the classroom but expanded to include parents, other adults, and friends who are not classmates help teenagers come to appreciate the value of collective wisdom. It also helps them realize that we continue to grapple with the intricacies of relationships throughout adulthood and that the potential rewards are worth the effort. As students consider the connections to their own lives, the story can remain a sanctuary. Talking about fictional characters and events affords a measure of safety but can address very personal issues.

—Stephan Elenwood and Nancy McLaren
An author’s artful use of language shapes the reader’s imagination and understanding often by the choice of a single word or phrase. Therefore, in order to understand a story fully, readers must slow down, or ‘text crawl.’

—Stephan Ellenwood and Nancy McLaren

I read The Bell Jar after a really rough patch in my life. It comforted me more than anything else my family told me. While they mean well and I appreciate them, they have no knowledge of what it’s really like to live with anxiety or depression. Reading Plath helped me better understand myself and gain perspective.

—Leyva

Literature has the ability to break into the sense of individual isolation that so often induces moral apathy and meism. By giving students an awareness that they are part of a larger community, it reassures them that they alone do not carry the burden of certain thoughts, ideas and feelings.

—Susan R. Parr

The word bibliotherapy first appeared in 1930, in an article by G. O. Ireland in Modern Hospital. Other names applied to this therapy have been biblioprophylaxis and therapeutic reading. In the United States, the Menningers were among the first to foster interest in this new aid to healing. In 1937, Dr. Will Menninger wrote The Prescription of Literature and later Dr. Karl added A Guide to Psychiatric Books. Providing a case for bibliotherapy, Dr. Karl notes that Robert Downs issued Books That Changed the World and states, ‘Since we know that many books have in many different ways changed the thinking the world, we can easily believe that many an individual can and does have his life changed directly through the experience of reading a book.

—Dr. William S. O’Bruba and Dr. Donald A. Camplese

Bibliotherapy as a preventive approach is concerned with the technique in which a teacher attempts to solve a child’s problem by bringing him a similar experience vicariously through books. Through recognition of the problem and its solution in literature, the individual gains insight into his own problems and presumably is then able to take a step toward solving it.

The theory of preventive bibliotherapy can be expressed in three points.

➢ All children and adolescents face certain types of problems.
➢ By reading and developing a sane attitude, youngsters are better prepared to make a satisfactory adjustment when similar problems arise.
A little vicarious injection of experience with a problem in a book is to prevent a bad case of this same kind of experience in the young readers’ development.

—Dr. William S. O’Bruba and Dr. Donald A. Camplesse

Books are dynamic and vital, capable of changing the whole direction of events; sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. Throughout history, there is ample evidence that books are not inanimate, peaceful articles belonging to the cloistered shades and academic quiet of monasteries, universities, and other retreats from an evil, materialistic world. The incidence of book burnings, banishment and murder of writers, and the suppression of ideas and opposition by dictators down through the ages to the present, bear mute testimony to the power—the explosive forces pent up in books.

—Archie L. Lejeune

_The Prince_, which has been a best seller for over 400 years, was written by Machiavelli for the express purpose of freeing his beloved Italy from foreign aggression; England was ready for a vast expansion of her commercial and industrial economy when Adam Smith wrote _The Wealth of Nations_; Thomas Paine’s _Common Sense_ triggered the American Revolution; Harriet Beecher Stowe’s _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ did likewise for the Civil War; Karl Marx’s _Das Kapital_ described the capitalistic system as he found it in 19th Century England and his doctrines propounded therein have long since had the official force of a religion in the Communist World; Henry David Thoreau’s essay _On the Duty of Civil Disobedience_ ultimately was to provide the inspiration and impetus of the non-violent resistance movement of Ghandi in India and Martin Luther King in the United States; and last but by no means least, Adolph Hitler’s _Mein Kampf_ became the philosophy of millions of people in the late 1930’s. Five million copies of Hitler’s book were sold in Germany in 1939 and who knows how many copies of _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ have been sold since its release!

