

A 2601 LITERARY SALON ARCHIVE BY JAMES MULHERN

# The Mulhern Story Library

## *Complete Salon Reading Guide to Twelve Canonical Short Stories*

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Twelve canonical short stories curated for the 2601 Literary Salon, with polished introductions, literary and historical context, discussion focus, reader pathways, and verified links to legitimate hosted texts.

This guide collects polished introductions, historical and literary context, discussion focus, and reader pathways for all twelve stories, with verified links to legitimate hosted texts. Works by Hemingway, Shirley Jackson, and William Faulkner remain under copyright; this guide links only to authorized or reputable sources and never reproduces their text.

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STORY 01

# The Tell-Tale Heart

Edgar Allan Poe · American Romanticism / Gothic · first published 1843

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AUTHOR	Edgar Allan Poe
PUBLISHED	1843
ERA	American Romanticism / Gothic
THEMES	Madness, Guilt, Death
READER PATHWAY	Accessible adult / college entry

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

A nameless narrator insists on his sanity even as he confesses to murdering an old man whose pale, filmy 'vulture eye' he could not bear. After hiding the body beneath the floorboards, he is undone by what he believes is the relentless beating of the dead man's heart.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in 1843 in *The Pioneer*, the tale is a landmark of Poe's psychological Gothic and an early study of the unreliable narrator. Its compressed first-person confession and rising dread shaped the modern short story and the detective and horror traditions that followed.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Unreliable narration, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and the use of sound and repetition to build suspense. A useful opening text for considering how point of view governs reader trust.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does the narrator's insistence on sanity reveal about the story's deeper understanding of guilt?
- How does Poe turn sound into both a physical sensation and a moral accusation?
- Is the old man's eye merely a Gothic device, or does it become a symbol of judgment and self-exposure?

## READ & RESEARCH

1. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Tell-Tale\\_Heart](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Tell-Tale_Heart)
  2. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2148>
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STORY 02

# The Cask of Amontillado

Edgar Allan Poe · American Romanticism / Gothic · first published 1846

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AUTHOR	Edgar Allan Poe
PUBLISHED	1846
ERA	American Romanticism / Gothic
THEMES	Revenge, Pride, Death
READER PATHWAY	College seminar / adult discussion

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Montresor lures the wine connoisseur Fortunato into the family catacombs with the promise of a rare cask of Amontillado, then walls him in alive as payment for an unnamed insult. Fifty years later, the narrator calmly recounts his perfect crime.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in Godey's Lady's Book in 1846, the story distills Poe's theory of the single unified effect. Its carnival setting, dramatic irony, and chillingly composed narrator make it a touchstone for the literature of revenge.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Verbal and dramatic irony, symbolism (the trowel, the coat of arms, the carnival), mood, and the calculating unreliable narrator. Strong for close reading of tone, resentment, and moral self-justification.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does Montresor's calm retrospect disclose about aristocratic pride, wounded vanity, and self-mythologizing?
- How does the carnival setting deepen rather than merely decorate the moral darkness of the story?
- Does the final line suggest triumph, confession, spiritual unease, or all three?

## READ & RESEARCH

3. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Cask\\_of\\_Amontillado](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Cask_of_Amontillado)
  4. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2148>
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STORY 03

# The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry · American Realism · first published 1905

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AUTHOR	O. Henry
PUBLISHED	1905
ERA	American Realism
THEMES	Sacrifice, Love, Poverty
READER PATHWAY	Accessible adult / college entry

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

A young couple, Della and Jim, each secretly sell their most prized possession to buy a Christmas gift for the other, only to find their gifts rendered useless by their mutual sacrifice. The story closes by calling them the wisest of gift-givers.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in 1905 and collected in *The Four Million* (1906), the story exemplifies O. Henry's signature twist ending and his affection for ordinary New Yorkers. Its sentimentality and craft make it a useful case study in popular American realism.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Situational irony, the twist ending, selfless love, class constraint, and authorial intrusion. Invites discussion of whether sentiment can coexist with technical elegance.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does the ending feel both contrived and emotionally satisfying?
- How does O. Henry transform poverty from social fact into moral theater?
- What does the narrator's direct commentary add to, or take away from, the story's emotional force?

