

Literatures and Cultures of the United States Recommended Core Texts by Literary Periods (Prof. Fitz, American Studies)

The following, strongly selective list is meant as an introduction to influential works of U.S. American literatures. The works are organized by publication date. Texts printed in **bold** should be regarded as key examples for a certain time period, genre, and/or author. Texts additionally marked in **yellow** should be considered “must read” texts. At the end of this list you can also find examples for (contemporary) Canadian literatures.

All U.S. American texts that have been part of the written “Staatsexamen für Literaturwissenschaft” are marked with an asterisk (*).

Please feel free to add and substitute texts of this reading list according to your special interests. To find (excerpts of) these texts and other suggestions, you can also refer to current volumes of the *Heath* or *Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

Colonial Period, Beginning—1760s

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506)	“Letter to Luis de Santangel Regarding the First Voyage” (1493) “Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella Regarding the Fourth Voyage” (1503)
Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566)	“The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies” (1552)
Thomas Harriot (1560-1621)	<i>Brief and True Report of the New Found Land Virginia</i> (1588)
John Smith (1580-1632)	<i>A Description of New England</i> (1616) (* <i>The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles</i> (1624)
John Winthrop (1588-1649)	“A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)
William Bradford (1590-1657)	<i>Of Plymouth Plantation</i> (1630-1650)
Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)	(*) Selection of poems, esp. “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” (1678), “The Author to Her Book” (1678), “To My Dear and Loving Husband” (1678), “On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet, Who Died on 16 November, 1669, Being But a Month, and One Day Old” (1678)
Mary Rowlandson (ca. 1637-1711)	<i>A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson</i> (1682)

Edward Taylor (1642-1729) *Preparatory Meditations* (1682-1725), esp. "Meditation 38 (First Series)" (1690)

Sarah Kemble Knight (1666-1727) *The Private Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York* (1704-1705)

Revolutionary and Early Republican Period, ca. 1760s—1820s

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1733-1738), esp. "The Way to Wealth" (1733) **(*) Autobiography (1791/1868)**

Samson Occom (1723-1792) "A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian" (1772)

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773)

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) "Declaration of Independence" (1776) *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782), esp. "Query XIX"

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) **(*) Common Sense** (1776) "The Rights of Man" (1791-1792)

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1731-1813) **(*) Letters from an American Farmer** (1782), esp. from "Letter III: What is an American"

Philip Freneau (1752-1832) "Wild Honeysuckle" (1786) "The Indian Burying Ground" (1787)

James Madison (1751-1836) "Federalist No. 10" (1787)

Constitution of the United States (1789)

Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) **(*) The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself** (1789)

Judith Sargent Murray(*) (1751-1820) "On the Equality of the Sexes" (1790)

Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) **(*) Edgar Huntly** (1799)

Romantic Period and American Renaissance, ca. 1820s—1860s

Washington Irving (1783-1859) "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)	(*) <i>The Pioneers</i> (1823) (*) <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> (1826)
William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878)	"The Prairies" (1832)
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)	(*) "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) (*) <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (1850)
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)	"Nature" (1836) (*) "The American Scholar" (1837) "Self-Reliance" (1841) (*) Selection of poems, esp. "Concord Hymn" (1837), "The Snow-Storm" (1847)
Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)	"The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" (1841) "The Masque of Red Death" (1842) "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842) "The Raven" (1845) "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846)
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)	"A Psalm of Life" (1839)
Margaret Fuller (1810-1859)	"The Great Lawsuit" (1843)
Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself</i> (1845) (*) "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (1855)
Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)	"Civil Disobedience, or Resistance to Civil Government" (1849) (*) <i>Walden, or Life in the Woods</i> (1854)
Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797-1883)	"Ain't I a Woman?" (1851)
Herman Melville (1819-1891)	<i>Moby Dick</i> (1851) "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) (*) "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight" (1866)
Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896)	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (1852)
Walt Whitman (1819-1892)	Preface to <i>Leaves of Grass</i> (1855 edition) (*) "Song of Myself" (1892 edition) "When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloo'd" (1865)

(*) "To a Locomotive in Winter" (1876)

(*) "A Broadway Pageant" (1900)

Harriet Jacobs
(ca. 1813-1897)

(*) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Julia Ward Howe
(1819-1910)

(*) "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1861)

Emily Dickinson
1886)

(*) Selection of poems, esp. 207 "I taste a liquor never brewed" (1830-1861), 359 "A Bird, came down the Walk-" (1862), 409 "The Soul selects her own Society" (1862), 479 "Because I could not stop for Death" (1862), 591 "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died" (1863), 764 "My Life has stood – a Loaded Gun" (1863)

Abraham Lincoln
(1809-1865)

"Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863" (1863)

American Realism and Naturalism, ca. 1860s—1910s

Mark Twain
(1835-1910)