Obviously, these books carried messages of a highly emotional nature, appealing to untold millions of people—sometimes the influence was beneficent and sometimes evil. Clearly, books can be forces of both good and bad—they are, as well, dynamic and powerful instruments, tools, or weapons.

—Archie L. Lejeune

Without Shakespeare’s plays, Dostoyevsky’s novels, or James’s short stories, our knowledge of anguish and conflict would be hollow, our self-revelation would be one-dimensional.

—Jeffrey A. Kottler

(1986)
If you have ever felt warm, weepy, excited, or renewed after reading a book, then you have experienced a form of bibliotherapy. We’ve all laughed and cried as our favorite characters succeeded and failed, because good literature is built on life itself—and life’s not always easy! But once in awhile a particular book or passage from a book touches us, and we are never the same again. Life is fuller as a result of these moments, but such insightful occasions are rare. Happening upon a book that deals fictionally or factually with immediate emotional, intellectual, social, and even physical needs is like finding a four-leaf clover.

—Claudia E. Cornett and Charles F. Cornett

There is something about words. In expert hands, manipulated deftly, they take you prisoner. Wind themselves around your limbs like spider silk, and when you are so enthralled you cannot move, they pierce your skin, enter your blood, numb your thoughts. Inside you they work their magic.

—Diane Setterfield

Bibliotherapy is the process of using books to teach those receiving medical care about their conditions.

— Samuel Carothers (1916)

Bibliotherapy is a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature—interaction which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment, and growth.

—David Russell and Caroline Shrodes (1950)

Bibliotherapy is psychology through literature—reading that is used to help solve or prevent problems.

—Adolph Stadel (1964)

Bibliotherapy is therapeutic reading in which children find duplications of their own problems and observe how children similar to themselves face their difficulties.

—Matilda Bailey (1964)

Bibliotherapy is defined as an interaction between the reader and certain literature which is useful in aiding personal adjustment.

—Barbara Lindeman and Martin King (1968)
Bibliotherapy is getting the right book to the right child at the right time about the right problem.

—Sara Lundsteen (1972)

Bibliotherapy is a family of techniques for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant . . . based on their mutual sharing of literature.

— F. M. Berry (1978)

Bibliotherapy is the use of literature...to help me through difficult situations, feelings and thought-processes and to allow me to appreciate the beauty of words and skilled writing.

—Lucy Horner (2013)

I would define bibliotherapy as...

A sure-fire way to get to know yourself
One of the easiest ways to relate to others when you feel isolated
Something that allows you to be inspired by others...
Yet to also learn from their mistakes
The result of reclining on a sun lounger with a trashy novel
Or, sitting in a well-supported reading chair and learning from history’s finest minds
A process highly linked to that incredible feeling of reading the last paragraph of a great book
The simple way you can be changed by words next to words on paper
The consequence of challenging, beautiful or iconic lives documented in text
A perpetual legacy that authors can share long after their passing
Something that must be accompanied by a good cup of tea
Not always a relaxing or welcome process, but one that is sometimes harsh and uncomfortable
A way to get your thinking back on track when you feel anxious or upset
Often born in a good bookshop
A lifelong companion and provider of guidance to all those who welcome it
Open entirely to interpretation.

—Lucy Horner (2013)
The bibliotherapeutic process has been found to have the following effects on readers:

**Affective Changes (attitudes, values, emotions)**
- Promotes empathy
- Creates positive attitudes
- Produces personal and social adjustment
- Develops positive self-image
- Relieves emotional pressures
- Develops new interests
- Promotes tolerance, respect, and acceptance of others
- Encourages realization that there is good in all people
- Helps reader to identify socially accepted behaviors
- Stimulates the examination of moral values, which results in character development
- Creates a desire to emulate models

