

National Endowment for the Arts



**THE BIG
READ**

**“You don’t have to
burn books to
destroy a culture.
Just get people
to stop reading
them.”**

—RAY BRADBURY

**N A T I O N A L
E N D O W M E N T
F O R T H E A R T S**



**THE BIG
READ**



June 2007



The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development.



Arts Midwest connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years.



Boeing is the world's leading aerospace company and the largest combined manufacturer of commercial jetliners and military aircraft. As a leading contractor to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Boeing works together with its DoD customers to provide U.S. Armed Forces and U.S. allies around the world with fully integrated high-performing systems solutions and support.

Additional support for the Big Read has also been provided by the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** in partnership with **Community Foundations of America**.

The Big Read in the Pacific Northwest is supported, in part, by a grant from the **Paul G. Allen Family Foundation**.

Additional funding for the Big Read is provided by the **Ruffin A. Cooper, Jr., Endowment** and through a bequest made in memory of **Dorothy Lois Beverly**.

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Chairman's Message

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, designed to bring the transformative power of literature back into the lives of Americans. A 2004 NEA report, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, identified a critical decline in reading for pleasure among American adults. The Big Read aims to address this issue directly by providing citizens with the opportunity to read and discuss a single book within their communities.

The purpose of the Big Read, like the purpose of literature itself, is pleasure. Not necessarily an easy pleasure, but a deliciously rich and complex one. A great book combines enlightenment with enchantment. Literature awakens our imagination and enlarges our humanity. It can even offer harrowing insights that somehow console and comfort us.

The prospect of an America where only a few people share a love of reading is just too lonely to bear. Even if statistics didn't show that readers are more active in their own communities and more engaged in their own lives, the act of reading would still be an indispensable part of what makes us fully human. It is for these reasons, with the incredible legacy of our nation's literature, that we at the NEA invite you to join the Big Read.

This catalogue features the books included in the Big Read library. These great works of American literature were selected by our Readers Circle—a group of distinguished librarians, professors, journalists, and fiction writers from across the country. We hope you'll agree that each book selected to be in the Big Read has the potential to inspire, enlighten, and enchant.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dana Gioia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dana" and last name "Gioia" clearly legible.

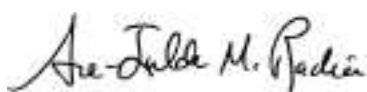
Dana Gioia
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is proud to partner with the National Endowment for the Arts on the Big Read. IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. Our involvement in this program promotes our mission to connect people to information and ideas.

We are encouraging libraries everywhere—in schools, on campuses, and in communities—to participate in the Big Read. Libraries are perfect partners positioned as centers of civic engagement for the Big Read. They are trusted places where groups come together to learn. And they have librarians—well-schooled experts who know about learning and literacy, and who know their communities and bring the diverse organizations contained therein to a single table. Such partnerships, focused on learning and literacy, unite people. Literacy and literature sharpen the imagination, promote empathy and learning, and hone critical thinking skills.

The Big Read is an outstanding initiative that benefits our entire nation. It has already united communities. We encourage your enthusiastic participation.



Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Ph.D.
Director
Institute of Museum and Library Services

How the Big Read Books Are Chosen

The National Endowment for the Arts is renowned for the panel process that informs all our grants, including national initiatives such as the Big Read. To select books for the Big Read, the NEA has enlisted a panel of 22 literary experts and laypeople with a passion for literature. The panelists make recommendations, which are then reviewed by the NEA's Literature staff.

Based on the Readers Circle's choices, the NEA selects a roster of books embodying a broad array of traditions, cultures, and regions. Though we try to offer Big Read communities a diverse choice of reading, the one constant across our list will always be literary excellence.

To give cities and towns even greater choice, the number of Big Read books will continue to increase as the program expands. Luckily, the storehouse of American literature shows no sign of running low. Great new books join its ranks faster than our list could ever grow.

Readers Circle

Wendell Berry, poet and novelist

Dr. James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress

Matthew Bruccoli, scholar and professor

James Lee Burke, author

Lan Samantha Chang, author and professor

Maureen Corrigan, author, book critic, and professor

Michael Dirda, book critic

Anne Fadiman, author and essayist

Pico Iyer, journalist and novelist

Mitchell Kaplan, former American Booksellers Association president

Ted Kooser, United States Poet Laureate from 2004 - 2006

Jim Lehrer, journalist and author

Jonathan Lethem, author

Aimee Mann, musician

Lorrie Moore, author

Azar Nafisi, author and professor

Marilyn Nelson, Connecticut state poet laureate

Kathleen Norris, author

P.J. O'Rourke, essayist and humorist

Nancy Pearl, author and librarian

Richard Rodriguez, author

Kevin Starr, historian and former California state librarian

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Bless Me, Ultima (1972) by Rudolfo Anaya is a coming-of-age novel about pride and assimilation, faith and doubt. The summer before Antonio Juan Luna Márez turns seven years old, an old woman comes to live with his family in Guadalupe, New Mexico. This woman—called La Grande or Ultima—is a *curandera*, a traditional healer feared by many and mysterious to all. Ultima teaches Antonio and their bond deepens, as Antonio endures several events that profoundly shake his understanding of his Hispanic-Catholic heritage and his destiny. His dreams often foreshadow the future and feature his three older brothers, just demobilized from World War II. These surreal dreams also reflect his existential questions: Why is there evil in the world? Why does God sometimes punish the good? Where will I go after death? How can I know the truth?

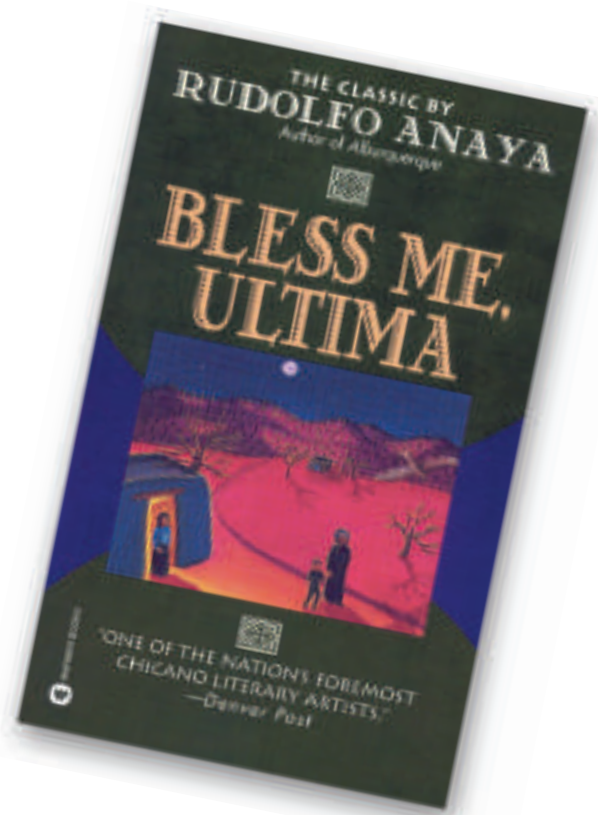
THEMES:

tradition, cultural identity, religion, death, education

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



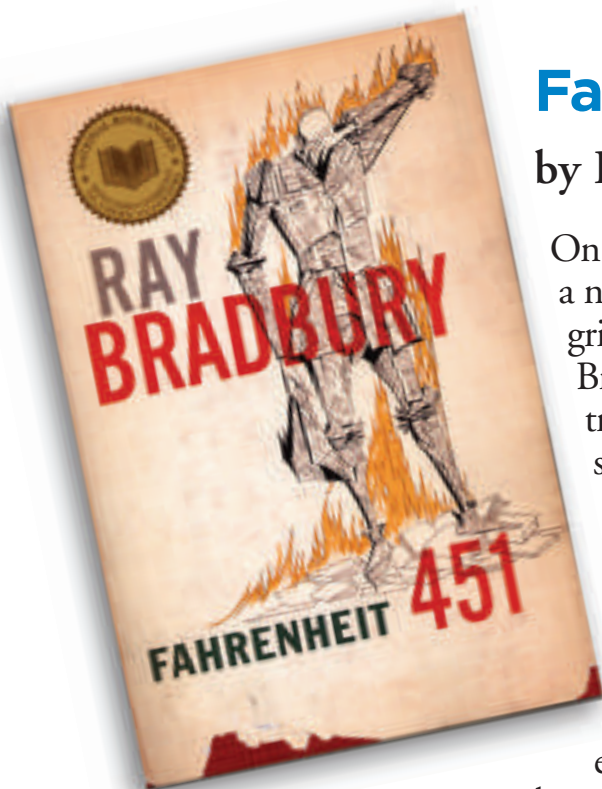
THE AUTHOR

Rudolfo Anaya was born in the small village of Pastura, New Mexico, to a cowboy father and a farmgirl mother. The author of more than 30 books, including *The Heart of Aztlán* (1976), *Tortuga* (1979), and *Alburquerque* (1992), he lives in New Mexico with his wife, Patricia. In 2001 Anaya received the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest award for artists.