"The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865)
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884-1885)

Louisa May Alcott
(1832-1888)

Little Women (1868-1869)

Bret Harte
(1836-1902)

"The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (1869)

Henry James
(1843-1916)

"Daisy Miller: A Study" (1878)
The Portrait of a Lady (1881)
"The Art of Fiction" (1884)

William Dean Howells
(1837-1920)

The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885)
"Criticism and Fiction" (1892)

Sarah Orne Jewett
(1849-1909)

"A White Heron" (1886)

Ambrose Bierce
(1842-1914)

"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)
"Chickamauga" (1891)

Hamlin Garland
(1860-1940)

"Under the Lion's Paw" (1891)

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
(1852-1930)

"A New England Nun" (1891)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1940)	(*) "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892)
Kate Chopin (1850-1904)	"At the 'Cadian Ball'" (1892) and "The Storm" (1898) (*) "The Story of an Hour" (1894) (*) <i>The Awakening</i> (1899)
Stephen Crane (1871-1900)	<i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i> (1893) (*) <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> (1895) "The Open Boat" (1898)
Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)	"Atlanta Exposition Address" (1895) <i>Up from Slavery</i> (1901)
Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875-1935)	"Sister Josepha" (1899)
Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945)	<i>Sister Carrie</i> (1900)
Frank Norris (1870-1902)	<i>The Octopus</i> (1901)
Jack London (1876-1916)	"The Law of Life" (1902) <i>The Call of the Wild</i> (1903) <i>The Road</i> (1907) (*) "To Build a Fire" (1908)
W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963)	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (1903)
Israel Zangwill (1864-1926)	<i>The Melting Pot</i> (1905)
Upton Sinclair (1878-1968)	<i>The Jungle</i> (1906)

Modernism, ca. 1910s—1950s

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946)	<i>Three Lives</i> (1909) <i>The Making of Americans</i> (1903, 1906-11)
James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)	<i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> (1912)
Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)	(*) "We Wear the Mask" (1913)

Willa Cather (1873-1947)	<i>O Pioneers!</i> (1913) <i>One of Ours</i> (1922)
Robert Frost (1874-1963)	(*) Selection of poems, esp. “Mending Wall” (1914), “The Road not Taken” (1916) , “Putting in the Seed” (1920), “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (1923), “The Gift Outright” (1941)
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886-1961)	“Oread” (1914) “Helen” (1924)
Ezra Pound (1885-1972)	“A Pact” (1916) “In a Station of the Metro” (1916)
Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)	(*) “Chicago” (1916)
Susan Glaspell (1876-1948)	(*) <i>Trifles</i> (1917) (*) <i>The Verge</i> (1921)
T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)	(*) “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917) “The Waste Land” (1922)
Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941)	(*) <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> (1919)
Edith Wharton (1862-1937)	<i>The Age of Innocence</i> (1920)
Anzia Yezierska (ca. 1880-1970)	“The Lost 'Beautifulness'” (1920)
Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953)	<i>The Emperor Jones</i> (1920) (*) <i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i> (1956)
Angelina Weld Grimké (1880-1958)	<i>Rachel</i> (1920)
Claude McKay (1889-1948)	(*) Selection of poems, esp. “America” (1921), “Harlem Dancer” (1922), “If We Must Die” (1922), “The White House” (1922)
Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)	(*) “Recuerdo” (1922)
Elmer Rice (1892-1967)	<i>The Adding Machine</i> (1923)
William Carlos Williams	“Spring and All” (1923)

(1883-1963)	"The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923)
Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)	"Indian Camp" (1924) (* "Soldier's Home" (1925) <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> (1926) <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (1929) (* "A Day's Wait" (1933) "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936)
F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)	(* <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (1925) "Babylon Revisited" (1931)
Zora Neale Hurston (ca. 1891-1960)	"Sweat" (1926) <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (1937)
e. e. cummings (1894-1962)	"next to of course god america i" (1926) (* "i sing of Olaf glad and big" (1931)
Langston Hughes (1902-1967)	"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1926) <i>Don't You Want to Be Free?</i> (1938)
Countee Cullen (1903-1946)	"From the Dark Tower" (1927)
William Faulkner (1897-1962)	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i> (1929) "A Rose for Emily" (1930) (* "Dry September" (1931) (* <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> (1936)
John Dos Passos (1896-1970)	<i>U.S.A. Trilogy</i> (1930-1936)
John Steinbeck (1902-1968)	(* <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (1933) <i>Of Mice and Men</i> (1937)
Lillian Hellman (1905-1984)	<i>The Children's Hour</i> (1934)
Clifford Odets (1906-1963)	(* <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> (1935)
Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)	"The Man-Moth" (1935)
Marianne Moore (1887-1972)	(* "Poetry" (1935)
Wallace Stevens	"The Idea of Order at Key West" (1936)

