

101 Books Millennials Should Read Before They Die

MercatorNet's book list, "[101 books Gen Ys must read before they die](#)", which we published in 2012, long before anyone had ever heard of Millennials, has become one of our most popular features.

So here is a sequel for the next generation, selected according to the same criteria: the books have to be interesting, enriching and short. Well, sadly, we have broken the last rule in this list. We had to. By and large, there are no short Russian novels; there are no short Victorian novels. So we've included a few epic reads, but not too many. (They are marked with an asterisk.) Finally, no author has more than one book in the list and nearly all of them are in conventional prose (ie, no drama or poetry).

The dark curse laid upon Millennials has condemned them to read nothing longer than 140 characters. We hope that our list will lift this dismal hex and allow them to saunter through the sunny uplands of Western culture.

Bear in mind that this is not a list of the "greatest books of all time" or of "'the world's most uplifting novels'". It is a list of books ranging from good to phenomenal which is meant to hook Millennials on reading. If we succeed in that simple aim, we can breathe easy.

Character

Tom Wolfe, [The Right Stuff](#) (1979)

This is a brilliantly written history of the pilots engaged in US post-War research on experimental rocket-powered, high-speed aircraft. It also tells the story of the first Project Mercury astronauts. Wolfe said that the book originated with his interest in what "'makes a man willing to sit up on top of

an enormous Roman candle and wait for someone to light the fuse””.

Pearl Buck, [The Good Earth](#) (1931)*

Pearl Buck won the 1938 Nobel Prize for Literature, mostly for this novel about the extended family of a prosperous peasant in a Chinese village in the chaotic years before World War I.

Willa Cather, [Death Comes for the Archbishop](#) (1927)

The narrative gives a very sympathetic picture of two French clergy, Jean-Baptiste Lamy and Joseph Projectus Machebeuf, both historical figures, who evangelised New Mexico. Like most of Willa Cather’s fiction, the novel is very episodic, painting beautiful pictures of the characters and the landscape with her wonderfully evocative prose.

Joseph Conrad, [Typhoon](#) (1902)

This novella tells the story of a dependable but unimaginative sea-captain who is transporting Chinese coolies back home when he runs into a gigantic typhoon. The description of the storm is incredibly realistic.

Henry James, [The Aspern Papers](#) (1888)

Henry James is one of America’s greatest novelists, a master of psychological realism. This novella relates the efforts of a biographer to obtain the letters of a dead American poet from his former lover, now living in Venice.

Rudyard Kipling, [The Jungle Books](#) (1894)

Kipling’s stories about a child adopted by a wolf pack in an Indian jungle have become a classic. But they are also deeply moral tales teaching respect for authority, obedience, and knowing one’s place in a society with “the law of the jungle”.

Robert Louis Stevenson, [Kidnapped](#) (1886)

Stevenson is one of the masters of English prose. In this thrilling story about the time of the 18th Century Jacobite Rebellion in Scotland, the young orphan David Balfour is sent

to live with his Uncle Ebenezer. After he discovers that he may be the rightful heir to his uncle's estate, he finds himself kidnapped, leading to a succession of adventures where his life hangs by a thread.

Frank O'Connor, [Short Stories](#) (1952)

The Irish writer Frank O'Connor was one of the great storytellers of 20th Century fiction, many of them drawn from his impoverished childhood and his experiences in the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War which followed.

Henry Handel Richardson, [The Fortunes of Richard Mahony](#) (1930)*

This is one of the greatest Australian novels. Its central character is a doctor from England who tries to settle in Victoria during the Gold Rush years. Life is difficult and he gradually sinks into madness. It's a remarkable psychological portrait as well as an evocative portrait of colonial Australia. (The author's real name is Ethel Florence Lindesay Richardson.)

Jack London, [White Fang](#) (1906)

An American classic about a vicious wolf cub who is gradually tamed and integrated into human society. Though written with great realism, it is basically an allegory about the development of man from barbarism to civilisation.

Comedy and satire

Giovanni Guareschi, [The Little World of Don Camillo](#) (1950)

These charming stories about the never-ending fight between Don Camillo, the hot-headed parish priest of small town in northern Italy, and Peppone, the Communist mayor, have become an Italian classic. Despite their ideological differences, the two men have a grudging affection for each other, even though they denounce the "godless" Communists and the "reactionaries" in public.

Flann O'Brien, [The Dalkey Archive](#) (1964)

Insanity is a definite help in reading this absurd story by the Irish journalist and novelist Brian O’Nolan. James Joyce and St Augustine are characters in the novel, along with the mad scientist De Selby, who seeks to destroy the world by removing all the oxygen from the air.