“I was happy with Ultima...She taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. My soul grew under her careful guidance.”

—from *Bless Me, Ultima*



Fahrenheit 451

by Ray Bradbury

On October 19, 1953, a young Californian published a novel with the odd title *Fahrenheit 451*. In a gripping story both disturbing and poetic, Ray Bradbury took the materials of pulp fiction and transformed them into a visionary parable of a society gone awry, in which firemen burn books and the state suppresses learning. Meanwhile, the citizenry sits by in a drug-induced and media-saturated indifference. One fireman, Guy Montag, secretly saves a few books from a burning house and begins to read deeply for the first time in his life. As his knowledge expands, his growing dissatisfaction leads him to leave his home and join a resistance force of readers, each one responsible for memorizing—and therefore preserving—an entire book. More relevant than ever a half-century later, *Fahrenheit 451* has achieved the distinction of being both a literary classic and a perennial bestseller.



THE AUTHOR

Ray Bradbury was born in 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois. When his family drove across the country to California, young Ray piled out of their car at every stop to explore the local library. With the publication of *The Martian Chronicles* in 1950, Bradbury ensured his own lasting place on library shelves. The author of more than 85 books, Bradbury lives in Los Angeles.

THEMES:

censorship, honor, courage, justice, the effects of technology on society

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *Fahrenheit 451* (1966, directed by Francois Truffaut, starring Oskar Werner and Julie Christie)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *Fahrenheit 451*, a play by Ray Bradbury (www.dramaticpublishing.com)
- *Fahrenheit 451* film score by Bernard Herrmann

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio versions available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

“It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed.”

—from *Fahrenheit 451*

Currently available for programming

My *Ántonia*

by Willa Cather

A beloved American classic, Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918) may be best summarized by its epigraph—"the best days are the first to flee." The adult narrator, Jim Burden, looks back on his childhood through the memory of his friend, Ántonia Shimerda, an inquisitive young immigrant girl from Bohemia. Like Cather, 10-year-old Jim has left Virginia for Nebraska by train and is shocked by the barren prairie on his first wagon ride. With time, he comes to love the land and his immigrant neighbors, even after he leaves Nebraska to pursue his education in Boston and his career in New York. Although Jim hears rumors of Ántonia's ruin, more than 15 years pass before he musters up the courage to return to Nebraska and find out what really happened to her. The novel teems with romance, violence, tenderness, cruelty, and tragedy—all bustling side by side in a narrative at once elegant and compassionate.

THEMES:

immigrant experience in America, memory, taming of the land, youth, friendship

DOCUMENTARY FILM:

- *Willa Cather: The Road Is All* (PBS *American Masters* documentary)

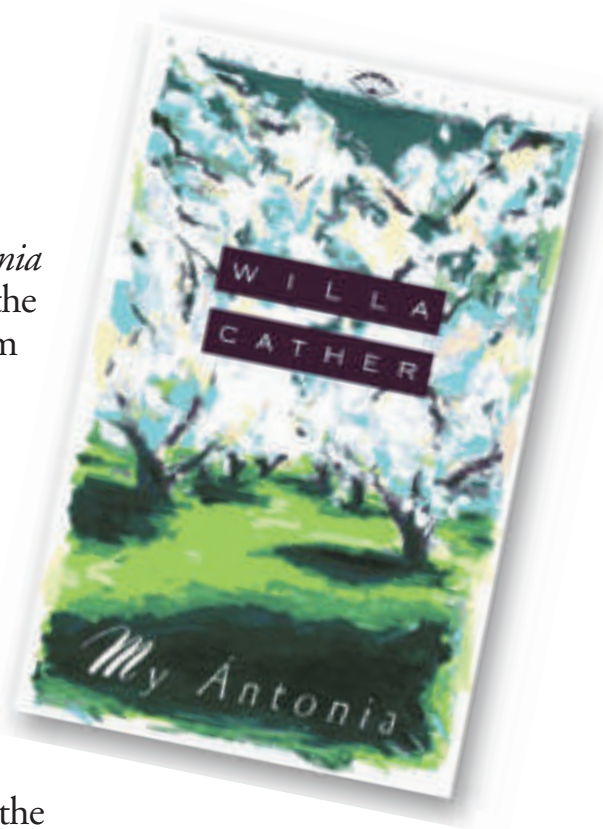
PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- Antonín Dvorák: Piano Trio, Op. 90 (*Dumky*)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



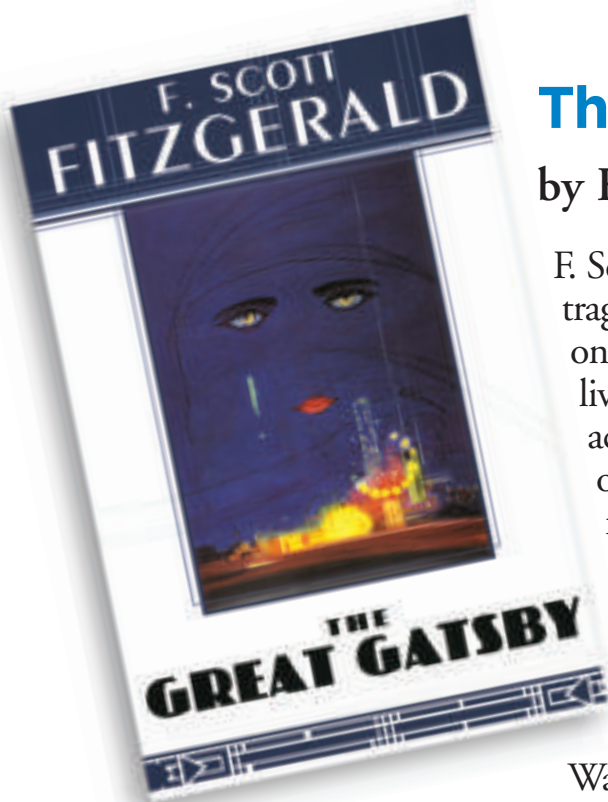
THE AUTHOR

Born in 1873 in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Willa Cather left nine years later to join her grandparents in the Nebraska territory. Her best-known novels—*O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918)—all take place in Nebraska, but she lived most of her life in New York. She died in 1947 and is buried in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.



"There was nothing but land...I had never before looked up at the sky when there was not a familiar mountain ridge against it. But this was the complete dome of heaven."

—from *My Ántonia*



The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* is a tragic love story, a mystery, and a social commentary on American life. The novel concerns the wasteful lives of four wealthy characters as observed by their acquaintance, narrator Nick Carraway. The story of Jay Gatsby's desperate quest to win back his first love reverberates with themes at once characteristically American and universally human, among them the importance of honesty, the temptations of wealth, and the struggle to escape the past. Though Gatsby's love, Daisy, pledged to wait for his return from World

War I, she married the wealthy Tom Buchanan. Gatsby still worships her as his golden girl and, having made a great fortune, sets out to win her back. In the novel's famous conclusion, the characters collide, leaving human wreckage in their wake.



