**The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne**

Set in the harsh Puritan community of seventeenth-century Boston, this tale of an adulterous entanglement that results in an illegitimate birth reveals Nathaniel Hawthorne's concerns with the tension between the public and the private selves. Publicly disgraced and ostracized, Hester Prynne draws on her inner strength and certainty of spirit to emerge as the first true heroine of American fiction. Arthur Dimmesdale, trapped by the rules of society, stands as a classic study of a self divided.

**A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway**

In 1918 Ernest Hemingway went to war, to the war to end all wars. He volunteered for [ambulance service](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10799.A_Farewell_to_Arms) in Italy, was wounded, and twice decorated. Out of his experiences came A Farewell to Arms. Hemingway's description of war is unforgettable. He recreates the fear, the comradeship, the courage of his young American volunteer, and the men and women he meets in Italy with total conviction. But A Farewell to Arms is not only a novel of war. In it, Hemingway has also created a love story of immense drama and uncompromising passion.

**The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway**

The quintessential novel of the Lost Generation, The Sun Also Rises is one of Ernest Hemingway's masterpieces and a classic example of his spare but powerful writing style. A poignant look at the disillusionment and angst of the post-World War I generation, the novel introduces two of Hemingway's most unforgettable characters: Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley. The story follows the flamboyant Brett and the hapless Jake as they journey from the wild nightlife of 1920s Paris to the brutal bullfighting rings of Spain with a motley group of expatriates. It is an age of moral bankruptcy, spiritual dissolution, unrealized love, and vanishing illusions. First published in 1926, The Sun Also Rises helped to establish Hemingway as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century.

**The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck**

First published in 1939, Steinbeck’s Pulitzer Prize winning epic of the Great Depression chronicles the Dust Bowl migration of the 1930s and tells the story of one Oklahoma farm family, the Joads, driven from their homestead and forced to travel west to the promised land of California. Out of their trials and their repeated collisions against the hard realities of an America divided into haves and have-nots evolves a drama that is intensely human yet majestic in its scale and moral vision, elemental yet plainspoken, tragic but ultimately stirring in its human dignity. A portrait of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man’s fierce reaction to injustice, and of one woman’s stoical strength, the novel captures the horrors of the Great Depression and probes the very nature of equality and justice in America.

**A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines**

A Lesson Before Dying is set in a small Cajun community in the late 1940s. Jefferson, a young black man, is an unwitting party to a liquor store shoot out in which three men are killed; as the only survivor, he is convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Grant Wiggins, who left his hometown for the university, has returned to the plantation school to teach. As he struggles with his decision whether to stay or escape to another state, his aunt and Jefferson's godmother persuade him to visit Jefferson in his cell and impart his learning and his pride to Jefferson before his death. In the end, the two men forge a bond as they both come to understand the simple heroism of resisting and defying the expected. Ernest J. Gaines brings to this novel the same rich sense of place, the same deep understanding of the human psyche, and the same compassion for a people and their struggle that have informed his previous, highly praised works of fiction.