Evelyn Waugh, [The Loved One](#) (1948)

Only Evelyn Waugh could write a side-splitting comedy about the work of morticians. The novel is set in California where Hollywood residentsÂ bury their beloved pets in the Happier Hunting Ground. The main character is an Englishman who is smitten by a rather dim mortician’s assistant and woos her by sending her famous English love poems under the pretence that he is the author.

E.B. White, [Charlotte’s Web](#) (1952)

This favourite American children’s novel tells the story of a pig named Wilbur and his friend, a barn spider named Charlotte. When Wilbur is in danger of being slaughtered by the farmer, Charlotte writes messages praising Wilbur in her webs to persuade the farmer to let him live.

P.G. Wodehouse, [Joy in the Morning](#) (1946)

All of Wodehouse’s numerous novels are pure escapism into a fantasy world of overbearing aunts, huge country homes, dominating fiances, and flighty young men who struggle to remain irresponsible and unmarried. *Joy in the Morning* is a entertaining example of the author’s witty and engaging style.

Crime

Agatha Christie, [And Then There Were None](#) (1939)

If you read only one Agatha Christie novel, make it this one, her masterpiece. More than 100 million copies have been sold. The premise is simple: ten people, all of them murderers, are in a hotel on on an isolated island. One by one, they all die who is the murderer?

Arthur Conan Doyle, [A Study in Scarlet](#) (1887)

This short novel introduced the memorable characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson to the world. The fascination of Holmes is not so much his adventures as his emotionless devotion to logic, which makes him both professionally outstanding and psychologically stunted. Wonderfully intriguing and never dated.

Graham Greene, [*The Confidential Agent*](#) (1939)

Graham Greene, the English novelist who was always a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature but who never quite made it, wrote a number of what he called "entertainments", crime and spy novels. In this tale a lecturer in mediaeval French who is an agent for his unnamed government in the middle of a civil war, becomes a hunted man in England.

Mark Haddon, [*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*](#) (2003)

This is a fabulously popular novel about a teenage boy with Asperger's syndrome who discovers a murdered poodle on a neighbour's lawn. He sets out to solve the crime in the style of his favourite detective, logic personified, Sherlock Holmes.

Robert Harris, [*Fatherland*](#) (1992)

This is a police thriller set in 1964 in an alternative universe in which the Nazis won World War II. Queen Elizabeth II lives in exile in Canada and her uncle Edward VIII sits on the throne in England. A German detective investigating the murders of several ageing Nazis discovers that they are being killed to erase all knowledge of the Holocaust in order to improve relations with the United States.

Peter Hoeg, [*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*](#) (1992)

One snowy day in Copenhagen, six-year-old Isaiah falls to his death from a rooftop. The police pronounce it an accident. But Isaiah's neighbour, Smilla, an expert in the ways of snow and ice from her childhood in Greenland, suspects murder. She embarks on a dangerous quest to find the truth.

Cormac McCarthy, [*No Country for Old Men*](#) (2005)

Written in stunningly beautiful prose, this is a kind of parable about America's moral corruption by drugs and drug money. McCarthy balances one of the most sinister characters in American fiction, the contract killer Anton Chigurh, against Bell, the thoughtful, humane sheriff who is pursuing him.

History

James Agee, [*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*](#) (1941)

A powerful picture of the poverty many Americans experienced during the Depression years.

Robert Conquest, [*The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*](#) (1968)

For many years Stalin's crimes were overlooked because he helped to save the West from Nazi Germany. But Conquest's book showed that while the "legal deaths" from the purges amounted to some 700,000, another 20 million perished from famine and disease caused by Stalin's policies.

T.E. Lawrence, [*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*](#) (1926)

The autobiographical account of the legendary "Lawrence of Arabia" while serving as a liaison officer with rebel forces during the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks of 1916 to 1918 during World War I.

Walter Lord, [*A Night to Remember*](#) (1955)

A brilliantly written account of the sinking of the RMS Titanic in 1912. It describes the sights and sounds of the disaster with the immediacy of a live broadcast.

David McCullough, [*1776*](#) (2005)

In 1776 the prospects of the American rebels looked very dim. This masterful history relates the experiences of those who marched with General George Washington in the year of the Declaration of Independence. The American cause was riding on the unlikely prospect of their success.