THE AUTHOR

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1896. During World War I, Fitzgerald was stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, where he met his future wife, Zelda. After *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald took nine years to finish his next novel, *Tender Is the Night* (1934). He died of a heart attack in Hollywood in 1940 and is buried in Rockville, Maryland.

THEMES:

loyalty, fidelity, class, living in the past, temptation

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Great Gatsby* (1974, starring Robert Redford, adapted by Francis Ford Coppola)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *The Great Gatsby*, theatrical adaptation by Simon Levy
- *The Great Gatsby*, opera by John Harbison, libretto by Murray Horwitz

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

“At his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.”

—from *The Great Gatsby*

Currently available for programming

A Lesson Before Dying

by Ernest J. Gaines

Set in Louisiana in the 1940s, Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) transports the reader into the pre-Civil Rights-era South, where the divide between races was as deep and free-flowing as the Mississippi River. Jefferson, a young uneducated black man, is called an animal and unjustly sentenced to death for a white storekeeper's murder. The teacher at a former plantation's schoolhouse, Grant Wiggins, is asked to help Jefferson die like a man. Though Grant desperately wants to escape the poverty and racism of the parish, he is rooted to the area by a sense of duty and cannot break away. Using atmospheric prose and pitch-perfect dialogue, Gaines treats both his characters and the Louisiana countryside with honesty and understanding. The result is an evocative look at the brutality of racism and the power of compassion.

THEMES:

human dignity, education, racism, family, duty

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *A Lesson Before Dying* (1999, starring Don Cheadle, directed by Joseph Sargent)

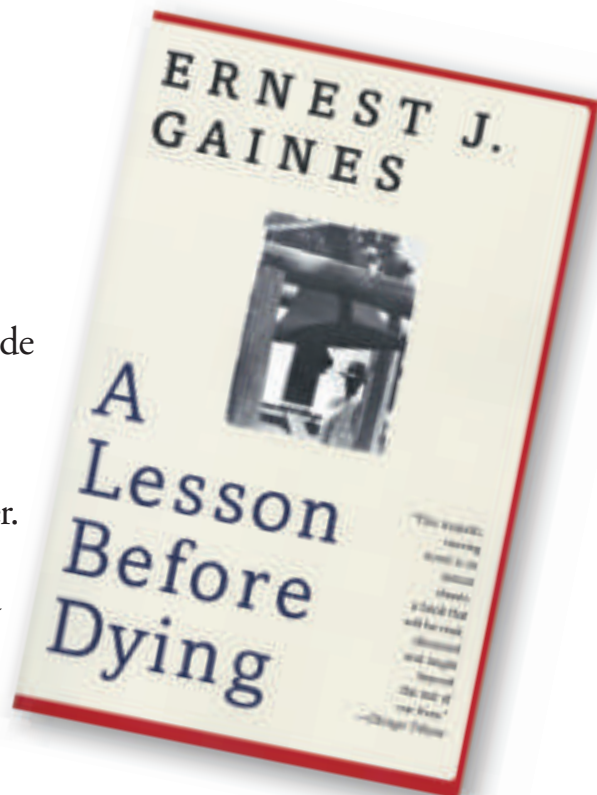
PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- *A Lesson Before Dying*, theatrical adaptation by Romulus Linney

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Available for applications due July 31, 2007; in communities as of spring 2008



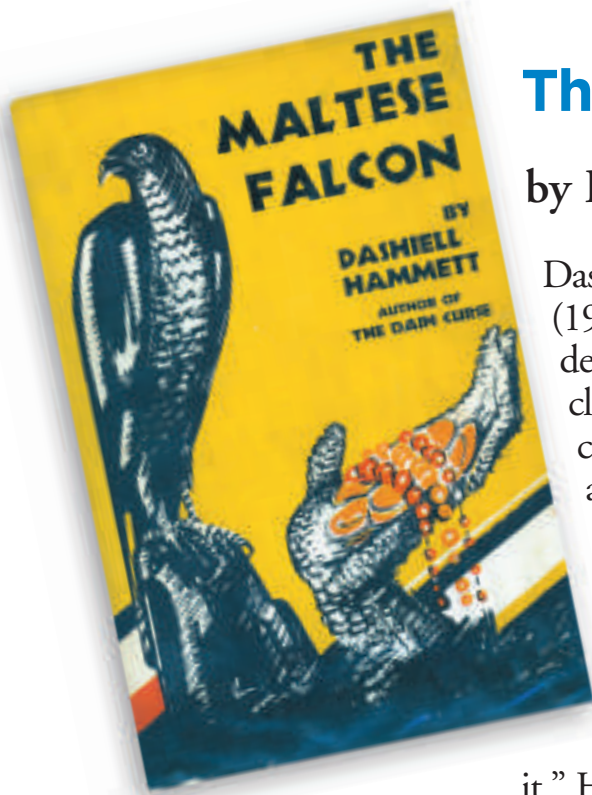
THE AUTHOR

Ernest J. Gaines was born on a plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana. At 15, he joined his mother and stepfather in Vallejo, California. The author of other acclaimed novels such as *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) and *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), he is Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing at University of Louisiana Lafayette and lives in Oscar, Louisiana. He received an NEA Literature Fellowship in 1968.



“You have the chance of being bigger than anyone who has ever lived on this plantation or come from this little town. You can do it if you try.”

—from *A Lesson Before Dying*



The Maltese Falcon

by Dashiell Hammett

Dashiell Hammett's third novel, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), fulfilled his stated ambition to elevate the detective novel to the status of literature. Hammett's clean prose and sharp ear for dialogue produced a compulsively readable novel that is at once a thriller, a love story, and a dry, acerbic comedy. A tough, independent detective in San Francisco, Sam Spade gets hired under false pretenses by the beautiful and mysterious Brigid O'Shaughnessy. After his partner turns up dead, Spade's personal moral code dictates that "when a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it." He soon realizes the death is linked to a group of shady characters seeking an elusive jeweled falcon statuette once owned by the legendary Knights of Malta. The quest for the falcon and the killer contains enough twists and surprises to keep the reader turning the pages, chasing the truth.



THE AUTHOR

Dashiell Hammett was born in St. Mary's County, Maryland, in 1894. In 1920 he moved to San Francisco and began writing detective stories for pulp magazines. Works such as *Red Harvest* (1929), *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), and *The Thin Man* (1934) cemented his reputation as a master of hard-boiled fiction. Hammett died in 1961, and is buried in the military cemetery at Arlington.

THEMES:

greed, loyalty, honor, justice

FILM ADAPTATIONS:

- *The Maltese Falcon* (1931, starring Ricardo Cortez)
- *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, starring Humphrey Bogart; adapted and directed by John Huston)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming

"My clients are entitled to a decent amount of secrecy.... As far as I can see, my best chance of clearing myself of the trouble you're trying to make for me is by bringing in the murderers—all tied up."

—from *The Maltese Falcon*

A Farewell to Arms

by Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway is the notorious tough guy of modern American letters, but it would be hard to find a more tender and rapturous love story than *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). It also would be hard to find a more harrowing American novel about World War I. The tragic love story between an American ambulance driver, Lieutenant Frederic Henry, and his English nurse, Catherine Barkley, takes place in Italy and Switzerland. Badly wounded at the front, Frederic finds himself bedridden in a Milan hospital, where he and Catherine fall deeply in love. While Frederic recovers from surgery and prepares to return to action, Catherine discovers that she is pregnant. Though the couple has escaped the war, there are dangers that cannot be anticipated or avoided. The final chapter is one of the most famous, and heartbreaking, conclusions in modern literature.