## READ & RESEARCH

5. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Gift\\_of\\_the\\_Magi](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Gift_of_the_Magi)
  6. *The Four Million* at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2776>
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STORY 04

# The Ransom of Red Chief

O. Henry · American Realism / Humor · first published 1907

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AUTHOR	O. Henry
PUBLISHED	1907
ERA	American Realism / Humor
THEMES	Comeuppance, Greed, Childhood
READER PATHWAY	Accessible adult / college entry

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Two small-time crooks kidnap a wealthy man's son for ransom, but the boy proves so wild and exhausting that the kidnappers end up paying the father to take him back.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in 1907 and collected in *Whirligigs* (1910), this farce showcases O. Henry's comic timing and reversal of expectations. For mature readers, it opens questions about comic violence, regional caricature, and the ethics of laughter.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Situational irony, comic characterization, hyperbole, reversal, and narrative pacing. A light but revealing entry point for discussing how farce disciplines greed and foolish confidence.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What assumptions about class, region, masculinity, and childhood does the comedy depend on?
- How does O. Henry make humiliation feel like moral correction?
- Where does farce sharpen social perception, and where might it flatten human complexity?

## READ & RESEARCH

7. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Ransom\\_of\\_Red\\_Chief](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Ransom_of_Red_Chief)
  8. *Whirligigs* at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1595>
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STORY 05

# Hills Like White Elephants

Ernest Hemingway · Modernism · first published 1927

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AUTHOR	Ernest Hemingway
PUBLISHED	1927
ERA	Modernism
THEMES	Choice, Communication, Relationships
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

An American man and a young woman wait at a Spanish railway station, talking around an unnamed decision in clipped, evasive dialogue. The story never states the subject directly, leaving readers to infer the weight of what is left unsaid.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in 1927 in the magazine *Transition* and collected in *Men Without Women*, the story is the classic demonstration of Hemingway's 'iceberg theory,' in which meaning lies beneath a spare surface of dialogue and gesture.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Subtext and the iceberg theory, symbolism (the hills, the river, the tracks), dialogue-driven characterization, and inference. A model for how omission, power, and syntax create moral pressure.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Hemingway make an unnamed subject dominate the entire conversation?
- Where do power and persuasion enter the dialogue despite the story's apparently neutral surface?
- Does the ending register decision, stalemate, resignation, or emotional exhaustion?

*Copyright note. Hemingway's text remains under copyright in the United States. We link only to legitimate hosted texts and reputable source pages; we do not reproduce the story.*

## READ & RESEARCH

9. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)
  10. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)
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STORY 06

# A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

Ernest Hemingway · Modernism · first published 1933

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AUTHOR	Ernest Hemingway
PUBLISHED	1933
ERA	Modernism
THEMES	Despair, Aging, Meaning
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Late at night in a Spanish cafe, two waiters discuss an old, deaf man who lingers over his drink. One waiter wants to close and go home; the older waiter understands the man's need for a clean, well-lit refuge against the nothingness of the night.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in Scribner's Magazine in 1933 and collected in Winner Take Nothing, the story is a key statement of Hemingway's existential concerns, culminating in the famous 'nada' meditation.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Existential theme of nada, minimalism, the parody of the Lord's Prayer, aging, sleeplessness, and ambiguity in dialogue attribution. Strong for mature discussion of dignity, despair, and restraint.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kind of dignity does the clean, well-lighted place offer, and why is it insufficient?
- How does the older waiter's understanding of nada differ from mere pessimism?
- What is gained by Hemingway's deliberate ambiguity about which waiter says which lines?

*Copyright note. Hemingway's text remains under copyright in the United States. We link to a legitimate Canadian public-domain hosting and a reputable overview; we do not reproduce the story.*

## READ & RESEARCH

11. Full text in Winner Take Nothing at Project Gutenberg Canada — <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hemingway-winnertakenothing/hemingway-winnertakenothing-00-h.html>
  12. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Clean,\\_Well-Lighted\\_Place](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Clean,_Well-Lighted_Place)
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STORY 07

# The Lottery

Shirley Jackson · Mid-Century American · first published 1948

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AUTHOR	Shirley Jackson
PUBLISHED	1948
ERA	Mid-Century American
THEMES	Tradition, Conformity, Violence
READER PATHWAY	College seminar / adult discussion

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

On a sunny June morning, the residents of a small village gather for an annual lottery. The cheerful ordinariness of the ritual masks its horrifying purpose, revealed only in the story's final, shocking turn.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in *The New Yorker* on June 26, 1948, the story provoked an unprecedented volume of reader mail. It endures as a parable about blind adherence to tradition and the violence latent in conformity.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Foreshadowing, irony, symbolism (the black box, the stones), setting as misdirection, and allegory. A powerful text for discussing tradition, ritual violence, scapegoating, and civic complicity.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is ordinary social detail essential to the horror of the story?
- How does Jackson distinguish tradition from moral legitimacy?
- What does the story suggest about communities that preserve rituals after forgetting their meanings?

