

## AP Language Independent Reading List

- ***The Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger (in classroom)**
  - The novel's protagonist and antihero, Holden Caulfield, has become an icon for teenage rebellion. The novel was among the 100 best English-language novels from 1951 to 2005 as chosen by *Time*, and named by Modern Library and its readers as one of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. It has been frequently challenged in the United States for its liberal use of profanity and portrayal of sexuality and teenage angst. It also deals with complex issues of identity, belonging, connection and alienation.
  
- ***A Prayer for Owen Meany*, John Irving (Only \$2.99 on Kindle)**
  - In the summer of 1953, two eleven-year-old boys—best friends—are playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire. One of the boys hits a foul ball that kills the other boy's mother. The boy who hits the ball doesn't believe in accidents; Owen Meany believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul ball is extraordinary.
  
- ***The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne**
  - One of the greatest American novels, its themes of sin, guilt, and redemption, woven through a story of adultery in the early days of the Massachusetts Colony, are revealed with remarkable psychological penetration and understanding of the human heart.
  
- ***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey**
  - An international bestseller and the basis for a hugely successful film, **Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** was one of the defining works of the 1960s. A mordant, wickedly subversive parable set in a mental ward, the novel chronicles the head-on collision between its hell-raising, life-affirming hero Randle Patrick McMurphy and the totalitarian rule of Big Nurse. McMurphy swaggers into the mental ward like a blast of fresh air and turns the place upside down, starting a gambling operation, smuggling in wine and women, and egging on the other patients to join him in open rebellion. But McMurphy's revolution against Big Nurse and everything she stands for quickly turns from sport to a fierce power struggle with shattering results. With **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**, Kesey created a work without precedent in American literature, a novel at once comic and tragic that probes the nature of madness and sanity, authority and vitality.
  
- ***All the King's Men*, Robert Penn Warren (in classroom)**
  - *All the King's Men* traces the rise and fall of demagogue Willie Stark, a fictional character loosely based on Governor Huey "Kingfish" Long of Louisiana. Stark begins his political career as an idealistic man of the people but soon becomes corrupted by success and

caught between dreams of service and an insatiable lust for power, culminating in a novel that Sinclair Lewis pronounced, on the book's release in 1946, "one of our few national galleries of character."

- ***Catch 22, Joseph Heller***

- Set in Italy during World War II, this is the story of the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a hero who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. But his real problem is not the enemy—it is his own army, which keeps increasing the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service. Yet if Yossarian makes any attempt to excuse himself from the perilous missions he's assigned, he'll be in violation of Catch-22, a hilariously sinister bureaucratic rule: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes a formal request to be removed from duty, he is proven sane and therefore ineligible to be relieved.

- ***A Walk in the Woods, Bill Bryson***

- Back in America after twenty years in Britain, Bill Bryson decided to reacquaint himself with his native country by walking the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine. The AT offers an astonishing landscape of silent forests and sparkling lakes--and to a writer with the comic genius of Bill Bryson, it also provides endless opportunities to witness the majestic silliness of his fellow human beings.

- ***The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, Michael Chabon***

- A young escape artist and budding magician named Joe Kavalier arrives on the doorstep of his cousin, Sammy Clay. While the long shadow of Hitler falls across Europe, America is happily in thrall to the Golden Age of comic books, and in a distant corner of Brooklyn, Sammy is looking for a way to cash in on the craze. He finds the ideal partner in the aloof, artistically gifted Joe, and together they embark on an adventure that takes them deep into the heart of Manhattan, and the heart of old-fashioned American ambition.

- ***The Whisper of the River, Ferrol Sams***

- Now the redoubtable Porter Osborne, Jr. is back - a little older, slightly more worldly, but just as full of mischief and curiosity as ever. With the power and grace which readily identify Ferrol Sams's writing, THE WHISPER OF THE RIVER confronts young Porter with a maelstrom of conflict, growth, and heightened sexuality.

