

NEA Big Read 2026–2027: Book Titles

Honoring America250

Stories from American History: Nonfiction

- *1776* by David McCullough
- *Almost a Miracle* by John E. Ferling
- *Betsy Ross and the Making of America* by Marla R. Miller
- *The Glorious Cause* by Robert Middlekauff
- *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* by Catherine Clinton
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass
- *Washington's Crossing* by David Hackett Fischer
- *Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields* by Robert M. Dunkerly

Classic Books of American Literature

- *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
- *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines
- *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain
- *The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other Stories* by Jack London
- *The Essential Emily Dickinson* by Emily Dickinson
- *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Great Tales and Poems* by Edgar Allan Poe
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *True Grit* by Charles Portis

Contemporary American Literature

- *An American Sunrise* by Joy Harjo
- *The Big Smoke* by Adrian Matejka
- *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros
- *In The Heart of the Sea* by Nathaniel Philbrick
- *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien

Stories from American History: Nonfiction

- ***1776* (David McCullough)** tells the story of those who marched with General George Washington in the year of the Declaration of Independence—when the whole American cause was riding on their success, without which all hope for independence would have been dashed and the noble ideals of the Declaration would have amounted to little more than words on paper. Based on extensive research in both American and British archives, *1776* is a powerful drama written with extraordinary narrative vitality.
- ***Almost a Miracle* (John E. Ferling)** provides an illuminating portrait of America's triumph in the War of Independence, offering vivid descriptions of all the major engagements of the American Revolution, from the first shots fired on Lexington Green to the surrender of General Cornwallis at Yorktown, revealing how these battles often hinged on factors such as leadership under fire, heroism, good fortune, blunders, tenacity, and surprise. Ferling paints sharp-eyed portraits of the key figures in the war, including General Washington and other American officers and civilian leaders.
- ***Betsy Ross and the Making of America* (Marla R. Miller)** is the first comprehensively researched and elegantly written biography of one of America's most captivating figures of the Revolutionary War. Drawing on new sources and bringing a fresh, keen eye to the fabled creation of “the first flag,” Marla R. Miller thoroughly reconstructs the life behind the legend.
- ***The Glorious Cause* (Robert Middlekauff)** is a panoramic view of the conflict between England and America that combines the political and the personal, giving readers a vivid sense of how the colonists perceived the events of their struggle for independence, from the French and Indian War to “the shot heard round the world.”
- ***Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (Catherine Clinton)** is a biography widely praised for its impeccable research and compelling narrative. Celebrated for her role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman has entered history as one of 19th-century America's most enduring and important figures. Singular and complex, she is a woman who defied simple categorization.
- ***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Frederick Douglass)** is an 1845 autobiographical treatise on abolition by Frederick Douglass, who escaped enslavement and became a prominent activist, author, and public speaker. A leading figure in the abolitionist movement, he fought for the end of slavery until the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation and continued to vehemently fight for human rights until his death. The book describes in detail his experiences of life as an enslaved person and was one of the most influential works of literature in the abolitionist movement in the United States.
- ***Washington's Crossing* (David Hackett Fischer)** chronicles one of the most crucial events in the American Revolution. Six months after the Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution was all but lost. A powerful British force had routed the Americans at New York, occupied three colonies, and advanced within sight of Philadelphia. Yet, as David Hackett Fischer recounts in this riveting history, George Washington—and many other Americans—refused to let the Revolution die.
- ***Women of the Revolution: Bravery and Sacrifice on the Southern Battlefields* (Robert M. Dunkerly)** is a fascinating account of the women who contributed to the Revolutionary War—

both patriots and loyalists—at specific battles in the Carolinas. Each of the Southern Revolutionary battlefields holds the history of soldiers and legends of women. From the wooded slopes of Kings Mountain to the fields of Cowpens, to the lesser-known sites like Fishing Creek and Hanging Rock, author Robert M. Dunkerly uncovers the stories and legends surrounding the women who were caught up in the struggle.

