

# “Reading maketh a full man” —What, Why & How?

## 那些年，我们读过的**英语文学作品**

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**What is**  
literature?

**Why study**  
literature?

**How to read**  
literature?

What is  
literature?



# What is literature?

# What is literature?

- In this talk, by literature I refer not only to poetry, fiction, and drama; but also non-fiction prose such as essays, biographies, autobiographies, journals, and even letters written by famous literary figures.
- In reading literature, we need to think of literature more as a process than a product. It's a way that writers express the human experience.
- Literature can also be viewed as a specific kind of language. Literary use of language is to give someone else the experience that they have received.
- Literature is REAL **TIME TRAVEL**. It provides a chance for us to broaden and deepen the human experience.

# What Is Literature

## Coming of the Word

- The word "Literature" came into English from the 14th century in the sense of polite learning through reading. Thus a man of literature, or a man of letters, meant what we would now describe as a man of wide reading. So, this word corresponds mainly to the modern meaning of the word "literacy". From the mid-18th century, literature referred to the practice and profession of writing. This appears to be closely connected with the heightened self-consciousness of the profession of authorship. Since the 19th century, literature has been the high skills of writing in the special context of high imagination.

## Origin of Literature

- Whence comes literature? Literature comes from human interest in telling a story, in arranging words in artistic forms, in describing in words some aspects of our human experiences. This human activity embodies human desire to express and share experiences. At the beginning, the literary impulse exists only in one's mind. It is the writer who turns this impulse into literature : a story, a poem, a play, or an essay, with the medium of language. It is a writer's "performance in words" as Robert Frost (American poet) once said. In this way it can be appreciated by others. Therefore, we can define literature as language artistically used to achieve identifiable literary qualities and to convey meaningful messages.

# What Is Literature

## Characteristics of Literature

- Literature is characterized by beauty of expression and form and by universality of intellectual and emotional appeal. Literature as an art is the creation of individuals and it is experienced by individuals. Yet, creative artistic literature presents one of the essential sources for studying the relation between humanity and society. Great works of literature enables us to study the way in which people live out their social roles. Literature shows not only the socialized behavior of individuals, but also the process of their socialization as well; it speaks not only of individual experience, but also of the meaning of that experience. Therefore, a writer is a specialized thinker about the individual.
- Literature shows us not only what a society is like in a certain age, but also what individuals feel about it, what they hope from it, and how they think they can change it or escape from it. The fictional characters see and record not only the reality around them, but their hopes, wishes, dreams, and fantasies as well. The social meanings of this inner life of the individual are related to the central problems of social change.
- Literature is important in human life because the writer of literature is not bound to fact in quite the same way as the historian, the economist or the scientist, whose studies are absolutely based on what has actually happened, or on what actually does happen, in the world of reality. The writer of literature, being less bound to fact, has more hope to comment on the fact, to arrange it in unusual ways, and to speculate not only what is, but on what ought to be, or what might be (for better or for worse).

# What Is Literature

## Writers

- Writers are people with visionary or prophetic insight into human life. They help all of us who read literature broaden and deepen our knowledge of human affairs, whether in the individual, the social, the racial, or the international sphere; they enable us to understand the possibility of human life, both for good and evil.
- As readers of their works, we are made to understand how we came to live at a particular time and place, with all its pleasures and vexations and problems ; we are also facilitated to be aware of the ways onwards which are open to us, and that we shall perhaps be able to make right rather than wrong choices.

# What to read?

● <http://blog.sina.com.cn/beiwailichen>

▪ 英国文学系列4/4: 十八世纪文...	2012-08-10 20:04
▪ 英国文学系列2/4: 文艺复兴	2012-08-10 20:02
▪ 英国文学系列3/4: 十七世纪文...	2012-08-10 20:00
▪ 英国文学系列2/4: 文艺复兴	2012-08-10 19:55

# What to read?

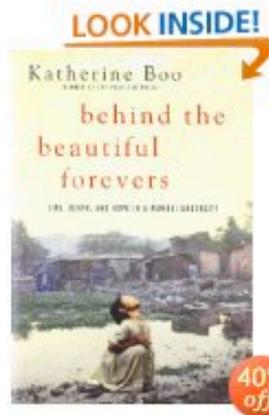
[http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/ref=s9\\_al\\_bw\\_feat?ie=UTF8&docId=1000698051&plgroup=1&pf\\_rd\\_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf\\_rd\\_s=center-2&pf\\_rd\\_r=06GYF6SAHPH4VEYA9EJX&pf\\_rd\\_t=101&pf\\_rd\\_p=1380789622&pf\\_rd\\_i=3003015011](http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/ref=s9_al_bw_feat?ie=UTF8&docId=1000698051&plgroup=1&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=center-2&pf_rd_r=06GYF6SAHPH4VEYA9EJX&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_p=1380789622&pf_rd_i=3003015011)

## Best Books of the Year So Far: Top 20 Picks for 2012

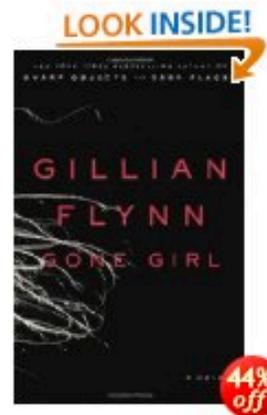
All year, the Amazon Books editorial team reads voraciously, tracking down and sharing the most fascinating, compelling, enlightening, and entertaining books for readers of all tastes. Here are our top 20 picks for the best reads of the year so far.