- ***All the World Was Young, Ferrol Sams***

- In the beginning of this long and somewhat sentimental novel, set during World War II, Porter is a medical student. He deliberately flunks out so that he can join the war effort and is sent to Normandy as a medical assistant. Porter and his friends deal with the same

issues found in any coming-of-age novel--family, religion, personal identity, and relations with the opposite sex. Porter, however, has an edge.

- ***The Fountainhead*, Ayn Rand**

- This instant classic is the story of an intransigent young architect, his violent battle against conventional standards, and his explosive love affair with a beautiful woman who struggles to defeat him. This edition contains a special Afterword by Rand's literary executor, **Leonard Peikoff** which includes excerpts from Ayn Rand's own notes on the making of **The Fountainhead**. As fresh today as it was then, here is a novel about a hero—and about those who try to destroy him.

- ***Cat's Cradle*, Kurt Vonnegut**

- Written contemporaneously with the Cuban missile crisis and countenancing a version of a world in the grasp of magnified human stupidity, the novel is centered on Felix Hoenikker, a chemical scientist reminiscent of Robert Oppenheimer... except that Oppenheimer was destroyed by his conscience and Hoenikker, delighting in the disastrous chemicals he has invented, has no conscience at all. Hoenikker's "Ice 9" has the potential to convert all liquid to inert ice and thus destroy human existence; he is exiled to a remote island where Boskonism has enlisted all of its inhabitants and where religion and technology collaborate, with the help of a large cast of characters, to destroy civilization.

- ***Into the Wild*, John Krakauer**

- Immediately after graduating from college in 1991, McCandless had roamed through the West and Southwest on a vision quest like those made by his heroes Jack London and John Muir. In the Mojave Desert he abandoned his car, stripped it of its license plates, and burned all of his cash. He would give himself a new name, Alexander Supertramp, and , unencumbered by money and belongings, he would be free to wallow in the raw, unfiltered experiences that nature presented. Craving a blank spot on the map, McCandless simply threw the maps away. Leaving behind his desperate parents and sister, he vanished into the wild.

- ***Columbine*, Dave Cullen**

- On April 20, 1999, two boys left an indelible stamp on the American psyche. Their goal was simple: to blow up their school, Oklahoma-City style, and to leave "a lasting impression on the world." Their bombs failed, but the ensuing shooting defined a new era of school violence-irrevocably branding every subsequent shooting "another Columbine." When we think of Columbine, we think of the Trench Coat Mafia; we think of Cassie Bernall, the girl we thought professed her faith before she was shot; and we think of the boy pulling himself out of a school window -- the whole world was watching him. Now, in a riveting piece of journalism nearly ten years in the making, comes the story none of us

knew. In this revelatory book, Dave Cullen has delivered a profile of teenage killers that goes to the heart of psychopathology. He lays bare the callous brutality of mastermind Eric Harris, and the quavering, suicidal Dylan Klebold, who went to prom three days earlier and obsessed about love in his journal.

- ***Devil in the White City*, Erik Larson**

- Author Erik Larson imbues the incredible events surrounding the 1893 Chicago World's Fair with such drama that readers may find themselves checking the book's categorization to be sure that *The Devil in the White City* is not, in fact, a highly imaginative novel. Larson tells the stories of two men: Daniel H. Burnham, the architect responsible for the fair's construction, and H.H. Holmes, a serial killer masquerading as a charming doctor.

- ***Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell (only \$3.99 on Kindle)**

- *Blink* is a book about how we think without thinking, about choices that seem to be made in an instant-in the blink of an eye-that actually aren't as simple as they seem. Why are some people brilliant decision makers, while others are consistently inept? Why do some people follow their instincts and win, while others end up stumbling into error? How do our brains really work-in the office, in the classroom, in the kitchen, and in the bedroom? And why are the best decisions often those that are impossible to explain to others?

- ***Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell (only \$3.99 on Kindle)**

- The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire. Just as a single sick person can start an epidemic of the flu, so too can a small but precisely targeted push cause a fashion trend, the popularity of a new product, or a drop in the crime rate. This widely acclaimed bestseller, in which Malcolm Gladwell explores and brilliantly illuminates the tipping point phenomenon, is already changing the way people throughout the world think about selling products and disseminating ideas.