THEMES:

love, war, liberation, death, honor, courage

FILM ADAPTATIONS:

- *A Farewell to Arms* (1932, starring Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes)
- *A Farewell to Arms* (1957, starring Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones)

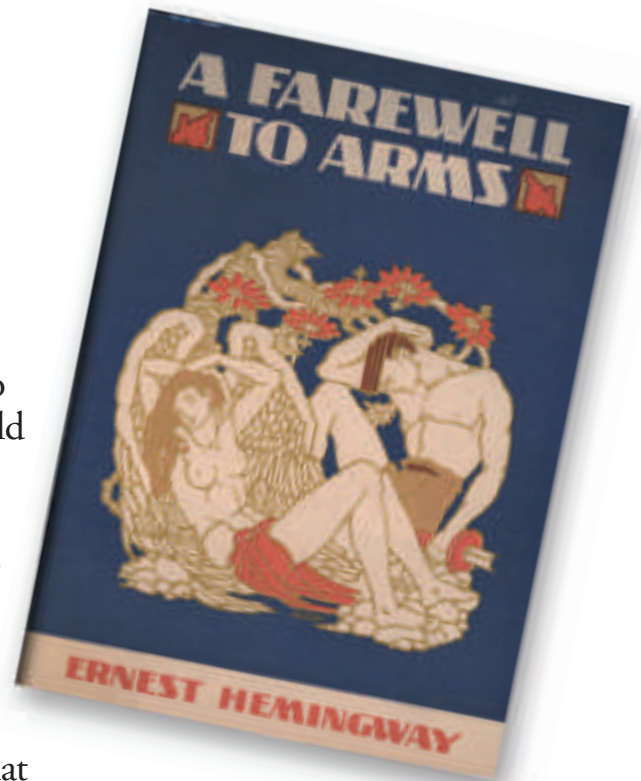
DOCUMENTARY FILM:

- *Ernest Hemingway: Rivers to the Sea* (PBS *American Masters* documentary)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

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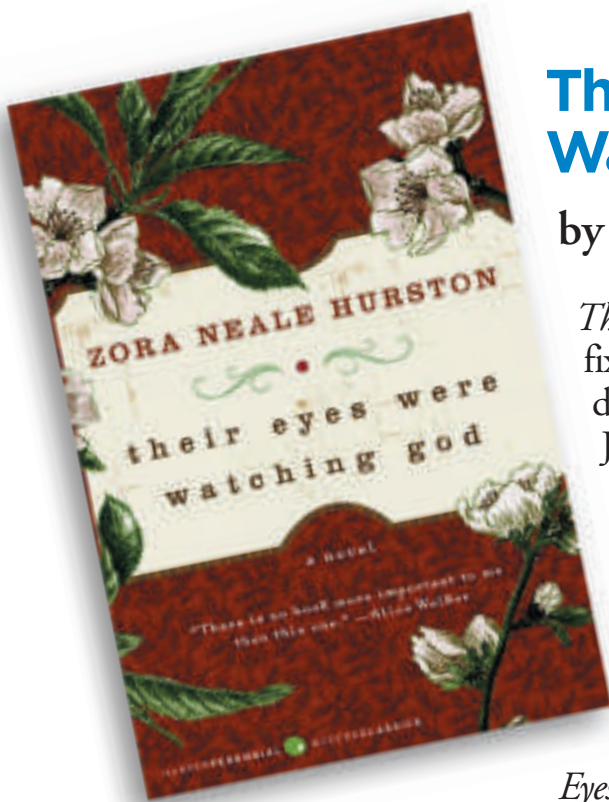
THE AUTHOR

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899, Ernest Hemingway served, like his hero in *A Farewell to Arms*, as an ambulance driver in World War I, received a severe wound, and fell in love with one of his nurses. His other classic works include *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). He died in Ketchum, Idaho, in 1961.



“If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.”

—from *A Farewell to Arms*



Their Eyes Were Watching God

by Zora Neale Hurston

Their Eyes Were Watching God begins with our eyes fixed on a woman who returns from burying the dead. Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel chronicles Janie Crawford's journey from her grandmother's plantation shack to marriage in Eatonville, to the Florida Everglades—until a tragedy brings her back to Eatonville. From this vantage point, Janie narrates her life story to her best friend, satisfying the “oldest human longing—self-revelation.”

Hurston's conviction that black culture is valuable and unique comes through in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* via its harmonious blend of folklore and black idiom. In Janie Crawford, Hurston rejects the 19th- and 20th-century stereotypes for women and creates a protagonist who—though silenced for most of her life—ultimately finds her own voice.

THEMES:

sexism, racism, religion, folklore, finding one's voice

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005, starring Halle Berry, adapted by Suzan-Lori Parks)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *Jump At The Sun*, a radio play by Kathleen McGhee-Andersen (produced by L.A. Theatre Works)
- *Mule Bone*, a play by Hurston and Langston Hughes

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



THE AUTHOR

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama. Her lifelong passion to record the many voices of her people informed all her fiction and anthropology, including *Mules and Men* (1935), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and her autobiography *Dust Track on a Road* (1942). Hurston died in poverty and obscurity in 1960, years before her books came back into print.

“The wind came back with triple fury, and put out the light for the last time...They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.”

—from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Washington Square

by Henry James

Catherine Sloper, the steadfast heroine of *Washington Square*, craves love—from the father disappointed in her lack of good looks and intellect, from the aunt inconvenienced by raising the motherless girl, and especially from her handsome suitor, Morris Townsend. Her father, refusing to believe his unremarkable daughter could attract Townsend with anything other than her wealth, forbids the match and threatens to disinherit her. Faced with choosing between obedience to her father and marrying the man she loves, Catherine accompanies her father on an extended trip to Europe but maintains her relationship with Townsend. Though the novel was not commercially successful when it was published in 1880, it gained popularity as Henry James' literary reputation grew and has become a much-loved classic whose themes of obedience, honor, loyalty, and love still resonate with readers.

THEMES:

honor, love, dignity, fidelity

FILM ADAPTATIONS:

- *The Heiress* (1949, adapted from *Washington Square*, starring Olivia de Havilland)
- *Washington Square* (1997, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh)

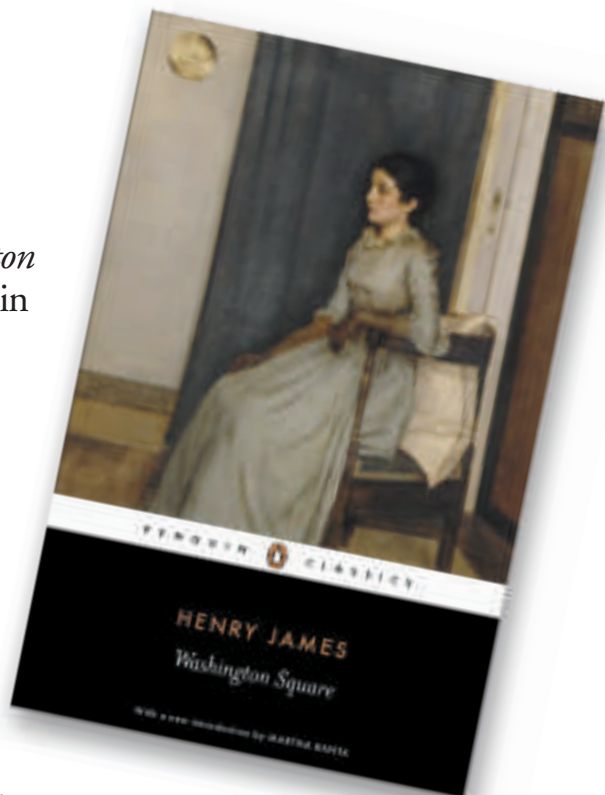
PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *The Heiress*, 1947 play adapted by Augustus and Ruth Goetz
- *Washington Square*, opera by Thomas Pasatieri, libretto by K. Elmslie
- *Washington Square*, ballet with music by Charles Ives, choreography by Rudolf Nureyev, adapted by Nureyev and Jean-Claude Carrière

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

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- large print edition available
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Available for applications in spring 2008; in communities as of fall 2008



