

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH – 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

Literature written in the English language is one of the largest literatures in the world. It started over 1000 years ago with Anglo-Saxon poems, for example the famous story of Beowulf. Today, books in English are written not only in **Britain** but in many other countries. There are famous English language writers from **the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India, the Caribbean, Nigeria, South Africa**, and many other countries. There are millions of books in English and thousands of new ones are published every year. Many English books and writers are known all over the world. Here are some of the most famous English-language writers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

James Joyce

James Joyce is probably the most famous novelist of the 20th century. He was born in **Dublin**. All of his books take place in Dublin but he didn't like living in Dublin. He spent most of his life in continental Europe, living in cities like Paris and Zürich. He was a **genius** but he had many problems in his life, for example with alcohol.

Joyce's first published book was a collection of short stories called **Dubliners**. All of these stories take place in **Dublin** and they show the lives of people who lived in Dublin **at the beginning of the 20th century**. After that, Joyce published a novel called **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**. It is the story of a young man called Stephen Dedalus who is growing up in Ireland. In the end, he decides to leave for Paris and become an artist.

Joyce's most famous book is definitely **Ulysses**. It is quite long – it has more than 600 pages. It takes place on one day – **16 June, 1904**. There are three main characters – **Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom** and **Molly Bloom**. The book is brilliant but it was for a long time forbidden in Britain as well as in America. Today, 16 June is called **Bloomsday** and it is celebrated by fans of the book all over the world.

Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley was a famous English writer. He is probably most famous for his book **Brave New World** which is about a very bad future of the world. In this new world, people don't have almost any material problems but they don't have any individuality and freedom.

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf was a famous English **modernist writer**. She never went to school but she could use her father's large library and she decided to become a writer. She wrote many **experimental novels**, for example **Mrs Dalloway** or **Jacob's Room**. She also wrote essays about the rights of women.

Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway was one of the most famous American novelists of the 20th century. He published seven novels and many short stories. He got the **Nobel Prize** for literature in 1954.

When he went to high school, Hemingway worked for the school newspaper. He wrote mainly about **sport**. After he finished high school, he worked as a **journalist** for the *Kansas City Star*. In 1918, Hemingway went to serve in **World War I** as an ambulance driver in the Italian Army. He used his experiences to write a novel **A Farewell to Arms**. It is a story of an American soldier who falls in love with an English nurse.

After the end of World War One, Hemingway returned to the USA and worked there as a journalist. After that, he moved to Paris where he met many other famous writers, for example Francis Scott Fitzgerald or James Joyce. He also looked for **adventure**. He liked **boxing, hunting, fishing, bullfighting** and so on. In 1937, he became a correspondent in the **Spanish Civil War**. His book **For Whom the Bell Tolls** is about this war. It is the story of a young American student Robert Jordan who fights against the fascists.

Hemingway's most famous book is probably **The Old Man and the Sea**. It is a short book. It takes place in Cuba in the 20th century. The hero of the book is an old man called **Santiago**. He is a **fisherman**. He is very unlucky and he hasn't caught any fish for many days. There is a boy called **Manolin** who usually goes fishing with him. Manolin's parents don't want him to go fishing with Santiago because they think that Santiago is too old and

won't catch anything. One day, Santiago goes fishing without Manolin. He is alone in his boat. He **catches an enormous fish**. It is a hard fight but the fish doesn't escape. Santiago is taking the fish home but it is attacked by sharks. He kills some of them but they eat all the meat from his fish. When he comes to his fishing village, he has **only the skeleton of the fish**. But it is really big and he is a hero because he caught such a big fish.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was a famous American writer. He is famous for his novels and short stories about **the Jazz Age** – the 1920s. His most famous novel is **The Great Gatsby**. The story is told by **Nick Caraway**, a young and ambitious man who moves to New York. He lives next to **Jay Gatsby**, a mysterious millionaire who got his money from criminal activities and who is in love with Nick's cousin. In the end, Jay Gatsby dies.

William Faulkner

William Faulkner is one of the best-known American novelists of the 20th century. He wrote about his native **South**. One of his most famous books is the **Sound and the Fury**. It is a novel about the tragic end of the Compson family.

John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck was an American novelist from **California**. His books are usually about **poor people**. One of Steinbeck's best-known books is **Of Mice and Men**. It is a story of George Milton and Lennie Small, two migrant workers who dream of owning a small farm. When Lennie accidentally kills their boss's daughter, George shoots him to save him from lynching.

Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller was an American **dramatist**. His most famous play is **Death of a Salesman**. It is the tragedy of Willy Loman, a salesman. Arthur Miller is also famous for being **one of the husbands of Marilyn Monroe**.

George Orwell

George Orwell was a famous English writer. His real name was **Eric Blair** but he hated the name, especially his first name. He wrote novels, poems, essays and other things. He was a **left-wing writer** but he was **against communism**. His most famous novels are warnings against this murderous ideology.

Animal Farm is a book about animals that take over a farm and make their own rules. They want to have a better life. Very soon, however, the **pigs become tyrants** and the life on the farm is much worse than before. The book is **an allegory of the communist revolution in Russia**.

1984 is a book that takes place in a **totalitarian society**. It is again based on things that really happened in the Soviet Union and other similar countries. People have no privacy and everybody is watched all the time by **Big Brother** and his spies. The hero of the book is a man called **Winston Smith**. He tries to make a revolution against Big Brother but he fails.

Vladimir Nabokov

Vladimir Nabokov was a **Russian and English** writer. He was born in St Petersburg in Russia and his first books were written in Russian. He had to **escape from Russia because of the communist revolution**. He lived in Berlin but he had to **escape because of the Nazis**. He moved to Paris but he had to escape again when the Nazis invaded France. He **moved to the USA**. Even before moving there, he started writing in English instead of Russian. In the USA, he became famous after the publication of his novel **Lolita**. Nabokov was not only a writer but also a zoologist. He **studied butterflies**.

