**From Shakespeare to Knausgaard: 66 Classics You Were Supposed To Read But Most Likely Didn’t**

**by Janne Stigen Drangsholt and Therese G. Eide**

Translation © Rachel Rankin

**Overview of Chapters**

**Don Quijote**

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

**Publication date:** 1605; 1615

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*

**Summary of Book:** Impoverished Spanish aristocrat reads too many chivalric romances.

 Then he fights against windmills.

 Then he dies.

**Pride and Prejudice**

Jane Austen

**Publication date:** 1813

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Pride and Prejudice*

**Summary of Book:** Mr and Mrs Bennet have five daughters. Fortunately, almost all of them get married.

**Macbeth**

William Shakespeare

**Publication date:** 1623 (first performed in 1606)

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

**Summary of Book:** Three witches tell Macbeth that he will be the king of Scotland. His wife nags him until he kills the king. After that, almost everyone dies.

**War and Peace**

Leo Tolstoy

**Publication date:** 1869

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Bойна и мир*

**Summary of Book:** There is war. Then there is peace.

**Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**

Robert Louis Stevenson

**Publication date:** 1886

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

**Summary of Book:** Doctor makes a chemical drink which allows him to be mean. When he is discovered, he blames society and dies.

**Beloved**

Toni Morrison

**Publication date:** 1987

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Beloved*

**Summary of Book:** A family is haunted by a ghost who is really a metaphor for slavery.

**Frankenstein**

Mary Shelley

**Publication date:** 1818; 1831

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*

**Summary of Book:** Man creates life, but soon discovers that the whole endeavour is too much work.

**Heart of Darkness**

Joseph Conrad

**Publication date:** 1899; 1902

**Genre:** Novella

**Original title:** *Heart of Darkness*

**Summary of Book:** Kurtz is crazy. Imperialism is insane. The jungle is disquieting.

**Crime and Punishment**

Fyodor Dostoevsky

**Publication date:** 1866; 1867

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Преступленіе и наказаніе*

**Summary of Book:** Young man kills pawnbroker and her sister. Then regrets it.

**Great Expectations**

Charles Dickens

**Publication date:** 1861

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Great Expectations*

**Summary of Book:** Parentless Pip misunderstands his own story.

**Jane Eyre**

Charlotte Brontë

**Publication date:** 1847

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Jane Eyre*

**Summary of Book:** Young woman fights for freedom but ends up marrying.

**The Old Man and the Sea**

Ernest Hemingway

**Publication date:** 1952

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Old Man and the Sea*

**Summary of Book:** Old man catches a big fish. Then he loses it.

**Book of Job**

God

**Publication date:** The very beginning

**Genre:** A kind of short story

**Original title:** *בֹוּי ִא*

**Summary of Book:** God makes a bet with Satan and destroys Job’s life. Then he rebuilds it.

**Dracula**

Bram Stoker

**Publication date:** 1897

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Dracula*

**Summary of Book:** Spooky foreigner travels to England to cause trouble and drink blood.

**The Trial**

Franz Kafka

**Publication date:** 1925

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Der Prozess*

**Summary of Book:** Man gets arrested. Nobody tells him why. Then he is killed.

**Waiting for Godot**

Samuel Beckett

**Publication date:** 1952

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot*

**Summary of Book:** Two men stand and wait. Twice.

**The Moonstone**

Wilkie Collins

**Publication date:** 1868

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Moonstone*

**Summary of Book:** Never give anyone a huge diamond for their eighteenth birthday. Especially if it actually belongs to someone else.

**Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter**

Simone de Beauvoir

**Publication date:** 1958

**Genre:** Autobiographical novel

**Original title:**  Mémoires d’une jenune fille rangée

**Summary of Book:** All her life Simone thinks like a man.

**Lord of the Flies**

William Golding

**Publication date:** 1954

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Lord of the Flies*

**Summary of Book:** Little boys shouldn’t have any responsibility. Nor should men.

**As I Lay Dying**

William Faulkner

**Publication date:** 1930

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *As I Lay Dying*

**Summary of Book:** Family travel to bury their mother. The father forgets to bring a shovel.

**The Odyssey**

Homer

**Publication date:** around 720BC

**Genre:** Epic poetry

**Original title:** *ὈΔΎΣΣΕΙΑ*

**Summary of Book:** The world’s most elaborate excuse for why it takes ten years to get home from work.

**The Waste Land**

T.S. Eliot

**Publication date:** 1922

**Genre:** Long poem (434 lines)

**Original title:** *The Waste Land*

**Summary of Book:** Everything is grey, nothing grows, and everyone has failed.

**Alice in Wonderland**

Lewis Carroll

**Publication date:** 1865

**Genre:** Children’s Novel

**Original title:** *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

**Summary of Book:** Young girl tries to catch a white rabbit but gets distracted by a crazy hatmaker and an angry queen. In the end, she goes home.