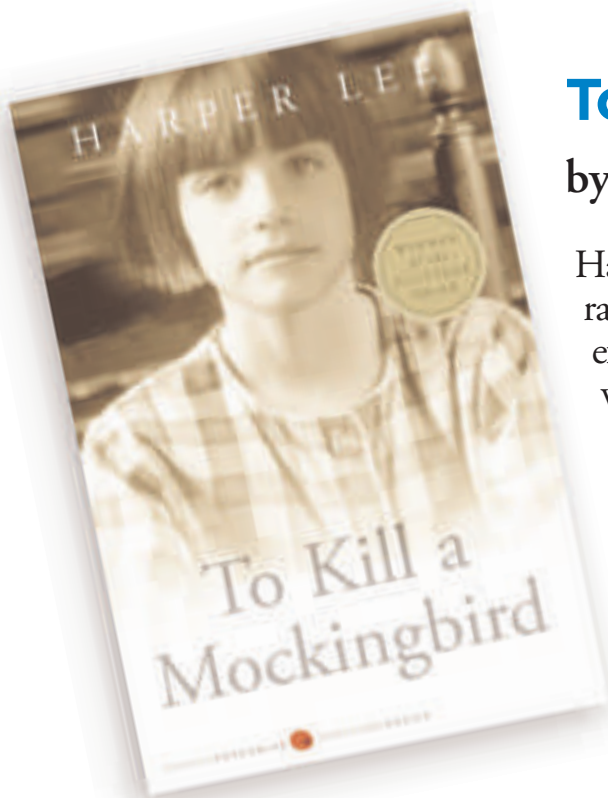
THE AUTHOR

Henry James was born in New York City in 1843. After publication of *Daisy Miller* (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), James enjoyed popularity in Europe and America while maintaining friendships with such writers as Edith Wharton, Ivan Turgenev, and Gustave Flaubert. Eventually a British subject, he received the Order of Merit from King George V in 1916 and died a month later.



“She grew up a very robust and healthy child, and her father, as he looked at her, often said to himself that, such as she was, he at least need have no fear of losing her.”

—from *Washington Square*



THE AUTHOR

Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama, in 1926. She attended Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama, and studied law at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa before moving to New York City to pursue a career as a writer. Lee's only novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1961 and has sold more than 30 million copies in 18 languages.

“The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.”

—from *To Kill a Mockingbird*

To Kill a Mockingbird

by Harper Lee

Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is the rare American novel that can be discovered with excitement in adolescence and reread into adulthood without fear of disappointment. Few novels so appealingly or convincingly evoke the daily world of childhood. Scout Finch, the novel’s narrator, and her brother, Jem, live in the small, rural town of Maycomb, Alabama, where they attempt to lure a reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley, out of his home. Meanwhile, the children’s father, attorney Atticus Finch, agrees to defend a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. Atticus’ decision angers the townspeople and endangers his family. Tying the stories together are his simple but profound words, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view. . . . Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” For many young people, this funny and humane novel becomes their first big read, the grown-up story against which all later books will be measured.

THEMES:

racism, poverty, literacy, responsibility, justice

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962, adapted by Horton Foote, starring Gregory Peck)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, stage adaptation by Christopher Sergel
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* film score by Elmer Bernstein

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming

A Wizard of Earthsea

by Ursula K. Le Guin

A Wizard of Earthsea (1968)—the first book of Ursula K. Le Guin's two Earthsea trilogies—originated at the request of Le Guin's publisher. Intended as a fantasy story for ages 11 and up, Le Guin created a world that has fascinated both children and adults. Influenced by Norse myths and Native-American legends, *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a coming-of-age fantasy adventure. The hero is a young boy, Ged, with magical talents and a hunger for greater knowledge and power. When Ged fights a forbidden duel, he inadvertently summons a spirit from the dead. An attack from this spirit almost kills him, and a nameless evil shadow is unleashed and wanders Earthsea. The novel traces Ged's growth as a man and a wizard, as he learns that wisdom comes from humility, silence brings strength, and the most powerful magic derives from learning one's true name.

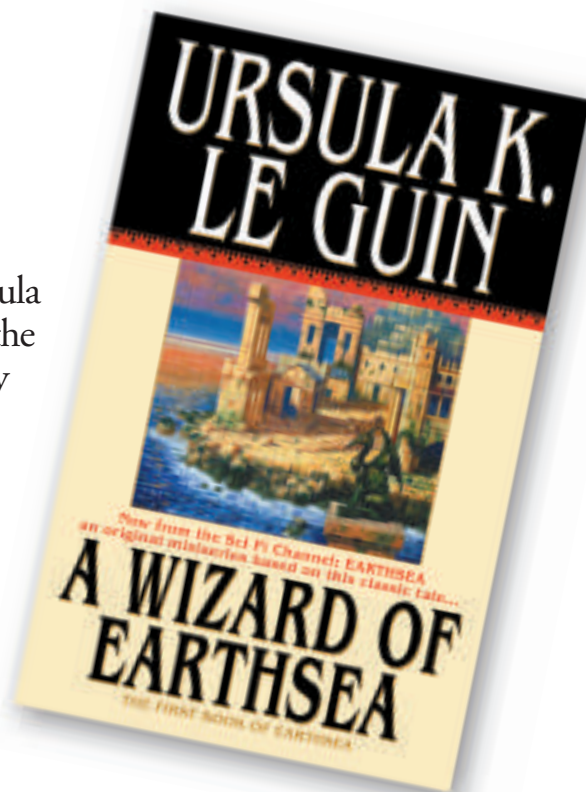
THEMES:

adolescence, interrelationship of good and evil, power of language

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Available for applications in spring 2008; in communities as of fall 2008



THE AUTHOR

Born in Berkeley, California, Ursula K. Le Guin has written novels, short stories, children's books, poetry, and a translation of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. Other major works include novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971). Her many honors include a National Book Award, five Nebula Awards, and five Hugo Awards. She lives in Portland, Oregon.



“For magic consists in this, the true naming of a thing.”

—from *A Wizard of Earthsea*



The Call of the Wild

by Jack London

The hero of *The Call of the Wild* is Buck, a St. Bernard/Scotch Shepherd dog. Abducted from his comfortable home as a pet in Northern California and sold as a sled dog, he learns to obey through “the law of club and fang.” He courageously survives brutal cruelty—from both his trainers and the wilderness—and rises to become the leader of the sled team. Buck’s primordial instincts return as he endures hunger and fatigue, learns to scavenge for food, and fights with his rival. Set during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98 in Canada’s Yukon territory and Alaska, *The Call of the Wild* was serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post* during the summer of 1903. Despite its frequent classification as juvenile fiction, generations of adults have found London’s portrayal of humans and animals unforgettable and their struggle for survival in a hostile environment genuinely moving.



THE AUTHOR

Born in Oakland, California, in 1876, Jack London lived a life of romantic adventure. At 15, he was an oyster pirate, and by 21 a miner in the Klondike Gold Rush—an experience he drew from for *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906). By the time of his death in 1916, he was arguably the most famous American writer of his time.

THEMES:

nature vs. nurture, socialism vs. individualism, civilization vs. instinct

FILM ADAPTATIONS:

- *The Call of the Wild* (1935, starring Clark Gable)
- *The Call of the Wild* (1976, adapted by James Dickey)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

“Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire, and to plunge into the forest.”

—from *The Call of the Wild*

Available for applications due July 31, 2007; in communities as of spring 2008

The development of resource materials for *The Call of the Wild* is made possible, in part, by a grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

by Carson McCullers

Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) is set in a small Georgia mill town in the late 1930s. John Singer, a deaf man, rents a room in the Kelly house after his companion, Spiros Antonapoulos, is sent away to an asylum. The amiable Singer becomes confidant to four of the town's misfits—Mick Kelly, a teenage girl who dreams of becoming a musician; Benedict Mady Copeland, the town's black doctor; Jake Blount, an alcoholic socialist; and Biff Brannon, the owner of the local café. Over the course of a year, the characters find solace in Singer, who pines for his friend, Antonapoulos. This tragic, small-town drama is so ambitious in its scope—presenting five radically different characters whose troubled lives intersect in the Depression-era South—it is hard to believe that *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* was the first book of a 23-year-old writer. It always feels like the work of a master storyteller.

