

You're Going to Have to Educate Yourself

Let's face it: we all have holes in our education.

In part, this is because we can only fit so much into the years of our formal education.

But the holes in our education are also due to the fact that we no longer have a standard canon of sources that we are expected to study in school.

In the past, this canon served a unifying function among those in the Western world: it gave us a common lens through which to view the world, common terms for discourse, and a means to understand a common past.

Now, however, many are lucky to have any exposure to classical sources beyond selections from the *Iliad*, a Shakespeare play or two, and *Huckleberry Finn*. Most books that students read differ from school to school, which leaves people with very few literary experiences that they share in common. (No wonder we're becoming more divided as a country!)

Faced with this situation, what are we to do? Well, if you want to learn the classical sources, you're most likely going to have to do a lot on your own. You simply cannot depend upon today's education system to put these books in front of you. You're going to have to self-educate.

Fortunately, there's a book to help you with this! It's called *The Well-Educated Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education You Never Had*, by Susan Wise Bauer. In Part I, she provides advice on how to more maturely study (vs. simply "reading") classical texts on one's own. In Part II, she provides a list/program of books (both past and present) that can make one part of the "Great Conversation" that has been taking place for over two

thousand years.

Below I have provided her list, in which the books and authors are put in chronological order. There's plenty to quibble with in it – both in terms of its exclusions and inclusions. However, I think the inspirational point behind the list remains: there's a human and social value to reading the classics, and tapping into that value requires much in the way of personal sacrifice and effort.

Novel List

1. *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes
2. *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan
3. *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift
4. *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen
5. *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens
6. *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte
7. *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne
8. *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville
9. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe
10. *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert
11. *Crime and Punishment*, Fyodor Dostoevsky
12. *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy
13. *Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy
14. *Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James
15. *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain
16. *Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane
17. *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad
18. *The House of Mirth*, Edith Wharton
19. *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald
20. *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf
21. *The Trial*, Franz Kafka
22. *Native Son*, Richard Wright
23. *The Stranger*, Albert Camus
24. *1984*, George Orwell
25. *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison

26. *Seize the Day*, Saul Bellow
27. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez
28. *If on a winter's night a traveler*, Italo Calvino
29. *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison
30. *White Noise*, Don DeLillo
31. *Possession*, A.S. Byatt

Autobiography List

1. *The Confessions*, Augustine
2. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery Kempe
3. *Essays*, Michel de Montaigne
4. *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila*, Teresa of Avila
5. *Meditations*, Rene Descartes
6. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan
7. *The Narrative of Captivity and Restoration*, Mary Rowlandson
8. *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau
9. *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Benjamin Franklin
10. *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau
11. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Written By Herself
12. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Frederick Douglass
13. *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington
14. *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche
15. *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler
16. *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mohandas Gandhi
17. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein
18. *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton
19. *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, C.S. Lewis
20. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X
21. *Journal of a Solitude*, May Sarton
22. *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn
23. *Born Again*, Charles W. Colson
24. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*,

Richard Rodriguez

25. *The Road from Coorain*, Jill Ker Conway

26. *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs*, Elie Wiesel

History List

1. *The Histories*, Herodotus

2. *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides

3. *The Republic*, Plato

4. *Lives*, Plutarch

5. *The City of God*, Augustine

6. *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede

7. *The Prince*, Niccolò Macchiavelli

8. *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More

9. *The True End of Civil Government*, John Locke

10. *The History of England, Volume V*, David Hume

11. *The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau

12. *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine

13. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,
Edward Gibbon

14. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary
Wollstonecraft

15. *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville

16. *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

17. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Jacob
Burckhardt

18. *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois

19. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max
Weber

20. *Queen Victoria*, Lytton Strachey

21. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell

22. *The New England Mind*, Perry Miller

23. *The Great Crash 1929*, John Kenneth Galbraith

24. *The Longest Day*, Cornelius Ryan

25. *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan

26. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, Eugene D.

Genovese

27. *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, Barbara Tuchman
28. *All the President's Men*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein
29. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, James McPherson
30. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich
31. *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama

Drama List

1. *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus
2. *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles
3. *Medea*, Euripides
4. *The Birds*, Aristophanes
5. *Poetics*, Aristotle
6. *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*
7. *Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe
8. *Richard III*, William Shakespeare
9. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, William Shakespeare
10. *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare
11. *Tartuffe*, Molière
12. *The Way of the World*, William Congreve
13. *She Stoops to Conquer*, Oliver Goldsmith
14. *The School for Scandal*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan
15. *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen
16. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde
17. *The Cherry Orchard*, Anton Chekhov
18. *Saint Joan*, George Bernard Shaw
19. *Murder in the Cathedral*, T.S. Eliot
20. *Our Town*, Thornton Wilder
21. *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, Eugene O'Neill
22. *No Exit*, Jean Paul Sartre
23. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams
24. *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller

25. *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett
26. *A Man For All Seasons*, Robert Bolt
27. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Tom Stoppard
28. *Equus*, Peter Shaffer

Poetry List (I've mainly included her recommended authors rather than her specific poem recommendations)

1. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
2. *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer
3. Greek Lyricists
4. *Odes*, Horace
5. *Beowulf*
6. *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri
7. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
8. *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer
9. Sonnets, William Shakespeare
10. John Donne
11. *Psalms*, King James Bible
12. *Paradise Lost*, John Milton
13. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, William Blake
14. William Wordsworth
15. Samuel Taylor Coleridge
16. John Keats
17. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
18. Alfred Lord Tennyson
19. Walt Whitman
20. Emily Dickinson
21. Christina Rossetti
22. Gerard Manley Hopkins
23. William Butler Yeats
24. Paul Laurence Dunbar
25. Robert Frost
26. Carl Sandburg
27. William Carlos Williams
28. Ezra Pound

29. T.S. Eliot
30. Langston Hughes
31. W.H. Auden
32. Philip Larkin
33. Allen Ginsberg
34. Sylvia Plath
35. Mark Strand
36. Adrienne Rich
37. Seamus Heaney
38. Robert Pinsky
39. Jane Kenyon
40. Rita Dove