Alan Moorehead, [*Gallipoli*](#) (1956)

Moorehead, an Australian who was one of the best war correspondents of World War II, wrote this gripping account of the tragic Gallipoli campaign of World War I in which tens of thousands of soldiers, both Allies and Turks, died in a doomed attempt to seize the Dardanelles and advance on Istanbul.

Imaginative worlds

Richard Adams, [*Watership Down*](#)* (1972)

Set in southern England, the novel features a small group of rabbits who face destruction if they remain in their own warren. So they embark upon an epic adventure to find a new home, evading men, dogs, cats, and hostile members of their own species. A darkly imaginative tale.

Frank L Baum, [*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*](#) (1900)

For sure, this is a children's fantasy, but it is a classic which everyone should read. Dorothy and her pet dog Toto are swept up by a tornado into the land of Oz where they eventually free her subjects from the Wicked Witch of the West and discover that the great Wizard is really a lovable charlatan.

J.K. Rowling, [*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*](#) (1997)

If you haven't read this, what is wrong with you? Honestly! Get a move on.

J.R.R. Tolkien, [*The Hobbit*](#) (1937)

If you haven't read this one either, something is seriously amiss. Don't just sit there! Do something.

Jorge Luis Borges, [*The Aleph and Other Stories*](#) (1949)

Borges is one of the most famous Latin American writers of the 20th Century. An Argentinian who was bilingual in Spanish and English, his short stories about dreams, labyrinths, libraries, mirrors, fictional writers, philosophy, and religion are endlessly fascinating.

Ray Bradbury, [*The Martian Chronicles*](#) (1950)

This is a collection of short stories about the colonization of Mars by humans fleeing from a troubled and eventually nuclear-devastated Earth, and the ensuing conflict between the Martians and the new colonists. Bradbury brought something new to science fiction, a sensitive humane touch and poetic prose.

Mikhail Bulgakov, [*The Master and Margarita*](#) (1940)

This zany novel was written under Stalin but only published many years later in 1966. It is now acclaimed as a masterpiece. It opens with Satan visiting Moscow in the 1930s and develops into an all-embracing indictment of the corruption, greed, narrow-mindedness, and widespread paranoia of Soviet Russia.

Lewis Carroll, [*Through the Looking-Glass*](#) (1871)

Whimsical, wise, witty and weird what other words could describe the bizarre adventures of Alice in this fantasy world? A classic for young and old.

G.K. Chesterton, [*The Man Who Was Thursday*](#) (1908)

A metaphysical thriller about an undercover agent for Scotland Yard who infiltrates a council of dangerous anarchists and discovers that all of them are also policemen. thereby suggesting that the universe despite its apparent chaos, is really ordered and governed by God's providence.

Roald Dahl, [*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*](#) (1964)

This is one of the most popular children's stories of all time, narrated with Dahl's characteristic zany verve. The novel features the adventures of young Charlie Bucket inside the chocolate factory of eccentric chocolatier Willy Wonka.

Walter M. Miller Jr, [*A Canticle for Leibowitz*](#) (1960)

A post-apocalyptic science fiction novel set in a Catholic monastery in the desert of the southwestern US after a devastating nuclear war. The story-line spans thousands of years as civilization rebuilds itself.

A.A. Milne, [*Winnie-the-Pooh*](#) (1928)

““I have been Foolish and Deluded,”” said Pooh, ““and I am a Bear of No Brain at All.”” Nonetheless, Pooh and his associates Tigger, Piglet, Kanga, Roo and Eeyore are full of adult wisdom. Well worth reading.

Bram Stoker, [*Dracula*](#) (1897)

Vampires have become so embedded in our culture that it's hard to believe that there was a time when no one wrote about them. The novel which sparked the genre was the creation of an Irish writer who died almost penniless. He tells the story of Dracula's attempt to move from Transylvania to England to find new blood and spread the undead curse. Still fresh a century later.

Jules Verne, [*Journey to the Center of the Earth*](#) (1864)

After Shakespeare, Jules Verne is said to be the most-translated author in history. True or not, it shows that he was a great story-teller. This novel, one of his best-known works, relates the adventures of a dedicated scientist who finds a mediaeval code indicating that it is possible to reach the centre of the earth by clambering down a volcano in Iceland. After many adventures, he and his team exit at Stromboli, a volcano in Italy.

H.G. Wells, [*The Time Machine*](#) (1895)

Apart from introducing the theme of time travel into literature, this memorable novel is a sombre look at the ultimate consequences of Darwinism. The traveller whizzes 800,000 years into the future where mankind has evolved into two races, the brutish Morlocks and the effeminate Eloi, and then 30 million years further where mankind has disappeared.