- ***Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell**

- There is a story that is usually told about extremely successful people, a story that focuses on intelligence and ambition. Gladwell argues that the true story of success is very different, and that if we want to understand how some people thrive, we should spend more time looking *around* them-at such things as their family, their birthplace, or even their birth date. And in revealing that hidden logic, Gladwell presents a fascinating and provocative blueprint for making the most of human potential.

- ***The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien**

- A classic work of American literature that has not stopped changing minds and lives since it burst onto the literary scene, *The Things They Carried* is a ground-breaking meditation on war, memory, imagination, and the redemptive power of storytelling. *The Things They Carried* depicts the men of Alpha Company: Jimmy Cross, Henry Dobbins, Rat Kiley, Mitchell Sanders, Norman Bowker, Kiowa, and the character Tim O'Brien, who has survived his tour in Vietnam to become a father and writer at the age of forty-three.
- ***The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck***
  - 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 into the very nature of equality and justice in America. Although it follows the movement of thousands of men and women and the transformation of an entire nation, **The Grapes of Wrath** is also the story of one Oklahoma family, the Joads, who are driven off 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 Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, Dave Eggers***
  - *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is the moving memoir of a college senior who, in the space of five weeks, loses both of his parents to cancer and inherits his eight-year-old brother. Here is an exhilarating debut that manages to be simultaneously hilarious and wildly inventive as well as a deeply heartfelt story of the love that holds a family together.
- ***A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again, David Foster Wallace***
  - In this hilarious essay, originally published in the collection *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, he chronicles seven days in the Caribbean aboard the m.v. *Zenith*. As he partakes in supposedly fun activities offered on the luxury tour, he offers riotous anecdotes and unparalleled insight into contemporary American culture.
- ***In Cold Blood, Truman Capote***
  - On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. **In Cold Blood** is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

- ***The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner**

- *The Sound and the Fury* is the tragedy of the Compson family, featuring some of the most memorable characters in literature: beautiful, rebellious Caddy; the manchild Benjy; haunted, neurotic Quentin; Jason, the brutal cynic; and Dilsey, their black servant. Their lives fragmented and harrowed by history and legacy, the character's voices and actions mesh to create what is arguably Faulkner's masterpiece and one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century.

- ***The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingslover**

- *The Poisonwood Bible* is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them everything they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it—from garden seeds to Scripture—is calamitously transformed on African soil. What follows is a suspenseful epic of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa.

- ***Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser**

- In 2001, *Fast Food Nation* was published to critical acclaim and became an international bestseller. Eric Schlosser's exposé revealed how the fast food industry has altered the landscape of America, widened the gap between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity, and transformed food production throughout the world. The book changed the way millions of people think about what they eat and helped to launch today's food movement.

- ***All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy**

- The national bestseller and the first volume in Cormac McCarthy's **Border Trilogy**, **All the Pretty Horses** is the tale of John Grady Cole, who at sixteen finds himself at the end of a long line of Texas ranchers, cut off from the only life he has ever imagined for himself. With two companions, he sets off for Mexico on a sometimes idyllic, sometimes comic journey to a place where dreams are paid for in blood.

- ***The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Stephen Chbosky**

- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a story about what it's like to travel that strange course through the uncharted territory of high school. The world of first dates, family dramas, and new friends. Of sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Of those wild and poignant roller-coaster days known as growing up.

- ***Black Boy, Richard Wright***

- Richard Wright grew up in the woods of Mississippi, with poverty, hunger, fear, and hatred. He lied, stole, and raged at those around him; at six he was a "drunkard," hanging about taverns. Surly, brutal, cold, suspicious, and self-pitying, he was surrounded on one side by whites who were either indifferent to him, pitying, or cruel, and on the other by blacks who resented anyone trying to rise above the common lot. *Black Boy* is Richard Wright's powerful account of his journey from innocence to experience in the Jim Crow South. It is at once an unashamed confession and a profound indictment—a poignant and disturbing record of social injustice and human suffering.