Print Editions

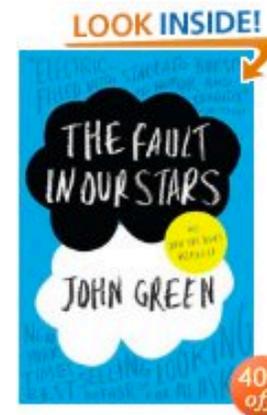
Kindle Books



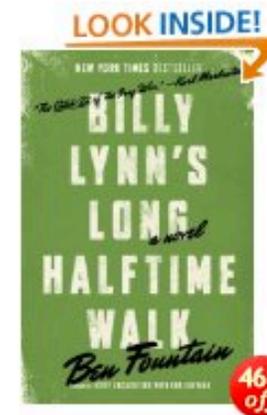
Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity  
by Katherine Boo  
★★★★☆ (196)  
**List Price:** \$27.00  
**Price:** \$16.20  
**You Save:** \$10.80



Gone Girl: A Novel  
by Gillian Flynn  
★★★★☆ (1,120)  
**List Price:** \$26.00  
**Price:** \$13.94  
**You Save:** \$11.06 (44%)  
In Stock



The Fault in Our Stars  
by John Green  
★★★★★ (870)  
**List Price:** \$17.99  
**Price:** \$10.79  
**You Save:** \$7.20 (40%)  
In Stock



Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel  
by Ben Fountain  
★★★★☆ (64)  
**List Price:** \$26.99  
**Price:** \$13.99  
**You Save:** \$12.00 (46%)  
In Stock

**Why** study  
literature?

# Why study literature?

1. Expand our vocabulary of everyday English and enable us to speak and write better and more idiomatically.
  1. Bellow was in a **turtleneck**.
  2. The writer E.M.Forster lived on the fifth floor of a **walk-up**.
  3. I had a job I'd held **on and off**.
  4. He walks into a living room with a large ...**circular** rug, some **slip-covered easy chairs**, a **worn** sofa, a long **wall** of books...
  5. The he jumps onto a bus and the **pneumatic door swings shut** behind him.

# Why study literature?

## 2. Improve our comprehension.

1. Turn out the light.
2. No-one turned out for exercises that morning.
3. It turned out that they had all gone to bed very late.
4. Our university turns out good interpreters.

# Why study literature?

## 3. Deepen our understanding of humor and irony.

- Mr Bennett to his wife Mrs Bennett
- “ You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr Bingley might like you the best of the party”.

—Pride and Prejudice

# Why study literature?

## 3. Deepen our understanding of humor and irony.

- Mr Bennett to his daughter Elizabeth
- “I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham is perhaps my favorite; but I think I shall like your husband quite as well as Jane’s”.

—Pride and Prejudice

# Why study literature?

4. Expand our cultural horizons and broaden our range of general knowledge.

## Customs and Habits (culture)

### 1. *Daisy Miller*

the wretched fate of Daisy

### 2. *The Portrait of a Lady*

How Isabel Archer notices the relation between the lady and her husband

# Why study literature?

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## History and Society

1. *The Scarlet Letter*—Nathaniel Hawthorne
2. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—Mark Twain
3. *The Age of Innocence*—Edith Wharton
4. *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* ---Willa Cather
5. *Sister Carrie*---Theodore Dreiser
6. *The Great Gatsby*—F. Scott Fitzgerald
7. *The Grapes of Wrath*—John Steinbeck

# Why study literature?

## 5. Deepen our understanding of human nature.

### 1. *Daisy Miller* by Henry James

**Daisy**

### 2. *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James

**Isabel Archer's husband**

### 3. *Middlemarch* by George Eliot

**Dorothea Brooke**

## **Why** study literature?

### 5. Deepen our understanding of human nature.

**Learning is acquired by reading books but the much more necessary learning, the knowledge of the world, is only to be acquired through reading man, and studying all the various editions of men.**

**---A letter from Lord Chesterfield to his son**

# Why study literature?

## 6. Help us to stay human.

- This is especially important in our world today -- a world that is highly mechanised and full of commodities. People are more interested in money and the material things that money can buy. They're so busy thinking about these things that they have little time to socialise with others, to think about them and care about them. So reading literature provides us with opportunities to sympathise with human beings less fortunate than ourselves, to respond to the beauty of nature, to laugh and cry with the ups and downs in the fate of the characters and be moved by their kindness or selflessness.

# Why study literature?

7. Contains the distillation of the life experience and mature views of the people who came before us.
  - Because of this we should treasure it. Take 'Of Studies', the essay by Francis Bacon, for example, the language might be old-fashioned, but the ideas still provides us with food for thought and fill us with admiration for the sharp perception, wise judgement, and the precise expression of the writer, even the essay was written over 400 years ago.

Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.

—*Of Studies* by Francis Bacon

Studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business.

—*Of Studies* by Francis Bacon

Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider.

—*Of Studies* by Francis Bacon

Crafty men contemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them, for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them and above them, won by observation.

—*Of Studies* by Francis Bacon

# How to read literature?

# **How** to read literature? (Shallow vs. Deep)

- **Set the scene:** social and cultural background; characteristics of the time
  - ‘The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never know each other's names.’ – *The Great Gatsby*
- **Apprehend the author:** perspective, value, attitude and belief
- **Appreciate the literary language:** author's usual tactics; techniques of expression

# Thank you!

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