Simon Leys (Pierre Ryckmans), [*The Death of Napoleon*](#) (1991)

A charming novella imagining how Napoleon would have fared if he had escaped from his final exile without the support of his faithful Grande Armée

Lives

Dorothy Day, [The Long Loneliness](#) (1952)

This is the autobiography of an extraordinary American woman whom the Catholic Church may someday canonise. She chronicles her bohemian lifestyle, her involvement in socialist groups, her conversion to Catholicism in 1927, and the beginning of her newspaper, the Catholic Worker, in 1933.

Isak Dinesen, [Out of Africa](#) (1937)

In 1913 a Danish woman, Karen Blixen, moved to Kenya, then called British East Africa, where she built up a coffee plantation with her ne'er-do-well husband. The book is a lyrical meditation on Blixen's life in Africa, as well as a warm tribute to some of the people who touched her life there.

Anne Frank, [The Diary of Anne Frank](#) (1947)

Anne Frank was a young Jewish teenager in the Netherlands whose diary about her family's life in hiding from the Nazis has become a classic. After two years in concealment, the Frank family was betrayed and Anne perished in Auschwitz, but her precious diary was kept by a fellow inmate and published to great acclaim after the war.

Paul Glynn, [A Song for Nagasaki](#) (1988)

On August 9, 1945, an American plane dropped an A-bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. Tens of thousands of people died, including the wife of Takashi Nagai, an eminent doctor and a Catholic convert. He spent the few remaining years of his life encouraging his friends and the nation to see the disaster as a way of purification and atonement. This is the beautifully told story of his courageous life.

John Keegan, [Winston Churchill: a life](#) (2007)

There are countless biographies of Churchill. This is a brief sketch of the great statesman's life by a military historian, from his days as a poor student to his inspiring leadership during World War II.

Paul Johnson, [Intellectuals](#) (1988)

A fascinating portrait of the minds that have shaped the modern world. Writing at his caustic best, Johnson critiques Rousseau, Shelley, Marx, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Hemingway, Bertrand Russell, Brecht, Sartre, Edmund Wilson, Victor Gollancz, Lillian Hellman, Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, and Noam Chomsky, among others. You will never again use the term "intellectual" as a compliment.

Dava Sobel, [Galileo's Daughter](#) (1999)

The pioneering scientist Galileo Galilei is better known as a foe of the Catholic Church. But, as this sensitive biography based on letters to and from his illegitimate daughter, a devout cloistered nun, shows, he was also a man of faith and a devoted father.

Booker T. Washington, [Up From Slavery](#) (1901)

This inspiring 1901 autobiography has become an American classic. It describes Booker T. Washington's life as a slave child during the Civil War, the obstacles he overcame to get an education, and his work establishing vocational schools to help black people bootstrap themselves.

Malcolm Muggeridge, [Chronicles of Wasted Time](#) (1972)

This is the hilarious (and unfinished) autobiography of a prominent English journalist who gradually moved from left-wing views to conservatism and from atheism to Catholicism. Scathingly funny and surprisingly deep.

Moral explorations

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, [Crime and Punishment](#) (1866)*

One of the masterpieces of world literature, *Crime and Punishment* is the story of Raskolnikov, an impoverished student with a fierce belief in nihilism. Believing that he is a superman to whom laws for the common man do not apply, he brutally murders an old pawnbroker whom he despises. But overwhelmed by guilt and terror, Raskolnikov eventually

confesses and goes to prison. There he realizes that redemption can only be achieved through suffering.

E.M. Forster, [A Passage to India](#) (1924)

Adela Quested is a visitor to British India who is anxious to become acquainted with "the real India". But during a visit to the Malabar caves with an Anglophile Muslim, Dr Aziz, something mysterious happens which rattles her and provokes her into accusing him of assault. This is one of the major British novels of the 20th Century.

Nicolai Gogol, [The Overcoat](#) (1842)

""We all came out of Gogol's 'Overcoat'""", said the novelist Turgenev. This tragic short story is a great introduction to Russian literature.

Primo Levi, [If This Is a Man](#) (1947)

Primo Levi was an Italian chemist who was rounded up late in World War II and deported to Auschwitz because he was a Jew. This is his memoir of months where his life hung by a thread andÂ a very moving meditation of what it means to be a human being.

Thomas Mann, [Buddenbrooks](#) (1901)*

Thomas Mann won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929 for this novel about the four-generationÂ decline of a north German merchant family in the 19th Century. It is a brilliant portrait of social change. perhaps the best ever written.