**Cognitive changes (intellectual, reasoning, thinking)**
- Stimulates critical thinking, such as analysis, drawing conclusions and implications, making decisions, solving problems, making judgments
- Gives perspective to problems so that they can be put into proper proportion; reader sees universality of problems
- Provides vicarious experiences
- Provides insight into human behavior and motives
- Develops in the reader the ability for self-evaluation
- Challenges readers to consider higher-level reasoning
- Encourages planning before taking a course of action
- Permits discussion on an impersonal level
- Reveals that problems have many alternative solutions and individuals have choices in solving problems

In summary, through bibliotherapy cognitive and affective changes occur in the reader that enable him or her to fully or partially satisfy an unfulfilled need. Through bibliotherapy young people can be helped to cope with a multitude of problems.

—Claudia E. Cornett and Charles F. Cornett
Words are merely words, but real literature for any age is words chosen with skill and artistry to give the readers pleasure and to help them understand themselves and others.

—Rebecca Lukens

In the large body children’s literature...many resources can be found for fostering the moral growth of young people. To prepare children to think critically about ethical concerns, schools should emphasize the thoughtful reading of such literature....Well-trained teachers, who understand the needs of students and who value literature, can identify appropriate books and develop creative critical-thinking activities based on them. Every time a story is read aloud or a novel discussed, such teachers are fostering moral education.

Recent research has shown the effectiveness of using literature and structured discussions of moral dilemmas to stimulate the growth of children’s moral judgment. Indeed, the value of literature in enriching the lives of children is manifold. Above all, books provide pleasure and insight. The narrative patterns of storytelling reflect an ordered way life. And by imaginatively entering the fictional worlds created by talented authors, children come to perceive their own environment and other people in fresh ways.

Through the vicarious experiences reading offers, children can see and feel how others have lived, and understand how they have dealt with the universal questions of life.

And stories can become quests for self-discovery. Facing the conflicts and dilemmas posed by a given tale, the young reader postulates fundamental questions: ‘Who am I?’ ‘What is my place in the world?’ ‘How can I make this a better world?’

—Jerry Watson

A fundamental goal of education is to enhance students’ ability to analyze critically not only their own behavior but also that of others. While we remind ourselves, for instance, that we are all capable of telling lies, the more formidable task is to discern when others are lying to us. To help children develop character, we must ask them to judge others’ characters.

We must prepare children to cope with living in a world of uncertainty—not to dissolve in cynical despair, but to function with a healthy sense of suspicion about what they see, hear, and read.

—Jerry Watson
Do we want our children to know what honesty means? Then we might teach them about Abe Lincoln walking three miles to return six cents and, conversely, about Aesop’s shepherd boy who cried wolf.

Do we want our children to know what courage means? Then we might teach them about Joan of Arc, Horatius at the Bridge, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.

Do we want them to know about kindness and compassion, and their opposites? Then they should read *A Christmas Carol* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* and, later on, *King Lear*.

—William Bennett

Educators and librarians know that for a child to learn well, and to succeed in interpersonal relationships and handle crises in an acceptable manner, he or she must feel a sense of security and well-being. When children feel their world is crumbling around them, they hardly can be expected to function on a high level of emotional response. It is then that literature can give a child insight into his or her situation as well as possible alternatives for solving a personal problem. It is both helpful and rewarding when readers can actually ‘see’ themselves in a story or poem. Therefore, recognizing a child’s need is an important first step in selecting and suggesting materials for reading or listening, if that material is to help in a particular situation.

—Linda B. Hendrickson

The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life.

—William Faulkner

I am dismayed by the recent rise of the term ‘literary fiction,’ denoting a genre almost as rarefied and special and ‘curious’ in its appeal, to contemporary Americans, as poetry.

—John Updike

It was clever marketing by publishers to set certain contemporary fiction apart and declare it Literature—and therefore Important, Art, and somehow better than other writing.

—Elizabeth Edmondson

*The Iliad* told the story of the Trojan War; its sequel [Homer’s *The Odyssey*] describes Odysseus’ subsequent journey home. A rare war sequel that’s better but did not require a higher budget.