*Copyright note. Jackson's text remains under copyright. We link to the publisher's authorized full text at The New Yorker and a reputable overview; we do not reproduce the story.*

## READ & RESEARCH

13. Authorized full text at *The New Yorker* — <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1948/06/26/the-lottery>
  14. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lottery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lottery)
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STORY 08

# The Necklace

Guy de Maupassant · French Realism / Naturalism · first published 1884

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AUTHOR	Guy de Maupassant
PUBLISHED	1884
ERA	French Realism / Naturalism
THEMES	Vanity, Class, Irony
READER PATHWAY	Accessible adult / college entry

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Mathilde Loisel, longing for a life of luxury, borrows a diamond necklace to wear to a ball, then loses it. She and her husband spend ten years in poverty to replace it, only to learn at the end that the original was a worthless imitation.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published as 'La Parure' in *Le Gaulois* in 1884, the story is Maupassant's most famous tale and a model of the realist short story with a devastating twist ending. It dissects vanity and the rigid class anxieties of the French bourgeoisie.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Situational irony, the twist ending, characterization, and materialism versus contentment. Pairs well with *The Gift of the Magi* for a sharper adult discussion of class, aspiration, and narrative justice.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is Mathilde punished for vanity, for class aspiration, or for living inside a social order built on appearances?
- How does Maupassant's realism make the final irony feel cruel rather than merely clever?
- What would change if the story were told from Monsieur Loisel's point of view?

## READ & RESEARCH

15. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Necklace](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Necklace)

16. The Works of Guy de Maupassant at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3090>

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STORY 09

# The Yellow Wallpaper

Charlotte Perkins Gilman · American Realism / Feminist · first published 1892

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AUTHOR	Charlotte Perkins Gilman
PUBLISHED	1892
ERA	American Realism / Feminist
THEMES	Confinement, Mental Health, Gender
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

A woman confined to a room for a 'rest cure' after childbirth records her growing obsession with the room's yellow wallpaper. As her journal entries fragment, she comes to believe a woman is trapped behind the pattern, mirroring her own descent.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in *The New England Magazine* in 1892, the story drew on Gilman's own experience with the rest cure prescribed by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell. It became a foundational feminist text and an early portrait of postpartum mental illness.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

First-person unreliable narration, symbolism of the wallpaper, feminist critique of medicine and marriage, the journal form, and the medicalization of women's experience. Rich for historical and theoretical analysis.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the narrator's confinement operate medically, domestically, and aesthetically?
- What does the wallpaper become as the narrator's interpretive powers intensify?
- How does the story complicate the boundary between madness and insight?

## READ & RESEARCH

17. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Yellow\\_Wall\\_Paper](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Yellow_Wall_Paper)

18. The Yellow Wallpaper at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1952>

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STORY 10

# An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

Ambrose Bierce · American Realism / Civil War · first published 1890

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AUTHOR	Ambrose Bierce
PUBLISHED	1890
ERA	American Realism / Civil War
THEMES	War, Time, Illusion
READER PATHWAY	College seminar / adult discussion

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## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

A Southern planter about to be hanged by Union soldiers seems to escape when the rope breaks, fleeing through forest and river toward home. The vivid escape is revealed to be a final fantasy in the instant before his death.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in the San Francisco Examiner in 1890 and collected in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, the story is celebrated for its manipulation of time and its early use of a shocking twist ending grounded in psychological realism.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Manipulation of narrative time, point of view shifts, the twist ending, and the unreliability of perception. Excellent for examining structure, wartime imagination, and the limits of heroic self-conception.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Bierce use altered time to reveal the mind's resistance to death?
- What critique of romanticized war emerges through Farquhar's fantasy of escape?
- Does the twist ending merely surprise, or does it revise the story's entire moral frame?