**Oedipus Rex**

Sophocles

**Publication date:** 428BC (approx.)

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *Οἰδίπους Τύραννος*

**Summary of Book:** Patricide, incest and self-mutilation.

**Wuthering Heights**

Emily Brontë

**Publication date:** 1846

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Wuthering Heights*

**Summary of Book:** Unlikable couple make life hell for themselves, each other, and everyone else.

**The Divine Comedy**Dante Alighieri

**Publication date:** 1321

**Genre:** Epic poetry

**Original title:** *Commedia/Divina Commedia*

**Summary of Book:** Midlife crisis in Hell.

**A Doll’s House**

Henrik Ibsen

**Publication date:** 1879

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *Et dukkehjem*

**Summary of Book:** Christmas celebration fails miserably.

**Paradise Lost**

John Milton

**Publication date:** 1674

**Genre:** Epic poetry

**Original title:** *Paradise Lost*

**Summary of Book:** God wants everyone to have free will. Then he doesn’t.

**In Search of Lost Time**

Marcel Proust

**Publication date:** 1913 - 1927

**Genre:** Novel in seven volumes

**Original title:** *À la recherche du temps perdu*

**Summary of Book:** Man fills page after page with descriptions of things he’s thought about.

**The Stranger**

Albert Camus

**Publication date:** 1942

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *L’Étranger*

**Summary of Book:** Man thinks everything is pointless and doesn’t cry at his own mother’s funeral. Afterwards, he kills someone.

**1984**

George Orwell

**Publication date:** 1949

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *1984*

**Summary of Book:** Winston Smith believes he can be himself in a totalitarian society. He cannot.

**Hamlet**

William Shakespeare

**Publication date:** 1599 - 1602

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

**Summary of Book:** Hamlet can’t make any decisions. And then he dies.

**Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow**

Ted Hughes

**Publication date:** 1970; 1972

**Genre:** Poetry

**Original title:** *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*

**Summary of Book:** Crow tries to fix God’s creation, but makes everything a lot worse.

**The Master and Margarita**

Mikhail Bulgakov

**Publication date:** 1969

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *МАСТЕР И МАРГАРИТА*

**Summary of Book:** Pontius Pilate meets Jesus while the devil arrives in Stalin’s Moscow. Behemoth the cat drinks huge amounts of vodka.

**To the Lighthouse**

Virginia Woolf

**Publication date:** 1927

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *To the Lighthouse*

**Summary of Book:** English family on holiday fail to decide on whether they should go to the lighthouse or not.

**Dune**

Frank Herbert

**Publication date:** 1965

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Dune*

**Summary of Book:** Boy saves a desert planet which secretly contains water. And something called melange.

**Little Women**

Louisa May Alcott

**Publication date:** 1868; 1869

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Little Women*

**Summary of Book:** We look like women, but we’re secretly human beings.

**Moby-Dick**

Herman Melville

**Publication date:** 1851

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*

**Summary of Book:** Captain Ahab is obsessed with killing the white whale that chewed off his leg. He devotes his harpoon to Satan, but the whale wins.

**Things Fall Apart**

Chinua Achebe

**Publication date:** 1958

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Things Fall Apart*

**Summary of Book:** Just because some Europeans talk about blank spaces on the map doesn’t mean that they’re empty.

**Ulysses**

James Joyce

**Publication date:** 1922

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Ulysses*

**Summary of Book:** Long sentences about Dublin.

**The Lord of the Rings**

J.R.R. Tolkien

**Publication date:** 1954-55

**Genre:** Trilogy of novels

**Original title:** *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954);

 *The Two Towers* (1954);

 *The Return of the King* (1955)

**Summary of Book:** A motley crew wander towards a gloomy mountain to throw a ring into a crater. It’s a hell of a journey.

**The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas**

Gertrude Stein

**Publication date:** 1933

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

**Summary of Book:** Gertrude Stein says that she’s going to write about the life of Alice B. Toklas, but then decides to behave like a man and talk about herself instead.