—Joshua A. Gelzer
THE 15 MOST BORING CLASSICS:

14. Vanity Fair – W.M. Thackeray
13. Das Kapital – K. Marx
12. Remembrance of Things Past – M. Proust
11. War and Peace – L. Tolstoy
10. Faust – J. W. von Goethe
9. Don Quixote – M. de Cervantes
8. Ivanhoe – W. Scott
6. Pamela – S. Richardson
5. Life of Samuel Johnson – J. Boswell
4. The Faerie Queene – E. Spenser
3. Paradise Lost – J. Milton
2. Moby Dick – H. Melville

And coming in as the #1 most boring book ever inflicted on lit. majors:
1. Pilgrim’s Progress – J. Bunyan

—Maggie Galehouse

11 BORING BOOKS TO HELP BATTLE INSOMNIA:

On the Road by Jack Kerouac (1957)
Swann’s Way by Marcel Proust (1913)
Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov (1962)
Gravity's Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon (1973)
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley (1818)
Moby-Dick by Herman Melville (1851)
Blood Meridian by Cormac McCarthy (1985)
Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand (1957)
Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy (1878)
Finnegans Wake by James Joyce (1939)
The Brothers Karamazov by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1880)

Too many adults wish to ‘protect’ teenagers when they should be stimulating them to read of life as it is lived.

—Margaret A. Edwards

Children’s and YA books are about being brave and kind, about learning wisdom and love, about that journey into and through maturity that we all keep starting, and starting again, no matter how old we get. I think that’s why so many adults read YA: we’re never done coming of age.

—Betsy Cornwell

In our age one of the glories of poetry is that it remains an art that demonstrates the virtues and pleasure of TAKING YOUR TIME. You can never read a poem too slowly, but you can certainly read one too fast. Poems are not read like novels. There is much pleasure to be had in taking the same fourteen-line sonnet to bed with you and reading it many times over for a week. Savor, taste, enjoy. Poetry is not made to be sucked up like a child’s milkshake, it is much better sipped like a precious malt whisky. Verse is one of our last stands against the instant and the infantile. Even when it is simple and childlike it is to be savored.

Always try to read verse out loud: if you are in a place where such a practice would embarrass you, read out loud inside yourself (if possible, moving your lips). Among the pleasures of poetry is the sheer physical, sensual, textural, tactile pleasure of feeling the words on your lips, tongue, teeth and vocal cords. Poetry is an entirely different was of using words and I cannot emphasize enough how much more pleasure is to be derived from a slow, luxurious engagement with its language and rhythms.

—Stephen Fry

Great stories changed our heart and penetrated our soul.

—Lailah Gifty Akita

Reading and writing, like everything else, improve with practice. And, of course, if there are no young readers and writers, there will shortly be no older ones. Literacy will be dead, and democracy—which many believe goes hand in hand with it—will be dead as well.

—Margaret Atwood

We like to romanticize people who live in the wilderness. But when I lived in Concord, Massachusetts, people like to tell me there was a footpath between Walden Pond and Concord because Henry David Thoreau often went into town to have tea with friends. He didn’t want to sit alone in his cabin all the time. He wanted to interact with other people, to hear new stories and expand his world.

—Minik Rosing
Before 1855, the year that Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*, he had achieved no distinction whatsoever. He had no formal education—no Oxford, no Cambridge, no Harvard or Yale. His life up to his 35th year had been anything but a success....In the summer of 1854, he was a carpenter, framing two-and-three-room houses in Brooklyn.

—Mark Edmundson

‘Song of Myself,’ arguably [Walt] Whitman’s greatest work, can be seen as a vision quest. In the original version, which had no title when it was published in 1855, in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman begins as an everyday workingman. He is ‘one of the roughs,’ the tough, laboring type who is depicted on the book’s frontispiece—shirt open, hat tilted to the side, a calmly insouciant expression on his face. Through a series of poetic and spiritual encounters he gains in experience and wisdom to become a representative democratic individual, one who can show his countrymen and countrywomen the way to a thriving and joyous life.