Classic Books of American Literature

- ***A Farewell to Arms* (Ernest Hemingway)** is the unforgettable story of an American ambulance driver on the Italian front and his passion for a beautiful English nurse. Set against the looming horrors of the battlefield—the weary, demoralized men marching in the rain during the German attack on Caporetto; the profound struggle between loyalty and desertion—this gripping, semiautobiographical work captures the harsh realities of war, and the pain of lovers caught in its inexorable sweep.
- ***A Lesson Before Dying* (Ernest J. Gaines)** poses one of the most universal questions literature can ask: knowing we're going to die, how should we live? It's the story of a young Black man named Jefferson, falsely accused of the murder of a white storekeeper, and Grant Wiggins, a teacher who visits him in prison. In a little more than 250 pages, these two men discover a friendship that transforms at least two lives.
- ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Mark Twain)** tells the exploits of young Tom Sawyer, a consummate prankster with a quick wit. Yet through the novel's humorous escapades, Mark Twain explores deeper themes within the adult world Tom will one day join. These include the human failings of dishonesty and superstition, murder and revenge, starvation and slavery.
- ***The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other Stories* (Jack London)** is a singular classic. It is a great novel that can be appreciated by readers of all ages, as well as a philosophical book that provides an action-packed adventure. It's also an experimental novel (half of the characters are canine, including the hero) that is a thrilling pleasure to read.
- ***The Essential Emily Dickinson* (Emily Dickinson)** brings together a carefully curated selection of Emily Dickinson's most profound and beloved works, capturing the essence of her timeless genius. Dickinson's poetry transcends the boundaries of time and space, exploring themes of love, nature, death, and the soul with unmatched depth and insight. Whether you're a lifelong fan or new to her work, this collection offers the perfect gateway into her poetic universe.
- ***The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck)** 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.
- ***The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald)** stands as the supreme achievement of his career. First published in 1925, this quintessential novel of the Jazz Age has been acclaimed by generations of

readers. 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.

- ***Great Tales and Poems (Edgar Allan Poe)*** contains Poe's classic short works: masterpieces of horror, terror, humor, and adventure. Poe is one of the classic authors of American literature—a master of the short story, a magician of the short poem, and a critic of brilliance and originality. And no small part of his artistic sleight of hand is that he appeals to readers from childhood to old age.
- ***To Kill a Mockingbird (Harper Lee)*** is a gripping and heart-wrenching coming-of-age tale in a South poisoned by prejudice, viewing a world of great beauty and savage iniquities through the eyes of a young girl as her father—a crusading local lawyer—risks everything to defend a black man unjustly accused of a terrible crime.
- ***True Grit (Charles Portis)*** tells the story of a 14-year-old girl from Arkansas in the latter part of the 19th century who recruits a one-eyed marshal to help her avenge the murder of her father; the two set out during a hard winter across untamed territory to find the drifter who killed him.

Contemporary American Literature

- ***An American Sunrise (Joy Harjo)*** is the eighth collection of poetry by Oklahoma-based writer, musician, and former U. S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. This collection revisits the homeland from which Harjo's ancestors were uprooted in 1830 as a result of the Indian Removal Act and explores the power of nature, memory, violence, and spirituality.
- ***Demon Copperhead (Barbara Kingsolver)***, set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, is the story of a boy born to a teenaged single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets beyond his dead father's good looks and copper-colored hair, a caustic wit, and a fierce talent for survival. In a plot that never pauses for breath, relayed in an unsparing voice, he braves the perils of foster care, child labor, derelict schools, addiction, love, and crushing loss. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favor of cities.
- ***The Big Smoke (Adrian Matejka)*** is a collection of poems that follows the prizefighter Jack Johnson's journey from poverty to the most coveted title in sports through the multi-layered voices of Johnson and the white women he brazenly loved. Matejka's book is part historic reclamation and part interrogation of Johnson's complicated legacy, one that often misremembers the magnetic man behind the myth.
- ***The House on Mango Street (Sandra Cisneros)*** is a collection of coming-of-age vignettes about a year in the life of a 12-year-old Mexican American girl growing up in a Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago who finds confidence and invents herself anew against a poor and patriarchal community that she comes to understand will play a significant role in shaping her identity.
- ***In The Heart of the Sea (Nathaniel Philbrick)*** brings to new life the incredible story of the wreck of the whaleship Essex—an event as mythic in its own time as the Titanic disaster in ours,

and the inspiration for the climax of *Moby-Dick*. In this harrowing page-turner, Nathaniel Philbrick tells the epic tale of the Essex crewmembers' fight for survival.

- ***The Things They Carried* (Tim O'Brien)** 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 43. Taught everywhere from high school classrooms to graduate seminars in creative writing, this book has become required reading for any American and continues to challenge readers in their perceptions of fact and fiction, war and peace, courage and fear.