**Classic Fiction:**

**American Literature**

*People have different opinions about what makes something a classic. The consensus for books is that they must be “timeless”. The messages, ideas and themes they convey should resonate with readers many years after the books are published.*

*Choose from the list below or pick another title by the recommended author, and let us know if you think these books are truly “classic”. What books would you add?*

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

In picturesque nineteenth-century New England, tomboyish Jo, beautiful Meg, fragile Beth, and romantic Amy come of age while their father is off to war.

***Go Tell It On the Mountain* by James Baldwin**

Baldwin lays bare the secrets of a tormented black family in Harlem during the depression, through the eyes of 14-year-old John Grimes.

***My Antonia* by Willa Cather**

Antonia Shimerda arrives on the Nebraska frontier with her family of Bohemian emigrants. Cather celebrates the spirit and courage of the immigrant pioneers whose strength helped to build America.

***The Awakening* by Kate Chopin**

First published in 1899, this tells the story of a New Orleans wife who attempts to find love outside a stifling marriage.

***House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros***

This story of a young girl's growing up in the Latino section of Chicago,told in a series of stunning vignettes

***Last of the Mohicans* by James F. Cooper**

This unforgettable picture of American frontier life is an imaginative, innovative, and classic 18th-century adventure.

***Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane**

Bored with farm life, and anxious for some excitement, Henry Fleming sets off to join the Union troops fighting the Civil War.

***Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison**

The nameless narrator describes the trials of growing up in a black community in the South, getting expelled from college, moving to New York, and retreating amid violence and confusion to the basement, as the Invisible Man he imagines himself to be.

***As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner**

Faulkner's harrowing account of the Bundren family's odyssey across the Mississippi countryside to bury Addie, their wife and mother.

***Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Dick Diver, psychiatrist, appears to have it all until his wife Nicole begins to show signs of schizophrenia. Set in Paris post-WWI.

***The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett**

Sam Spade, a private eye with his own code of ethics, along with a cast of unusual characters, seeks a treasure worth killing for.

***The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne**

Themes of sin, guilt, and redemption, are woven through a story of adultery in the early days of the Massachusetts Colony.

***Catch-22* by Joseph Heller**

Set in Italy during World War II, this comic masterpiece stars the reluctant bombardier, Yossarian, a hero who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him.

***Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway**

Set during World War I, this is the unforgettable story of an American ambulance driver on the Italian front and his passion for a beautiful English nurse.

***Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert Heinlein**

The story of Valentine Michael Smith, the man from Mars who taught humankind grokking, water-sharing and love.

***Dune* by Frank Herbert**

A blend of adventure, environmentalism and politics, set on the desert planet Arrakis. A boy avenges the plot against his noble family--and brings to fruition humankind's most ancient and unattainable dream.

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

Set in the 1920s, free-spirited Janie’s search for happiness leads her through several marriages, challenging the morals of her small African American town.

***On the Road* by Jack Kerouac**

This semi-autobiographical novel is the original road trip. It took the Beat Movement mainstream and fused literature and the youth culture inextricably in the 50s and 60s.

***One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by Ken Kesey**

Set in a mental ward, this novel chronicles the head-on collision between its hell-raising, life-affirming hero Randle Patrick McMurphy and the totalitarian rule of Big Nurse.

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

Set in the Yukon during the 19th Century Gold Rush,Buck, who is shipped to the Klondike to be trained as a sled dog, reverts to his primitive, wolflike ancestry and is transformed into the legendary "Ghost Dog".

***The Natural* by Bernard Malamud**A fascinating blend of magical realism and sports, this is the story of Roy Hobbs, a “natural” at baseball, who doesn’t get to prove his talent until he’s in his mid-thirties.

***A Thousand Pieces of Gold* by Ruth Lum McCann**

When famine strikes China in 1871, thirteen-year-old Lalu’s father is forced to sell her. She ends up in the American West.

***The Heart is A Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers**

At its center is the deaf-mute John Singer, who becomes the confidant for various types of misfits in a Georgia mill town during the 1930s. Each one yearns for escape from small town life.

***Goodbye Columbus* by Philip Roth**

In this coming-of-age story about a summer romance, Roth explores tensions from class, generational, religious, and educational differences in the 1950s.

***Catcher in the Rye* by** **JD Salinger**

Sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield, a native New Yorker who leaves his prep school in Pennsylvania and goes underground in New York City for three days, views life with almost unbearable honesty.

***East of Eden* by John Steinbeck**

Set in the rich farmland of California’s Salinas Valley, this often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel.

***A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith**

Francie Nolan, avid reader and clever observer of human nature, has much to ponder in colorful, turn-of-the-20th century Brooklyn. She turns out well, despite her sweet but alcoholic father and severely realistic mother.

***Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet B. Stowe**

Published in 1852, this powerful novel, attacks slavery and, according to Lincoln,

Stowe was “the little woman who started the [Civil] War.”

***Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan**

Cuts between four Chinesemothers and four Chinese American daughters-- families whose histories shift with the four winds depending on who's "saying" the stories.

***Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

One of the world’s great antiwar books, set during WWII and centering on the infamous firebombing of Dresden. Billy Pilgrim’s odyssey through time reflects the mythic journey of our own fractured lives as we search for meaning in what we fear most.

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

Celie is a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she is being abused and raped by her and continuing over the course of her marriage to "Mister," a brutal man who terrorizes her.

***Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton**

Set in upper class New York City in the 1870s, Newland, the lead character, is a man torn between the old and new, the conservative and the progressive, represented by the two women in his life.

***Native Son* by Richard Wright**

Set in Chicago in the 1930s, this is the story of Bigger Thomas, a young black man caught in a downward spiral after he kills a young white woman in a brief moment of panic.