Mary Flannery O'Connor

Mary Flannery O'Connor was an American writer from **the South**. She was a **Catholic** and she said that her religion was important for her stories. She is famous mostly for her **short stories**. They are often dark but humorous. Her most famous short story is probably **A Good Man is Hard to Find**.

James Baldwin

James Baldwin was an American writer. He was black and he often wrote about his experiences. He grew up in Harlem. His first novel is called ***Go Tell It on the Mountain***. He also wrote essays about his experiences with racism in the USA. His most important essays were collected in a book called ***The Price of the Ticket***. He was active in **the civil rights movement**. He didn't like violence and he disagreed with groups like the Black Panthers.

Graham Greene

Graham Greene was a British novelist. He was a **Catholic** but he didn't like being called a Catholic writer. His books often take place in **very poor countries** where there is war or revolution. One of Greene's most famous novels is ***The Power and the Glory***. It takes place in Mexico. The hero of the book is an alcoholic priest who is trying to escape from the revolutionary government.

Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut was an American writer. He wrote mostly **science fiction** books but they were more serious than most other science fiction books. One of his most famous books is ***Slaughterhouse Five***. It describes **the bombing of Dresden** during World War Two and combines it with science fiction motives. Vonnegut was an American soldier who was in prison in Dresden when the bombing happened so he used his own experiences to write the book. Vonnegut's best book is probably ***Cat's Cradle***. It is a book about the end of the world.

Harper Lee

Harper Lee was an American writer. She is famous for her novel for children called ***To Kill a Mockingbird***. It takes place in **the South** in the 1930s. It is told by a very young girl called Scout Finch. Her father is a lawyer. There is a black man called Tom Robinson who is **accused of raping a white girl**. Scout's father defends Tom. People want to lynch him but he doesn't give up. He shows them that **Tom didn't do it but they don't care because Tom is black**. In the end, Tom is killed when he tries to escape from prison.

Jerome David Salinger

Jerome David Salinger is an American writer. He is famous for his book ***The Catcher in the Rye***. The book takes place in **New York**. The hero of the novel is **Holden Caulfield**. He is expelled from school. He should go home, but he goes to New York instead. He spends there three days.

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was an **Irish writer**. He wrote in **English** and in **French**. He wrote novels and plays. One of his most famous plays is ***Waiting for Godot***. He wrote this play in French. It is about four people who are waiting for a mysterious Mr Godot. They are waiting and waiting but he never comes.

William Styron

William Styron was an American writer. He is probably most famous for his novel ***Sophie's Choice***. The book takes place in **New York** and in **Poland**. One of the main characters in the book is a **Polish woman called Sophie**. She **survived the Holocaust** and now lives in America. When she was in the concentration camp, the Nazis made her make a terrible choice. They said that **one of her two children will be killed and the other will live**. In the end, Sophie and her lover Nathan commit suicide.

Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is an American novelist. She got the **Nobel Prize for literature** in 1993. Her most famous book is probably a novel called ***Beloved***. It is the story of a black woman who used to be a slave and who cannot escape her horrible memories.

Isaac Bashevis Singer

Isaac Bashevis Singer was a **Jewish writer**. He was born in Poland but he later moved to the USA. He got the **Nobel Prize for Literature** in 1978. His stories usually take place among the Jews who lived in Poland before the Holocaust. They are full of Jewish legends and folklore. His short story ***Yentl the Yeshiva Boy*** was turned into a movie by Barbara Streisand.

J. R. R. Tolkien

J. R. R. Tolkien was a British writer. He is one of the most famous **fantasy writers** of all time and one of the fathers of fantasy as a genre. He was a **professor of the English language at Oxford**. His most famous books are ***The Hobbit*** and ***The Lord of the Rings***. They were inspired by **Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian mythology**. They take place in a fictional world called the **Middle-earth**. There are many strange creatures in the Middle-earth: **Hobbits, Elves, Dwarves, Ents, Goblins** and others.

The hero of *The Hobbit* is **Bilbo**. He is a Hobbit who likes good food and his comfortable home. He doesn't like adventure. But he has to go with a group of dwarves to **steal gold from a terrible dragon**. On his journey, he meets an ugly creature called **Gollum**. He finds Gollum's **magic ring** and keeps it. The ring can make you invisible and has other amazing powers. It is important for the story of Tolkien's next book, *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Lord of the Rings is a **trilogy of novels**. One of the main characters of this trilogy is a Hobbit called **Frodo**. He is a relative of Bilbo. Bilbo gives him his ring and Frodo has to destroy it. To destroy the ring, he has to **travel to a scary place called Mordor**. He has a lot of helpers, especially the powerful wizard **Gandalf**.

J. K. Rowling

J. K. Rowling is a popular British **fantasy writer**. She is famous for her series of books about **Harry Potter**. He is a young **wizard** who is studying at the **Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry**. He fights against an evil wizard called **Lord Voldemort**. His best friends are a red-haired boy called **Ron Weasley** and a nerdy girl called **Hermione Granger**. The headteacher of Hogwarts school is called **Albus Dumbledore**. There are a lot of other characters, for example an alcoholic giant called **Hagrid** or an evil potions teacher called **Snape**.

The first of these books is called ***Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone***. The American version was called ***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*** because somebody thought that American kids are stupid and wouldn't understand the original name. The other six books are always called Harry Potter and Something. The books are mystery stories. They are all badly written but nobody cares about that anymore.

The overview is largely based on the following sources:

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