- ***Beloved, Toni Morrison***

- Staring unflinchingly into the abyss of slavery, this spellbinding novel transforms history into a story as powerful as *Exodus* and as intimate as a lullaby. Sethe, its protagonist, was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but eighteen years later she is still not free. She has too many memories of Sweet Home, the beautiful farm where so many hideous things happened. And Sethe's new home is haunted by the ghost of her baby, who died nameless and whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: *Beloved*. Filled with bitter poetry and suspense as taut as a rope, ***Beloved*** is a towering achievement.

- ***Angela's Ashes, Frank McCourt***

- *"When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I managed to survive at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood."* So begins the luminous memoir of Frank McCourt, born in Depression-era Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants and raised in the slums of Limerick, Ireland. Frank's mother, Angela, has no money to feed the children since Frank's father, Malachy, rarely works, and when he does he drinks his wages. Yet Malachy--exasperating, irresponsible and beguiling-- does nurture in Frank an appetite for the one thing he can provide: a story. Frank lives for his father's tales of Cuchulain, who saved Ireland, and of the Angel on the Seventh Step, who brings his mother babies.

- ***One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel Garcia Marquez***

- *One Hundred Years of Solitude* tells the story of the rise and fall, birth and death of the mythical town of Macondo through the history of the Buendía family. Inventive, amusing, magnetic, sad, and alive with unforgettable men and women -- brimming with truth, compassion, and a lyrical magic that strikes the soul -- this novel is a masterpiece in the art of fiction.

- ***Wise Blood, Flannery O'Connor***

- Focused on the story of Hazel Motes, a twenty-two-year-old caught in an unending struggle against his innate, desperate fate, this tale of redemption, retribution, false prophets, blindness, blindings, and wisdoms gives us one of the most riveting characters in twentieth-century American fiction.

- ***Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad (free on Kindle)***

- [Charles Marlow](#)'s job is as an [ivory](#) transporter down the [Congo River](#) in [Central Africa](#). This river is described to be "... a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land." In the course of his commercial-agent work in Africa, the seaman Marlow becomes obsessed by Mr. [Kurtz](#), an ivory-procurement agent, a man of established notoriety among the natives and the European colonials.

- ***Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston***

- One of the most important and enduring books of the twentieth century, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* brings to life a Southern love story with the wit and pathos found only in the writing of Zora Neale Hurston. Out of print for almost thirty years—due largely to initial audiences' rejection of its strong black female protagonist—Hurston's classic has since its 1978 reissue become perhaps the most widely read and highly acclaimed novel in the canon of African-American literature.

- ***The Sun Also Rises, Ernest Hemingway***

- Published in 1926 to explosive acclaim, *The Sun Also Rises* stands as perhaps the most impressive first novel ever written by an American writer. A roman à clef about a group of American and English expatriates on an excursion from Paris's Left Bank to Pamplona for the July fiesta and its climactic bull fight, a journey from the center of a civilization spiritually bankrupted by the First World War to a vital, God-haunted world in which faith and honor have yet to lose their currency, the novel captured for the generation that would come to be called "Lost" the spirit of its age, and marked Ernest Hemingway as the preeminent writer of his time.

- ***Cold Mountain, Charles Frazier***

- Sorely wounded and fatally disillusioned in the fighting at Petersburg, a Confederate soldier named Inman decides to walk back to his home in the Blue Ridge Mountains to Ada, the woman he loves. His trek across the disintegrating South brings him into intimate and sometimes lethal converse with slaves and marauders, bounty hunters and witches, both helpful and malign. At the same time, the intrepid Ada is trying to revive her



father's derelict farm and learning to survive in a world where the old certainties have been swept away. As it interweaves their stories, *Cold Mountain* asserts itself as an authentic odyssey, hugely powerful, majestically lovely, and keenly moving.