## READ & RESEARCH

19. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An\\_Occurrence\\_at\\_Owl\\_Creek\\_Bridge](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Occurrence_at_Owl_Creek_Bridge)
  20. The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4366>
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STORY 11

# A Rose for Emily

William Faulkner · Southern Gothic / Modernism · first published 1930

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AUTHOR	William Faulkner
PUBLISHED	1930
ERA	Southern Gothic / Modernism
THEMES	Decay, Isolation, The Past
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

The townspeople of Jefferson narrate the life of the reclusive Emily Grierson, whose refusal to accept change and loss culminates in a macabre discovery after her death.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in *The Forum* in 1930, Faulkner's first nationally published story introduces his fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Its non-chronological structure and communal 'we' narrator are hallmarks of Southern Gothic modernism.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Non-linear chronology, communal first-person-plural narration, symbolism of the house and the rose, and Southern Gothic atmosphere. Strong for analyzing memory, social surveillance, race, gender, and inherited decline.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does the communal narrator reveal about the town's curiosity, guilt, cruelty, and nostalgia?
- How does Faulkner's disrupted chronology imitate the persistence of the past?
- In what ways is Emily Grierson both victim and emblem of a decaying social order?

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## READ & RESEARCH

21. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Rose\\_for\\_Emily](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Rose_for_Emily)
  22. Author profile at the Poetry Foundation — <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-faulkner>
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STORY 12

# The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin · American Realism / Feminist · first published 1894

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AUTHOR	Kate Chopin
PUBLISHED	1894
ERA	American Realism / Feminist
THEMES	Freedom, Marriage, Irony
READER PATHWAY	College seminar / adult discussion

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Told her husband has died in a train accident, Louise Mallard retreats to her room and, to her own surprise, feels a dawning sense of freedom. When her husband walks in alive an hour later, the shock kills her.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published as 'The Dream of an Hour' in *Vogue* in 1894, Chopin's compressed masterpiece interrogates the constraints of nineteenth-century marriage. It is a cornerstone of feminist literary study and the irony of the final line.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Situational and verbal irony, the compressed time frame, symbolism (the open window, spring), and feminist theme. A concise text ideal for close reading of marriage, freedom, and the shock of self-recognition.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Chopin make liberation feel both morally troubling and psychologically undeniable?
- What is the significance of the open window as sensory image, symbol, and structure?
- How should readers understand the doctors' final explanation of Louise Mallard's death?

## READ & RESEARCH

23. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Story\\_of\\_an\\_Hour](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Story_of_an_Hour)

24. The Awakening, and Selected Short Stories at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/160>

## Source Directory

Every external link below was verified active during the build of this guide. See the accompanying link manifest for HTTP status detail.

### The Tell-Tale Heart — Edgar Allan Poe

1. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Tell-Tale\\_Heart](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Tell-Tale_Heart)
2. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2148>

### The Cask of Amontillado — Edgar Allan Poe

3. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Cask\\_of\\_Amontillado](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Cask_of_Amontillado)
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### The Gift of the Magi — O. Henry

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6. The Four Million at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2776>

### The Ransom of Red Chief — O. Henry

7. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Ransom\\_of\\_Red\\_Chief](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Ransom_of_Red_Chief)
8. Whirligigs at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1595>

### Hills Like White Elephants — Ernest Hemingway

9. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)
10. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)

### A Clean, Well-Lighted Place — Ernest Hemingway

11. Full text in Winner Take Nothing at Project Gutenberg Canada — <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hemingway-winnertakenothing/hemingway-winnertakenothing-00-h.html>
12. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Clean,\\_Well-Lighted\\_Place](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Clean,_Well-Lighted_Place)

### The Lottery — Shirley Jackson

13. Authorized full text at The New Yorker — <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1948/06/26/the-lottery>
14. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Lottery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lottery)

### The Necklace — Guy de Maupassant

15. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Necklace](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Necklace)
16. The Works of Guy de Maupassant at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3090>

### The Yellow Wallpaper — Charlotte Perkins Gilman

17. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Yellow\\_Wall\\_Paper](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Yellow_Wall_Paper)
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### An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge — Ambrose Bierce

19. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An\\_Occurrence\\_at\\_Owl\\_Creek\\_Bridge](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Occurrence_at_Owl_Creek_Bridge)
20. The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4366>

### A Rose for Emily — William Faulkner

21. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Rose\\_for\\_Emily](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Rose_for_Emily)
22. Author profile at the Poetry Foundation — <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-faulkner>

### The Story of an Hour — Kate Chopin

23. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Story\\_of\\_an\\_Hour](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Story_of_an_Hour)

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