(1879-1955)	“Of Modern Poetry” (1942)
Thornton Wilder (1897-1975)	(*) <i>Our Town</i> (1938)
W. H. Auden (1907-1973)	(*) “The Unknown Citizen” (1939)
Richard Wright (1908-1960)	<i>Native Son</i> (1940)
James Agee (1909-1955)	<i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> (1941)
Eudora Welty (1909-2001)	“A Worn Path” (1941)
Tennessee Williams (1911-1984)	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i> (1944) (*) <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> (1947)
Arthur Miller (1915-2004)	<i>All My Sons</i> (1947) (*) <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (1949) (*) <i>The Crucible</i> (1953)
Norman Mailer (1923-2007)	<i>The Naked and the Dead</i> (1948)
Postmodernism and beyond (incl. Multiculturalism and Neorealism), ca. 1950s—present	
J. D. Salinger (1919-2010)	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> (1951)
Ralph Ellison (1914-1994)	(*) <i>Invisible Man</i> (1952)
James Baldwin (1924-1987)	<i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i> (1953)
Charles Olson (1920-1970)	“Maximus, To Himself” (1953)
Ray Bradbury (1920-2012)	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (1953)
Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)	“Howl” (1955) “A Supermarket in California” (1955)

“America” (1956)

Jack Kerouac

(1922-1969)

***On the Road* (1957)**

Bernard Malamud

(1914-1986)

The Assistant (1957)

Vladimir Nabokov

(1899-1977)

Lolita (1958)

Lorraine Hansberry

(1930-1965)

(* *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)

Gary Snyder

(*1930)

“Riprap” (1959)

William S. Burroughs

(1914-1997)

Naked Lunch (1959)

Harper Lee

(1926-2016)

To Kill a Mockingbird (1960)

Anne Sexton

(1928-1974)

“Her Kind” (1960)

Joseph Heller

(1923-1999)

Catch-22 (1961)

Edward Albee

(1928-2016)

The American Dream (1961)

***Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962)**

(* *The Sandbox* (1966)

Ken Kesey

(1935-2001)

One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962)

Martin Luther King, Jr.

(1929-1968)

“I have a Dream” (1963)

Sylvia Plath

(1932-1963)

The Bell Jar (1963)

“Lady Lazarus” (1966)

Bob Dylan

(* 1941)

(* Selection of lyrics, e.g. “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” (1963),

“Like a Rolling Stone” (1965), “The Death of Emmett Till” (1962; 1972)

John Cheever

(1912-1982)

(* “The Swimmer” (1964)

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014)	(*) <i>Dutchman</i> (1964)
Robert Lowell (1917-1977)	"For the Union Dead" (1964)
Malcom X (1925-1965)	<i>The Autobiography of Malcom X</i> (1965)
Truman Capote (1924-1984)	<i>In Cold Blood</i> (1965)
Thomas Pynchon (*1937)	<i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> (1966)
John Barth (*1930)	"Lost in the Funhouse" (1968)
Scott Momaday (*1934)	<i>House Made of Dawn</i> (1968)
Arthur Kopit (*1937)	<i>Indians</i> (1968)
Tom Wolfe (*1931)	<i>The Electric Kool-Aid-Acid Test</i> (1968)
Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007)	(*) "Welcome to the Monkey House" (1968) (*) <i>Slaughterhouse Five</i> (1969)
Maya Angelou (1928-2014)	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> (1969)
Sonia Sanchez (*1934)	(*) "to blk/record/buyers" (1970)
Alice Walker (*1944)	(*) "Everyday Use" (1973) <i>The Color Purple</i> (1982)
Donald Barthelme (1931-1989)	"A Manual for Sons" (1975)
John Updike (1932-2009)	"Separating" (1975)
Ntozake Shange (1948-2018)	(*) <i>for colored girls who have considered suicide</i> (1976)

Simon J. Ortiz (*1941)	"My Father's Song" (1976)
Mitsuye Yamada (*1923)	<i>Camp Notes and Other Poems</i> (1976)
Maxine Hong Kingston (*1940)	<i>The Woman Warrior</i> (1976)
Leslie Marmon Silko (*1948)	<i>Ceremony</i> (1977)
Denise Levertov (1923-1997)	"A Woman Alone" (1978)
Audre Lorde (1934-1992)	"Chain" (1978)
Adrienne Rich (1929-2012)	"Power" (1978)
Art Spiegelman (*1948)	<i>Maus: A Survivor's Tale</i> (1980)
Sam Shepard (1943-2017)	<i>True West</i> (1980)
Marsha Norman (*1947)	<i>'night, Mother</i> (1982)
Toni Morrison (*1931-2019)	"Recitatif" (1983) <i>Beloved</i> (1987)
Joy Harjo (*1951)	"Remember" (1983)
Louise Erdrich (*1954)	(*) "I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move" (1984) <i>The Round House</i> (2012)
Don DeLillo (*1936)	<i>White Noise</i> (1985)
Paul Auster (*1947)	<i>The New York Trilogy</i> (1985-1986)
August Wilson (1945-2005)	<i>Fences</i> (1985) <i>The Piano Lesson</i> (1987)