—Mark Edmundson

Graphic novels can...help improve language and literacy development, including second language learners; the illustrations provide valuable contextual clues to the meaning of the written narrative.

—Philip Crawford

Graphic novels and comic books are less likely to be viewed as ‘baby’ books, with students who identify themselves as non-readers still expressing interest in them.

—Kat Kan

Some people in their reading limit themselves to current talked-about best sellers. Oh, what they miss! The library is full of yesterday’s best sellers; and they still make compelling reading today.

—James A. Michener

Poetry teachers especially at the high school and undergraduate levels, should spend less time on analysis and more on performance. Poetry needs to be liberated from literary criticism. Poems should be memorized, recited, and performed. The sheer joy of the art must be emphasized. The pleasure of performance is what first attracts children to poetry, the sensual excitement of speaking and hearing the words of the poem. Performance was also the teaching technique that kept poetry vital for centuries. Maybe it also holds the key to poetry’s future.

—Mark Edmundson
The critic John Ruskin said, ‘Shakespeare has no heroes—he has only heroines.’ A striking number of those heroines refuse to obey rules. At least 10 defy their fathers, bucking betrothals they don’t like to find their own paths to love. Eight disguise themselves as men, outwitting patriarchal controls—more gender-swapping than can be found in the work of any previous English playwright. Six lead armies. The prevailing view, however, has been that no women in Renaissance England wrote for the theater, because that was against the rules. Religious verse and translation were deemed suitable female literary pursuits; ‘closet dramas,’ meant only for private reading, were acceptable. The stage was off-limits. Yet scholars have lately established that women were involved in the business of acting companies as patrons, shareholders, suppliers of costumes, and gatherers of entrance fees. What’s more, 80 percent of the plays printed in the 1580s were written anonymously, and that number didn’t fall below 50 percent until the early 1600s.

—Elizabeth Winkler

Shakespeare’s life is remarkably well documented, by the standards of the period—yet no records from his lifetime identify him unequivocally as a writer. The more than 70 documents that exist show him as an actor, a shareholder in a theater company, a moneylender, and a property investor. They show that he dodged taxes, was fined for hoarding grain during a shortage, pursued petty lawsuits, and was subject to a restraining order. The profile is remarkably coherent, adding up to a mercenary impresario of the Renaissance entertainment industry. What’s missing is any sign that he wrote.

—Elizabeth Winkler

Pulp was popular as magazines, novels, and novellas during the first half of the 20th century because it was escapist fiction with high drama, exaggerated villains and heroes, and punchy, super-vivid covers. These exploits served as a distraction during world wars, national economic hardships, and the growing pains of settling into a more industrialized world.

—Heidi Ruby Miller

If you read great literature every day, you will uplift your spirit, soul and self.

—Lailah Gifty Akita

If a nation’s literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays.

—Ezra Pound

A man who has not read Homer is like a man who has not seen the ocean. There is a great object of which he has no idea.

—Walter Bagehot
Although much wonderful poetry is being written, the American poetry establishment is locked into a series of exhausted conventions—outmoded ways of presenting, discussing, editing, and teaching poetry. Educational institutions have codified them into a stifling bureaucratic etiquette that enervates the art. These conventions may once have made sense, but today they imprison poetry in an intellectual ghetto. It is time to experiment, time to leave the well-ordered but stuffy classroom, time to restore a vulgar vitality to poetry and unleash the energy now trapped in the subculture. There is nothing to lose. Society has already told us that poetry is dead. Let’s build a funeral pyre out of the desiccated conventions piled around us and watch the ancient, spangle-feathered, unkillable phoenix rise from the ashes.

