Books That Shaped America

1750 to 1800

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790). Experiments and Observations on Electricity, Made at Philadelphia in America. London: E. Cave, 1751. Benjamin Franklin Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (001.00.00)

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790). Poor Richard Improved: An Almanack for the Year of Christ 1758. Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1757. American Almanac Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (002.00.00)

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790). The Way to Wealth, and a Plan by Which Every Man May Pay His Taxes. Philadelphia: Daniel Humphreys, 1785. Printed Ephemera Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (103.00.00)

Thomas Paine (1737–1809). Common Sense. Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1776. American Imprint Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (003.00.00)

The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution. vol. 1. New York: J. and A. McLean, 1788. Thomas Jefferson Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (006.00.00)

A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible, or, Select Passages in the Old and New Testaments. . . . Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1788. American Imprint Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (007.00.00)


Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790). The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D. Late Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America to France, &c. London: J. Parsons, 1793. Benjamin Franklin Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (009.00.00)

Amelia Simmons [n.d.]. American Cookery, or, The Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry, and Vegetables . . . and All Kinds of Cakes, from the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake, Adapted to This Country, and All Grades of Life. Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1796. American Imprint Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (010.00.00)

1800 to 1850

The New England Primer, Improved: for the More Easy Attaining the True Reading of English: to which is added the Assembly of Divines’ Catechism. Hartford: Printed by Lincoln & Gleason, and Hudson & Goodwin, 1803. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (011.00.00)


Washington Irving (1783–1859). The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1899. Margaret Armstrong Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (013.00.00)

McGuffey’s Newly Revised Eclectic Primer. With Pictorial Illustrations. Cincinnati: W. B. Smith & Co., 1849. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (014.00.00)

Noah Webster (1758–1843). A Grammatical Institute of the English Language. Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1783. John Davis Batchelder Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (004.00.00)

Samuel Goodrich (1793–1860). Peter Parley’s Universal History, on the Basis of Geography: for the Use of
Families, Illustrated by Maps and Engravings. Boston: American Stationers’ Company, John B. Russell, 1837. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (015.00.00–016.00.00)
Frederick Douglass (1818–1895). Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (017.00.00)

1850 to 1900
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864). The Scarlet Letter. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1850. Rosenwald Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (019.02.00)
Herman Melville (1819–1891). Moby-Dick; or, the Whale. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (020.00.00)
Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896). Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. 2 vols. Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852. Oliver Wendell Holmes Library Collection and Susan B. Anthony Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (021.00.00, 021.01.00, 022.00.00)
National Era, December 11, 1851. Newspaper. John Davis Batchelder Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division (023.00.00)
Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896). The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Boston: John P. Jewett & Co. 1853. John Davis Batchelder Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division (024.00.00)
Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). Walden; or, Life in the Woods. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (025.00.00)
Walt Whitman (1819–1892). Leaves of Grass. Brooklyn, New York: [Walt Whitman] and Rome Brothers, 1855. Houghton Whitman Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (026.00.00)
Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888). The Mysterious Key and What It Opened. Boston: Elliot, Thomes & Talbot, 1867. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (027.00.00)
Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888). Little Women, or, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (028.00.00)
Horatio Alger Jr. (1832–1899). Mark, the Match Boy. Boston: Loring, 1869. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (029.00.00)
Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens, 1835–1910). The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer’s Comrade). London: Chatto & Windus, 1884. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (031.00.00)
Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens, 1835–1910). Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer’s Comrade). New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1885. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (032.00.00)
Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). Poems. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (033.00.00)
Emily Dickinson (1830–1886). Slant of Light=Sesgo de Luz. Matanzas, Cuba: Ediciones Vigia, 1998. Press Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (034.00.00)
1900 to 1950

L. Frank Baum (1856–1919). The Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Chicago and New York: Geo. M. Hill, 1900. Juvenile Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (035.00.00)
Sarah H. Bradford. Harriet, the Moses of Her People. New York: Little & Co., 1901. Susan B. Anthony Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (036.00.00)
Jack London (1876–1916). The Call of the Wild. New York: Macmillan, 1903. Oliver Wendell Holmes Library Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (038.00.00)
William James (1842–1910). Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking: Popular Lectures on Philosophy. New York: Longmans, Green, 1907. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (042.00.00)
Zane Grey (1872–1939). Riders of the Purple Sage. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1940. Western Literature Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (043.00.00)
Margaret Sanger (1879–1966). Family Limitation. [New York: 1914]. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (045.00.00)
William Carlos Williams (1883–1963). Spring and All. Paris: Contact Publishing, 1923. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (046.00.00)
F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940). The Great Gatsby. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (048.00.00)
Langston Hughes (1902–1967). The Weary Blues. New York: Knopf, 1926. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (049.00.00)
Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961). Red Harvest. New York: Knopf, 1929. Oliver Wendell Holmes Library Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (052.00.00)
Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949). Gone With the Wind. New York: Macmillan, 1936. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (053.00.00)
William F. Warnecke. Margaret Mitchell holding her book, Gone With the Wind, ca. 1938. Photograph. New York World-Telegram and Sun Newspaper Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (056.00.00)
gress (053.01.00)
Thornton Wilder (1897–1975). Our Town: A Play in Three Acts. New York: Coward McCann, 1938. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (058.00.00)
Carol M. Highsmith (b.1946). Grapes of Wrath Billboard along a California Highway, between 1980 and 2006. Facsimile. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (059.01.00)
Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961). For Whom the Bell Tolls. New York: Scribners, 1940. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (061.00.00)
Richard Wright (1908–1960). Native Son. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (062.00.00)
Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953). The Iceman Cometh, A Play. New York: Random House, 1946. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (070.00.00)
Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: New Directions, 1947. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (072.00.00)

1950 to 2000

J. D. Salinger (1919–2010). The Catcher in the Rye. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (074.00.00)
Ralph Ellison (1914–1994). Invisible Man. New York: Random House, 1952. Herman Finkelstein Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (075.00.00)

Theodor Seuss (Dr. Seuss, 1904–1991). The Cat in the Hat. New York: Random House, 1957. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (081.00.00)


Harper Lee (b. 1926). To Kill a Mockingbird. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (083.00.00)


