

George Eliot

Mary Ann Evans, whose pen name was George Eliot, was born 1819 in rural Warwickshire. When her mother died in 1836 she left school to look after her father. After his death in 1849 she moved to London to pursue a literary career. There she met George Henry Lewes and they lived together happily for 24 years. He encouraged her to write, and she became one of the leading novelists of the time.

Some of her acclaimed novels:

Mill on the Floss
Daniel Deronda
Middlemarch

Charles Dickens

Dickens, born in Portsmouth in 1812, was taken from school at just 12 years of age, when his father was imprisoned for bad debt. Sent to work in a factory to help support his family, his feelings of abandonment and despair influenced his future life both as a novelist and social reformer. His novels are renowned for their characterisation, and are a window on the contemporary life and times of Victorian England.

Good reads:

David Copperfield
Great Expectations
A tale of two cities

Anthony Trollope

Trollope, who was born in London in 1815, worked for the Post Office for 33 years, first as a clerk and then as a surveyor in Ireland. He often travelled abroad in connection with his work. Hugely self-disciplined he published 47 novels, 5 travel books and 3 biographies in addition to numerous articles, reviews, essays and short stories. He even found time to invent the post box!

Favourites:

The last chronicle of Barse
The Warden
Doctor Thorne

Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Stevenson, was born in London in 1810. In 1832 she married Unitarian minister William Gaskell and they settled in Manchester. She was inspired by the death of her only son to write her first novel, *Mary Barton*, which proved an immediate success. Much admired by Dickens, she was invited to contribute to his magazine. A popular novelist, she also wrote a biography of her friend Charlotte Brontë.

Among the best:

North and south
Cranford
Mary Barton

Thomas Hardy

Hardy was born in Dorset in 1840, the son of a stonemason and a servant. Hardy considered himself a poet but wrote novels out of financial necessity, and his success allowed him to give up his architectural practice. Always aware of his humble start in life, much of his writing reflects contemporary attitudes to social class and position. Often pessimistic, his novels show sympathy for the plight of the individual.

Three of the best:

Tess of the D'Urbervilles
Under the greenwood tree
Jude the obscure

The Brontë Sisters

The Brontë sisters, part of a large family, were brought up at The Parsonage, Haworth. Writing was their hobby, and in 1846, encouraged by Charlotte, they published a volume of poems. After this success the sisters went on to write novels. They all died young, Emily at 30, Anne at 29, and Charlotte at 39, just one year after her marriage. The sisters between them published 7 romantic novels.

Why not try:

Wuthering Heights (*Emily*)
Jane Eyre (*Charlotte*)
The tenant of Wildfell Hall (*Anne*)

Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born in the Steventon Rectory in 1775. In 1801 the family moved to Bath. After the death of her father in 1805, Jane, along with her mother and sister, moved several times before settling in Chawton. Jane began writing as a teenager, and in 1811 her brother Henry helped her find a publisher for her first novel. Before she died in 1817 she had completed 6 novels, which have never been out of print.

Have you read:

Emma
Sense and sensibility
Northanger Abbey

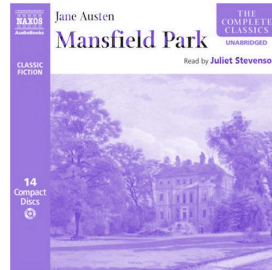
Wilkie Collins

Wilkie Collins, born in 1824, was the son of portrait painter William Collins. He led a bohemian lifestyle, travelled widely and was know for his love of good food and good wine. He studied, but never practiced, law. Journalism was his chosen career. A close friend of Dickens, Collins has been credited with writing the first detective novel. His most popular work concerns murder, mystery and the supernatural.

Favourites include:

The Moonstone
The woman in white
Who killed Zebedee?

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Mr Darcy,
Tess of the
D'Urbervilles,
Emma

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characters from costume
drama on TV, but have
you read the novels?
And what do you know
about their authors?**