THEMES:

isolation, loneliness, communication, loss, racism, suffering

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1968, starring Alan Arkin)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Op. 55 (*Eroica*)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



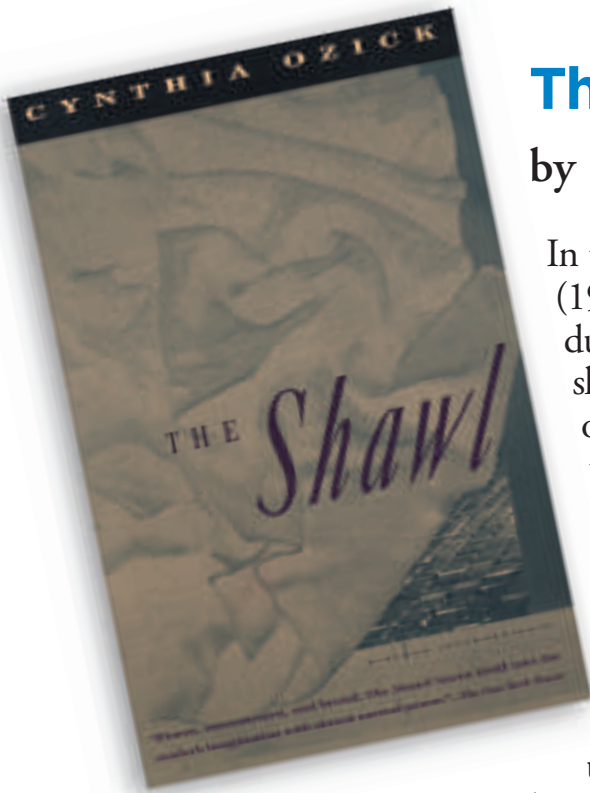
THE AUTHOR

To know Mick Kelly—the precocious, dreamy heroine of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*—is to know a young Carson McCullers, born in 1917 in Columbus, Georgia. At 17 she left Georgia for New York City to become a writer. The author of five novels, two plays, 20 short stories, poetry, and more than two dozen works of non-fiction, McCullers died in 1967.



“The town was in the middle of the deep South. The summers were long and the months of winter cold were very few. Nearly always the sky was a glassy, brilliant azure and the sun burned down riotously bright.”

—from *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*



The Shawl

by Cynthia Ozick

In the opening pages of Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* (1989), Rosa Lublin is in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, "a place without pity" where she witnesses her young daughter's murder. The rest of the book takes place 30 years later in Miami, where Rosa is living "among the elderly, in a dark hole, a single room." Still traumatized by her past suffering, Rosa struggles to reclaim at least a portion of the life stolen from her while clinging tenaciously to a mother's dreams for what her child might have become. Though Ozick examines the brutality of which man is capable, ultimately the book testifies to the resilience of the human spirit. Readers should not be fooled by the slimness of *The Shawl*. Ozick's prose is both intensely poetic and emotionally unsettling. The book—actually a short story followed by a linked novella—carries the impact of a work many times its length, and each story earned the coveted Best American Short Story and O. Henry awards.



THE AUTHOR

The daughter of Russian immigrants, Cynthia Ozick was born in New York City in 1928. She has won the Rea Award for the Short Story and been nominated four times for the National Book Critics' Circle Award, winning for *Quarrel & Quandary* (2000). She also received an NEA Literature Fellowship in 1968 and lives in New Rochelle, New York.

THEMES:

poverty, loss, resilience, grief, discrimination

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- *The Shawl*, Ozick's theatrical retelling and extension of the story

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version of the short story "The Shawl" available on CD, read by Cynthia Ozick (part of *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*)
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

"Blue digits on the arm, what difference? They don't call you a woman anyhow. Survivor."

—from *The Shawl*

Available for applications due July 31, 2007; in communities as of spring 2008

Housekeeping

by Marilynne Robinson

Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* (1981) begins with a train wreck on a lonely lake during a moonless night. Because her grandfather died in the crash and her mother later drowned in the same lake, the novel's narrator, Ruth, has grown up with her sister under the care of a succession of female family members. Set in the fictional Idaho town of Fingerbone, the story's glacial lake is a powerful presence in all their lives. This lyrical novel examines each character with precision and clarity, revealing the complex relationships of individuals caught between familial responsibility and the wish for freedom. Through "the clutter of ordinary life," *Housekeeping* suggests that the loss of innocence is most deeply felt when we try to break the bonds of family and home.

THEMES:

nontraditional families, grieving, adoption, abandonment, small-town life

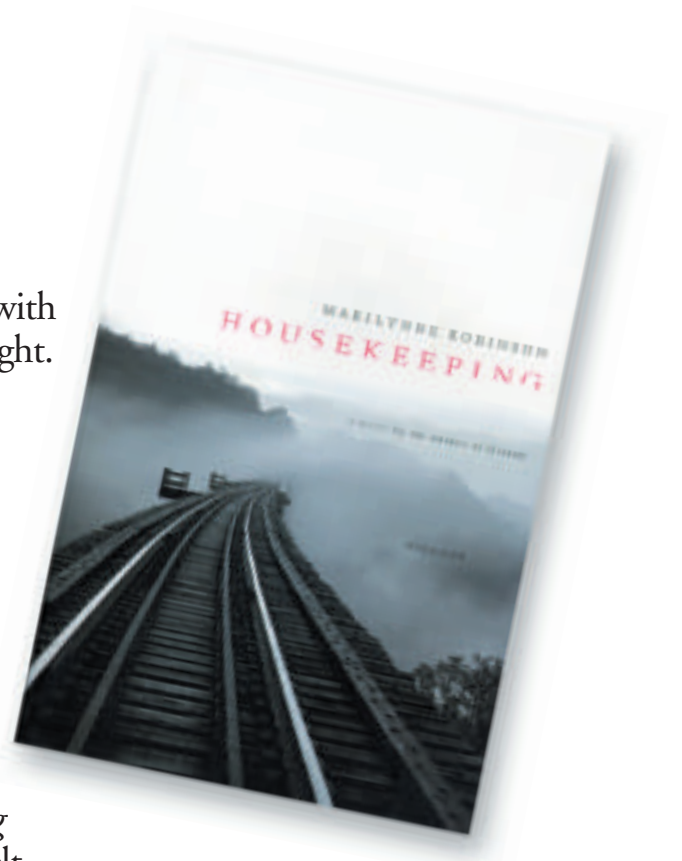
FILM ADAPTATION:

- *Housekeeping* (1987, adapted and directed by Bill Forsyth)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

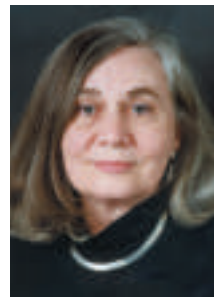
- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Available for applications in spring 2008; in communities as of fall 2008



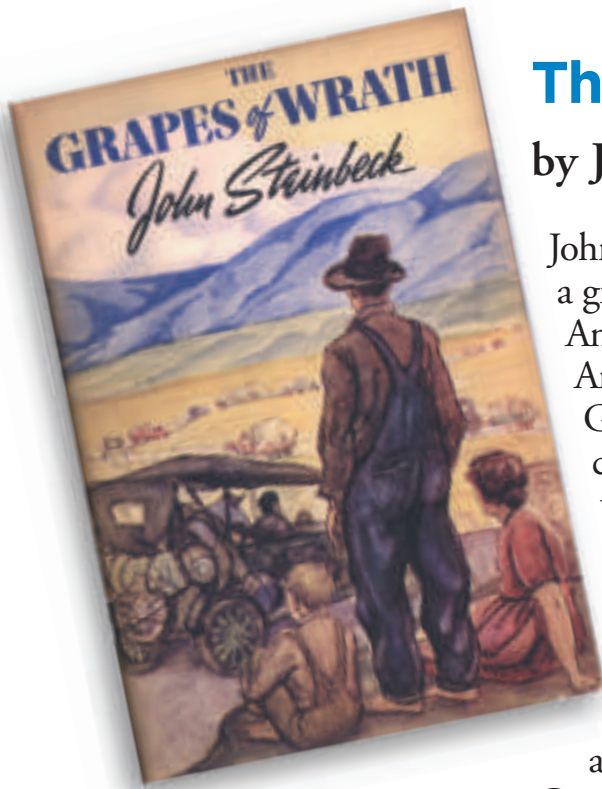
THE AUTHOR

Marilynne Robinson was born in 1943 and grew up in the Idaho town of Sandpoint—not unlike Fingerbone in *Housekeeping*. Many know her as the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Gilead* (2004), the saga of an ailing Congregationalist pastor, recounting his life for a son he will never know. Robinson also has written two nonfiction books, and teaches at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop.