Herman Melville, [Moby Dick](#) (1851)*

It's hard to believe that the greatest American novel was a commercial failure and only became well-known 70 years after its publication. Apart from being a realistic account of a whaling voyage, Melville transformed the story of a mad sea captain's revenge upon a gigantic albino whale into a profound poetic meditation upon democracy, God, Nature, science and morality.

Conrad Richter, [The Sea of Grass](#) (1936)

Set in New Mexico in the late 19th century, the crux of this poetic novella is the clash between rich ranchers, whose cattle run freely on a prairie ““sea of grass,”” and farmers who build fences. It is an epic portrayal of the end of the cowboy era in the American Southwest.

C.P. Snow, [*Corridors of Power*](#) (1964)

Although C.P. Snow’s novels have aged a bit, there are few authors so skilled in depicting the quiet but desperate struggle for power within bureaucracies. Deservedly famed as an accomplished political novel, *Corridors of Power* relates the struggle of a British MP to denuclearize Britain.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, [*The First Circle*](#)* (1968)

The occupants of a Gulag prison just outside Moscow after World War II live in the first of the nine circles of Dante’s Inferno. Although they are not particularly ill-treated, they are forced to work on a secret project to support Stalin’s monstrous and diabolical regime. A masterpiece.

Mark Twain, [*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*](#) (1876)

A genial classic by one of America’s greatest authors about growing up in the mid-19th Century. Beautifully characterised and plotted.

Oscar Wilde, [*The Picture of Dorian Gray*](#) (1890)

The handsome Dorian Gray has his portrait painted a likeness so intoxicating that Dorian makes a wish he lives to regret: that the marks of age be reflected in the portrait rather than on his own face. The stage is set for a masterful allegory about appearance, reality, art, life, truth, fiction and the burden of conscience.

Religion and philosophy

[*The Book of Genesis*](#) (1500 BC)

Even from a purely secular point of view, Genesis is where it all began “it” being Western culture. It’s impossible to understand ourselves or the society we live in without

familiarity with the first book of the Bible.

[The Gospel according to Matthew](#) (45 AD)

The birth of Jesus Christ divides BC from AD. it is the single most important event of our history. Matthew's terse account of his life makes it clear why.

[Marcus Aurelius, Meditations](#) (180)

Former US President Bill Clinton once said that this is his favourite book. Whether or not that entices you, this classic of Stoic philosophy by a Roman Emperor, written while he was campaigning against savage marauding tribes, is the favourite of many others as well.

Boethius, [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) (523)

For writers the Middle Ages, Boethius was one of the most influential thinkers. A scholar, a nobleman and an administrator under Emperor Theoderic, he was accused of treason and tossed into prison. There he wrote this timeless investigation of what makes us truly happy.

C.S. Lewis, [The Problem of Pain](#) (1940)

Does suffering have a meaning? The great Christian apologist C.S. Lewis offers answers to this age-old problem in this brief but convincing book – without side-stepping the anguish of human existence.

Robert Bolt, [A Man for All Seasons](#) (1960)

True, strictly speaking, this is not a text about religion or philosophy. It is a play about Sir Thomas More, the English Chancellor who lost his head in 1535 because he hewed to his conscience and not the will of the tyrannical Henry VIII. But it is a great lesson in the imperious grandeur of following what one knows to be right, not what is convenient.

Hannah Arendt, [Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil](#) (1963)

The German philosopher Hannah Arendt reported on Israel's trial of Adolf Eichmann for genocide. Eichmann was the

official who organised the logistics to transport hundreds of thousands of Jews to Auschwitz. How could he have done it? Her answer is controversial and thought-provoking.

Questioning the system

A.J. Cronin, [The Citadel](#) (1937)

This is a ground-breaking novel about medical ethics. Andrew Manson, a young and idealistic Scottish doctor, discovers how poorly Welsh miners are being cared for and how tenaciously the medical profession defends itself against new ideas. The book helped to inspire the formation of the UK's National Health Service.

Aldous Huxley, [Brave New World](#) (1931)

This dystopian novel is a prophetic vision of a future where humans are genetically bred, socially indoctrinated, sexually brutalised, and pharmaceutically anesthetized to uphold an authoritarianÂ ruling order, at the cost of their freedom and humanity. It doesn't take much imagination to see disturbing parallels in our own culture.

John Le Carr©, [A Most Wanted Man](#) (2008)

This is John Le Carr© at his best, this time critiquing the War on Terror. A mysterious young Chechen, Issa, appears in Hamburg

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