—Mark Edmundson

I’m not talking about epic poems. We all know how long they can take. I’m talking about the smallish, unofficial garden-variety poem. How shall I describe it?—a door opens, a door shuts. In between you have had a glimpse: a garden, a person, a rainstorm, a dragonfly, a heart, a city. I think of those round glass Victorian paperweights which I remember, yet can never find—a far cry from the plastic mass-productions which stud the toy counters in Woolworth’s. This sort of paperweight is a clear globe, self-complete, very pure, with a forest or village or family group within it. You turn it upside down, then back. It snows. Everything is changed in a minute. It will never be the same in there—not the fir trees, nor the gables, nor the faces.

So a poem takes place.
And there is really so little room! So little time! The poet becomes an expert packer of suitcases.

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet black bough.

There it is: the beginning and the end in one breath. How would the novelist mange that? In a paragraph? In a page? Mixing it, perhaps, like paint, with a little water, thinning it, spreading it out.

—Sylvia Plath

If a poem is concentrated, a closed fist, then a novel is relaxed and expansive, an open hand: it has roads, detours, destinations; a heart line, a head line; morals and money come into it. Where the fist excludes and stuns, the open hand can touch and encompass a great deal in its travels.

—Sylvia Plath
The great use of poetry is its pleasure—not its influence as religious or political propaganda. Certain poems and lines of poetry seem as solid and miraculous to me as church altars or the coronation of queens must seem to people who revere quite different images. I am not worried that poems reach relatively few people. As it is, they go surprisingly far—among strangers, around the world, even. Farther than the words of a classroom teacher or the prescriptions of a doctor; if they are very lucky, farther than a lifetime.

—Sylvia Plath

Arguments about the decline of poetry's cultural importance are not new. In American letters they date back to the nineteenth century. But the modern debate might be said to have begun in 1934 when Edmund Wilson published the first version of his controversial essay ‘Is Verse a Dying Technique?’ Surveying literary history, Wilson noted that verse’s role had grown increasingly narrow since the eighteenth century. In particular, Romanticism’s emphasis on intensity made poetry seem so ‘fleeting and quintessential’ that eventually it dwindled into a mainly lyric medium. As verse—which had preciously been a popular medium of narrative, satire, drama, even history and scientific speculation—retreated into lyric, prose usurped much of its cultural territory. Truly ambitious writers eventually had no choice but to write in prose. The future of great literature, Wilson speculated, belonged almost entirely to prose.

—Mark Edmundson

Louis Untermeyer’s Modern American Poetry, first published in 1919, was recently revised to keep it up to date and was a perennial best seller. My 1942 edition, for example, had been reprinted five times by 1945. My edition of Oscar William’s A Pocket Book of Modern Poetry and been reprinted nineteen times in fourteen years. Untermeyer and Williams prided themselves on keeping their anthologies broad-based and timely. They tried to represent the best of what was being published. Each edition added new poems and poets and dropped older ones. The public appreciated their efforts. Poetry anthologies were an indispensable part of any serious reader’s library. Random House’s popular Modern Library series, for example, included not one but two anthologies—Selden Rodman’s A New Anthology of Modern Poetry and Conrad Aiken’s Twentieth Century American Poetry. All these collections were read and reread by a diverse public. Favorite poems were memorized. Difficult authors like Eliot and Thomas were actively discussed and debated. Poetry mattered outside the classroom.

—Mark Edmundson
The quote has traditionally been relegated to a small corner of our literary appreciation—in volumes of high-level anthologies destined to collect dust on the shelf. Readers of quote books have always turned to these volumes of classical wit and ideology for little more than moments of idle amusement, or, at best, reference. Seldom, if ever, has a book of quotations reflected its own time or been read cover-to-cover, much as one would read an absorbing novel.

Today, however, as a result of the general cultural awakening...and the pervading influence of multi-media in our society, we no longer need to wait for the future to understand the impact of the present. Instead, we readily turn to the words of our contemporary philosophers...for our understanding of ourselves and our experiences in the world around us. Their instamatic expressions have drawn the quotation out of its corner and into the foreground of print.

—Barbara Rowes