Linda Hogan (*1947)	"The Truth Is" (1985)
Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004)	<i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i> (1987)
Hisaye Yamamoto (1921-2011)	"Seventeen Syllables" (1988)
Amy Tan (*1952)	<i>The Joy Luck Club</i> (1989)
Rita Dove (*1952)	"Arrow" (1989)
Sandra Cisneros (*1954)	<i>Women hollering creek, and other stories</i> (1991), esp. "Mericans"
Bret Easton Ellis (*1964)	<i>American Psycho</i> (1991)
Gerald Vizenor (*1934)	<i>The Heirs of Columbus</i> (1991) (*) <i>Dead Voices</i> (1992)
David Mamet (*1947)	<i>Oleanna</i> (1992)
Sherman Alexie (*1966)	<i>The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven</i> (1993) (*) "What You Pawn I Will Redeem" (2003) <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> (2007)
T. C. Boyle (*1948)	<i>Tortilla Curtain</i> (1995)
Barack Obama (*1961)	<i>Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance</i> (1995)
Charles Burns (*1955)	<i>Black Hole</i> (1995)
Lisa See (*1955)	<i>On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family</i> (1995)
Chuck Palahniuk (*1962)	<i>Fight Club</i> (1996)
Joyce Johnson (*1935)	<i>Minor Characters</i> (1999)

Susan Sontag (1933-2004)	<i>In America</i> (1999)
Philip Roth (*1933-2018)	<i>The Human Stain</i> (2000)
Jeffrey Eugenides (*1960)	<i>Middlesex</i> (2002)
Jonathan Safran Foer (*1977)	(*) <i>Extremely Loud & Incredible Close</i> (2005)
Kevin Guilfoile (*1968)	<i>Cast of Shadows</i> (2005)
Alison Bechdel (*1960)	<i>Fun Home</i> (2006)
Cormac McCarthy (*1933)	<i>The Road</i> (2006)
Jhumpa Lahiri (*1967)	<i>Unaccustomed Earth</i> (2008)
Christina Henríquez (*1977)	<i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> (2014)
Celeste Ng (*1980)	<i>Everything I Never Told You</i> (2014)
Adam Johnson (*1967)	<i>Fortune Smiles</i> (2015)
Colson Whitehead (*1969)	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> (2016)

Canadian Literatures

E. Pauline Johnson (1861-1913)	"A Red Girl's Reasoning" (1913)
Margaret Laurence (1926-1987)	<i>The Stone Angel</i> (1964)
Robertson Davies (1913-1995)	<i>The Deptford Trilogy</i> (1970-1975)

Alice Munro (*1931)	<i>Lives of Girls and Women</i> (1971) <i>Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage</i> (2001) <i>Dear Life</i> (2012)
James Reaney (1926-2008)	<i>Poems</i> (1972) <i>The Donnelly's: Sticks and Stones</i> (1974)
Sharon Pollock (*1936)	<i>Blood Relations</i> (1980) <i>Doc</i> (1984)
William Gibson (*1948)	<i>Neuromancer</i> (1984)
Margaret Atwood (*1939)	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> (1985) <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003) <i>The Year of the Flood</i> (2009) <i>MaddAddam</i> (2013)
Jeannette Armstrong (*1948)	<i>Slash</i> (1985) <i>Breath Tracks</i> (1991) <i>Whispering in Shadows</i> (2000)
Tomson Highway (*1951)	<i>The Rez Sisters</i> (1986) <i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i> (1998)
Dionne Brand (*1953)	<i>Sans Souci and Other Stories</i> (1988) "This Body For Itself" (1994) <i>A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging</i> (2001)
Drew Hayden Taylor (*1962)	<i>Toronto at Dreamer's Rock</i> (1990) <i>AlterNatives</i> (2000)
Michael Ondaatje (*1943)	<i>The English Patient</i> (1992)
Thomas King (*1943)	<i>Green Grass, Running Water</i> (1993) <i>The Truth About Stories</i> (2003) <i>Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America</i> (2012)
Rutz Ozeki (*1956)	<i>My Year of Meats</i> (1998) <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (2013)
Marie Clements (*1962)	<i>The Unnatural and Accidental Women</i> (2000)
Eden Robinson (*1968)	<i>Monkey Beach</i> (2000)