- ***A River Runs Through It, Norman Maclean***

- Maclean grew up in the western Rocky Mountains in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a young man he worked many summers in logging camps and for the United States Forest Service. The two novellas and short story in this collection are based on his own experiences—the experiences of a young man who found that life was only a step from art in its structures and beauty. The beauty he found was in reality, and so he leaves a careful record of what it was like to work in the woods when it was still a world of horse and hand and foot, without power saws, "cats," or four-wheel drives. Populated with drunks, loggers, card sharks, and whores, and set in the small towns and surrounding trout streams and mountains of western Montana, the stories concern themselves with the complexities of fly fishing, logging, fighting forest fires, playing cribbage, and being a husband, a son, and a father.

- ***True Grit, Charles Portis***

- The novel is told from the perspective of a woman named Mattie Ross who recounts the time when she was 14 years old and sought retribution for the murder of her father by a scoundrel named Tom Chaney.

- ***The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell, John Crawford***

- John Crawford joined the Florida National Guard to pay for his college tuition, willingly exchanging one weekend a month and two weeks a year for a free education. But in Autumn 2002, one semester short of graduating and newly married—in fact, on his honeymoon—he was called to active duty and sent to the front lines in Iraq. Crawford and his unit spent months upon months patrolling the streets of Baghdad, occupying a hostile city. During the breaks between patrols, Crawford began recording what he and his fellow soldiers witnessed and experienced. Those stories became *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*—a haunting and powerful, compellingly honest book that imparts the on-the-ground reality of waging the war in Iraq, and marks as the introduction of a mighty literary voice forged in the most intense of circumstances.

- ***Nickel and Dimed, Barbara Ehrenreich***

- Millions of Americans work full time, year round, for poverty-level wages. In 1998, Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them. She was inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform, which promised that a job -- any job -- can be the ticket to a better life. But how does anyone survive, let alone prosper, on \$6 an hour? To find out, Ehrenreich left her

home, took the cheapest lodgings she could find, and accepted whatever jobs she was offered. Moving from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, she worked as a waitress, a hotel maid, a cleaning woman, a nursing-home aide, and a Wal-Mart sales clerk. She lived in trailer parks and crumbling residential motels. Very quickly, she discovered that no job is truly "unskilled," that even the lowliest occupations require exhausting mental and muscular effort. She also learned that one job is not enough; you need at least two if you intend to live indoors.

- ***Me Talk Pretty One Day*, David Sedaris**

- "It's a pretty grim world when I can't even feel superior to a toddler." Welcome to the curious mind of David Sedaris, where dogs outrank children, guitars have breasts, and French toddlers unmask the inadequacies of the American male. Sedaris inhabits this world as a misanthrope chronicling all things petty and small. In *Me Talk Pretty One Day* Sedaris is as determined as ever to be nobody's hero--he never triumphs, he never conquers--and somehow, with each failure, he inadvertently becomes everybody's favorite underdog.

- ***Travels with Charley*, John Steinbeck**

- In September 1960, John Steinbeck embarked on a journey across America. He felt that he might have lost touch with the country, with its speech, the smell of its grass and trees, its color and quality of light, the pulse of its people. To reassure himself, he set out on a voyage of rediscovery of the American identity, accompanied by a distinguished French poodle named Charley; and riding in a three-quarter-ton pickup truck named Rocinante.

- ***Early Bird*, Rodney Rothman**

- Everyone says they would like to retire early, but Rodney Rothman actually did it -- forty years early. Burnt out, he decides at the age of twenty-eight to get an early start on his golden years. He travels to Boca Raton, Florida, where he moves in with an elderly piano teacher at Century Village, a retirement village that is home to thousands of senior citizens. *Early Bird* is an irreverent, hilarious, and ultimately warmhearted account of Rodney's journey deep into the heart of retirement. Rodney struggles for acceptance from the senior citizens he shares a swimming pool with, and battles with cranky octogenarians who want him off their turf. The day-to-day dealings begin to wear on him. Before long he observes, "I don't think *Tuesdays with Morrie* would have been quite so uplifting if that guy had to spend more than one day a week with Morrie."