**Harry Potter**

J.K. Rowling

**Publication date:** 1997-2007

**Genre:** Novel series

**Original title:** *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997);

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998);

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999);

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000);

 *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003);

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005);

*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007)

**Summary of Book:** Scarred boy is pursued by a snakeman who killed his parents.

**One Thousand and One Nights**

Various narrators

**Publication date:** 800 AC

**Genre:** Folktales

**Original title:** *One Thousand and One Nights*

**Summary of Book:** Woman saves her own life by telling exciting stories with no ending.

**My Struggle**

Karl Ove Knausgaard

**Publication date:** 2009 – 2011

**Genre:** Novel series

**Original title:** *Min kamp. Første bok* (2009);

*Min kamp. Andre bok* (2009);

*Min kamp. Tredje bok* (2009);

*Min kamp. Fjerde bok* (2010);

*Min kamp. Femte bok* (2010);

*Min kamp. Sjette bok* (2011)

**Summary of Book:** Man with daddy issues buys broccoli while thinking about Hitler.

**The Road**

Cormac McCarthy

**Publication date:** 2006

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Road*

**Summary of Book:** People are exhausting. Especially in the post-apocalypse.

**The Brothers Lionheart**

Astrid Lindgren

**Publication date:** 1973

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Bröderna Lejonhjärta*

**Summary of Book:** Some children die, and some children take their own lives. That’s just the way things are.

**Austerlitz**

W.G. Sebald

**Publication date:** 2001

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Austerlitz*

**Summary of Book:** Man wanders around Europe trying to find himself.

**To Kill a Mockingbird**

Harper Lee

**Publication date:** 1960

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *To Kill a Mockingbird*

**Summary of Book:** It’s better to kill racism than songbirds.

**One Hundred Years of Solitude**

Gabriel García Márquez

**Publication date:** 1967

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Cien años de soledad*

**Summary of Book:** History repeats itself until a child who bears the tail of a pig is born. Then it ends.

**Faust**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

**Publication date:** 1808; 1832

**Genre:** Drama

**Original title:** *Faust. Der Tragödie Erster Teil;*

*Faust II. Der Tragödie Zweiter Teil.*

**Summary of Book:** Man stupidly sells his soul to the devil. Fortunately things turn out fine in the end, after all.

**Madame Bovary**

Gustave Flaubert

**Publication date:** 1857

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Madame Bovary. Mœurs de province*

**Summary of Book:** Middle-class woman reads too many books and ends up taking arsenic.

**Huckleberry Finn**

Mark Twain

**Publication date:** 1884

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

**Summary of Book:** Boy and slave live the good life on a raft. Pretty much everyone else is evil.

**The Bell Jar**

Sylvia Plath

**Publication date:** 1963

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Bell Jar*

**Summary of Book:** Young woman struggles to find herself in 1950s America.

**The Emperor of Portugallia**

Selma Lagerlöf

**Publication date:** 1914

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Kejsarn av Portugallien*

**Summary of Book:** Father loses it when his daughter moves out. Also, he becomes a bit clairvoyant.

**The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**

C.S. Lewis

**Publication date:** 1950

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

**Summary of Book:** The wardrobe is a portal, the lion is Jesus and the witch is the devil.

**Wolf Hall**

Hilary Mantel

**Publication date:** 2009

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Wolf Hall*

**Summary of Book:** Thomas Cromwell is Henry VIII’s chief minister and works a lot of overtime.

**The Catcher in the Rye**

J.D. Salinger

**Publication date:** 1951

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Catcher in the Rye*

**Summary of Book:** Moody kid refuses to take off his hat and ends up in an institution.

**The Time Machine**

H.G. Wells

**Publication date:** 1895

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Time Machine*

**Summary of Book:** Time traveller travels to the year 802,701, where he meets cute vegans and cannibalistic miners.

**White Teeth**

Zadie Smith

**Publication date:** 2000

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *White Teeth*

**Summary of Book:** Life is a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.

**The Handmaid’s Tale**

Margaret Atwood

**Publication date:** 1985

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *The Handmaid’s Tale*

**Summary of Book:** The patriarchy hates women but likes children and colourful clothes.

**The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle**

Haruki Murakami

**Publication date:** 1994-5

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *ねじまき鳥クロニクル*

**Summary of Book:** Young man looks for a cat. Then he looks for his wife. Then he climbs into a well.

**The Decameron**

Giovanni Boccaccio

**Publication date:** 1353

**Genre:** Short story collection

**Original title:** *Il Decamerone*

**Summary of Book:** A group of people from the upper classes go to a cabin to avoid the plague.

**Coraline**

Neil Gaiman

**Publication date:** 2002

**Genre:** Children’s book (short novel)

**Original title:** *Coraline*

**Summary of Book:** If someone offers you buttons for eyes, say no.

**The Neapolitan Novels**

Elena Ferrante

**Publication date:** 2011 – 2014

**Genre:** Novel series

**Original title:** *L’amica geniale* (2012);

*Storia del nuovo cognome* (2013);

*Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (2013);

*Storia della bambina perduta* (2014)

**Summary of Book:** Friendship is wonderful. And a bit of a hassle. The same goes for life.

**Whatever**

Michel Houellebecq

**Publication date:** 1994

**Genre:** Novel

**Original title:** *Extension du domaine de la lutte*

**Summary of Book:** Computer engineer discovers that he’s no good with the ladies and blames society.