"To crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow...and when do our senses know any thing so utterly as when we lack it?"

—from *Housekeeping*



The Grapes of Wrath

by John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is both a great American novel and a significant event in American history. Capturing the plight of millions of Americans impoverished by the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, Steinbeck awakened the nation's comprehension and compassion. The novel begins with young Tom Joad's return home from prison to find his family's Oklahoma farmstead in ruins. The Joads soon set out for a better life in California, only to find a plantation economy whose bounty makes no provision for them except as occasional day laborers. Written in an amazing five-month burst of productivity, *The Grapes of Wrath's* creation stands testament to perhaps its greatest theme: the dignity of hard work, done by hand and beset by doubt, with all one has, and for others to share.



THE AUTHOR

Born in the California farm town of Salinas in 1902, John Steinbeck received decades of enmity from his hometown for its depiction in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck soon thereafter moved to New York. The 1962 memoir *Travels With Charley: In Search of America* freshened and deepened Steinbeck's already wide readership. That same year, he won the Nobel Prize for literature. He died in Manhattan in 1968.

THEMES:

the American Dream, redemption, individuals vs. corporations, tolerance, ecology, immigration

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940, starring Henry Fonda)

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES:

- *The Grapes of Wrath*, stage adaptation by Frank Galati (produced by L.A. Theatre Works)
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, opera by Ricky Ian Gordon, libretto by Michael Korie

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

“On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. And the anger began to ferment.”

—from *The Grapes of Wrath*

Currently available for programming

The Joy Luck Club

by Amy Tan

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) is itself a joyful study in luck. Initially intended as a short-story collection, the novel is a mother-daughter saga written by a woman whose own mother wanted her to be anything but a writer. The novel features four pairs of mothers and daughters. One of these mothers, Suyuan Woo, invented the original "Joy Luck Club" in China, before the Japanese invaded the city of Kweilin. After Suyuan reaches America, she resurrects the club with three other Chinese immigrants, and the four reinvent themselves in San Francisco's Chinatown. These four mothers hope the mix of "American circumstances with Chinese character" will give their California-born daughters better lives. Through the power of storytelling, all eight women struggle to connect despite the ghosts and secrets of the past.

THEMES:

parent-child relationships, sacrifice, memories, fate, joy, faith, hope

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Joy Luck Club* (1993, co-written by Amy Tan and Ronald Bass, directed by Wayne Wang)

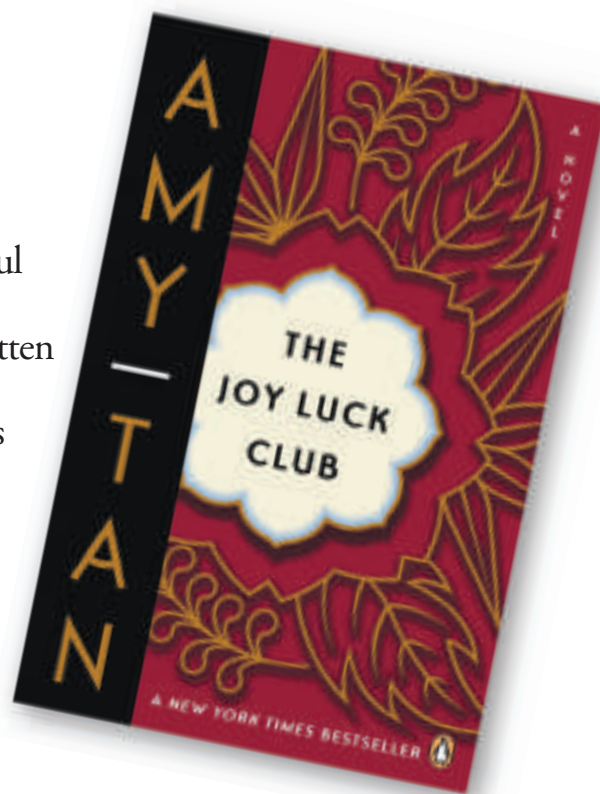
PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- *The Joy Luck Club* film score by Rachel Portman

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- abridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



THE AUTHOR

Amy Tan was born in Oakland, California, in 1952, several years after her parents immigrated to the Bay area from China. After her first trip to China with her mother, Tan wrote *The Joy Luck Club*. Her other works include several acclaimed novels, the children's book *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994), and the essay collection *The Opposite of Fate* (2003). She lives in northern California.



"They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it does not exist."

—from *The Joy Luck Club*

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

by Mark Twain

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) is ripe for a second look. The story of a mischievous boy growing up before the Civil War in a small Mississippi River town, Twain's first full-length novel brims with the exultation of a world-class sprinter finding out he can run marathons, too. What many people mistake for a children's novel is really a natural introduction—or re-introduction—to the pleasures of literature, whatever a reader's age. As Twain himself wrote in his preface, "Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls,

I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account, for part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in."

THEMES:

childhood, racism, education, family

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1938, starring Walter Brennan)

DOCUMENTARY FILMS:

- *Mark Twain* (3-1/2 hours, two-part documentary from Ken Burns)
- *Mark Twain Tonight!* (starring Hal Holbrook)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Available for applications in spring 2008; in communities as of fall 2008



THE AUTHOR

The writer we know as Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens in 1835 in Florida, Missouri. He wrote comic newspaper stories in the California goldfields, uproarious nonfiction such as *Roughing It* (1872), and a couple of novels—including *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)—in which not just his heroes, but all of American literature grows up. He died in 1910 in Redding, Connecticut.

"Like it? Well I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

—from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

The Age of Innocence

by Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) begins at the opera on a January evening in the 1870s. Among the audience is Newland Archer, an affluent New York lawyer in his 30s, "sincerely yet placidly in love" with beautiful May Welland. Newland never questions that his fiancée will be the perfect wife until May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, returns home suddenly after many years in Europe. From the moment Ellen enters the opera, she shocks Old New York, but when she wants to divorce her Polish husband, she risks public disgrace. With time, Newland not only falls in love with Ellen—despite his impending wedding to May—but also begins to see the hypocrisy of his world. Will he follow the wishes of his family and convince Ellen to remain in an oppressive marriage? Or will he risk his own name and encourage her to seek a divorce?

THEMES:

struggle between duty and desire, marriage and divorce, conformity, temptation

FILM ADAPTATION:

- *The Age of Innocence* (1993, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer, adapted by Jay Cocks, directed by Martin Scorsese)

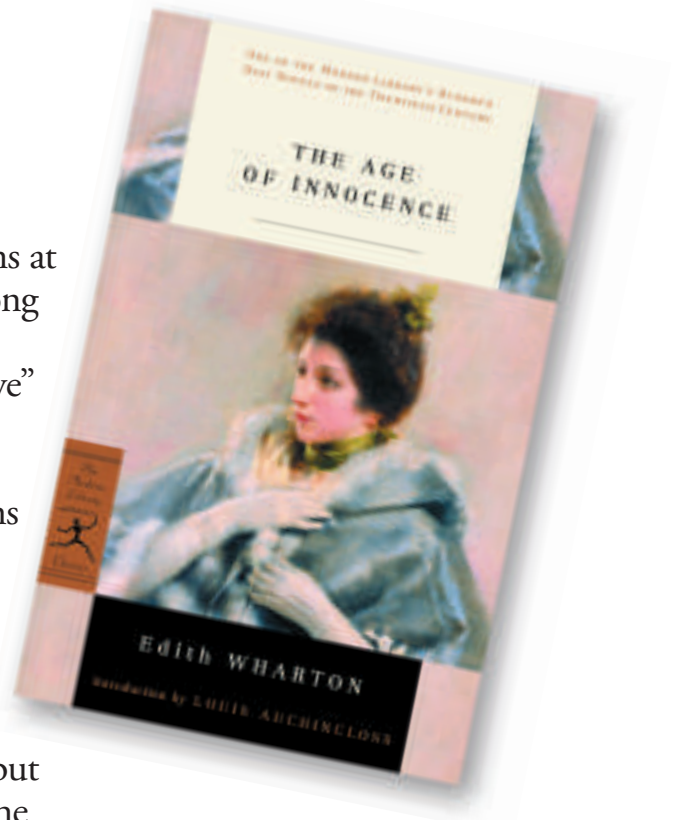
PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITY:

- *Faust* by Charles Gounod (1859, the opera that begins and ends the novel)

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- large print edition available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Currently available for programming



THE AUTHOR

Born in New York in 1862, Edith Wharton won literary fame with *The House of Mirth* (1905). One of the 20th century's most prolific, wealthy, and distinguished American writers, Wharton published more than 45 books of poetry, non-fiction, stories, and novels to both popular and critical acclaim. She died in 1937 in France, where she had lived the last 27 years of her life.



"In reality they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs."

— from *The Age of Innocence*



Old School

by Tobias Wolff

In Tobias Wolff's *Old School* (2003), the characters talk and think about literature as if their lives depend upon it. Wolff's narrator, a secretly half-Jewish scholarship student from the Northwest, is nearing graduation at a classy all-boy prep school during the Kennedy era. The first three sections take the form of campus visits by the poet Robert Frost, the philosopher Ayn Rand, and novelist Ernest Hemingway, whose anticipated arrival drives Wolff's hero-worshipping narrator to an act of desperation. The fourth section comes decades later as the adult narrator reckons with his earlier conduct while visiting the school as a guest writer himself. *Old School* examines the price of sacrificing integrity and the powerful allure of artistic fame.



THE AUTHOR

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1945, Tobias Wolff is an accomplished writer and teacher. The memoirs *This Boy's Life* (1989) and *In Pharoah's Army* (1994) recall his adolescence in Washington State and four years in the military. *This Boy's Life* and *Old School* were each nominated for the National Book Critics' Circle Award. Wolff teaches at Stanford University and lives in northern California. He also has received two NEA Literature Fellowships in 1978 and 1985.

THEMES:

truth, honor, fame, plagiarism, integrity, education

ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- unabridged audio version available
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) resources available (www.loc.gov/nls/)

Available for applications in spring 2008; in communities as of fall 2008

**“Make no mistake, he said:
a true piece of writing is a
dangerous thing. It can change
your life.”**

—from *Old School*

Application Guidelines for the Big Read

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, designed to revitalize the role of literature in American culture and bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of its citizens. Created by the NEA in cooperation with Arts Midwest, the Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage citizens to read for pleasure and enlightenment.

An organization applying to participate must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or a division of state, local, or tribal government. Eligible applicants include such organizations as literary centers, libraries, museums, colleges and universities, art centers, historical societies, arts councils, tribal governments, humanities councils, literary festivals, and arts organizations. Applicant organizations must partner with a library (if the applicant organization itself is not a library).

Community organizations participating in the Big Read shall develop and produce a well-planned and well-attended community-wide read with innovative, diverse programming, and widespread community partnerships and participation. Activities should last approximately 4-6 weeks and focus on one book from the list of available Big Read titles.

Organizations selected to participate in the Big Read will receive a grant; financial support to attend a national orientation meeting; Reader's, Teacher's, and Audio Guides for their selected title; promotional materials for broad distribution; an online Organizer's Guide for developing and managing Big Read activities; inclusion of the organization and its events on the Big Read Web site; and the prestige of participating in a highly visible national initiative.

To learn more about the Big Read, including current programming and application deadlines, visit www.neabigread.org.



International Partnerships for the Big Read

The Big Read is expanding to include international partnerships that will create meaningful cultural exchange through the reading of great literature. The first of these developing international exchanges is with Russia.

Communities considering *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* are encouraged to explore partnerships that involve the local Russian community (if applicable), university International Centers, Slavic language departments, and international exchange organizations, such as Sister Cities.

Communities that select *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (available for programming starting January 2008) may have the opportunity to participate in NEA-coordinated cultural exchange activities with Russia.

Programming expectations and reporting requirements for *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* are the same as for selections of other Big Read titles.

In addition to Russia, partnerships with several countries, including Mexico and Egypt, are in the planning stages. To learn more about the Big Read's current international partnership opportunities, visit www.neabigread.org.

The Death of Ivan Ilyich

by Leo Tolstoy

The 1886 novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* dramatizes Leo Tolstoy's central spiritual concerns. Although Ivan Ilyich is a Russian judge and official, he is also a middle-class everyman whose death results from a trivial accident while hanging a curtain in his home. As his disease progresses, Ivan recognizes the hypocrisy of his society and the insincerity of his family, and ultimately confesses the futility of his life. Surrounded by his wife, daughter, colleagues, and doctors, Ivan feels even more isolated and alone. As his physical pain increases, so does Ivan's emotional awareness of a horrifying truth: he has not lived a meaningful life. The power of the novella stems from Tolstoy's psychological insight, sharp satire, and sensory realism.

THEMES:

conformity, hypocrisy, death, confronting mortality

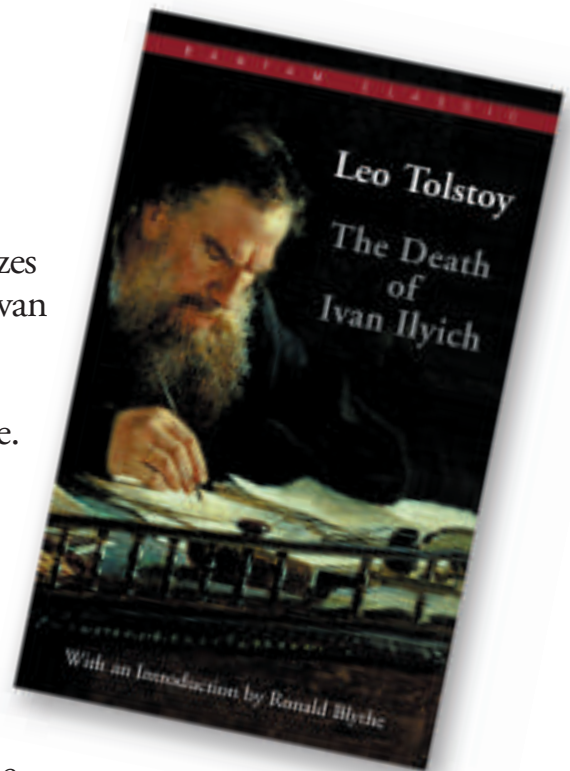
ACCESSIBILITY MATERIALS:

- large print edition available

Available for applications due July 31, 2007; in communities as of spring 2008

“Ivan Ilyich's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible.”

—from *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*



THE AUTHOR

Considered by many Russia's greatest novelist, Count Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) was orphaned at nine. He later joined the army and served in the Crimean War. Between 1863 and 1869 Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace*, his epic of France's 1812 invasion of Russia. *Anna Karenina* (1875-77) followed, as did his obsession with early Christianity subtly present in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886).



This publication is published by:
National Endowment for the Arts
Office of Communications
Felicia K. Knight, Director
Don Ball, Publications Manager/Editor

Written by Sarah Cook, David Kipen, Erika Koss, and
Molly Thomas-Hicks, NEA Literature Office

Designed by:
Fletcher Design, Washington DC



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1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506-0001
(202) 682-5400



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