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- [The Art of War](#), Sun Tzu. Short, dense, and quoted far more often than it is read.
- [Walden](#), Henry David Thoreau. Two years in a cabin, and the case for wanting less.

- [The Prince](#), Niccolò Machiavelli. Power, described without flattery. Shorter than its reputation.
- [The Wealth of Nations](#), Adam Smith. The founding text of economics. Long; the first three books are the ones everyone means.
- [The Souls of Black Folk](#), W. E. B. Du Bois. Essays that still set the terms of the conversation a century on.
- [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass](#). One of the great American autobiographies, and one evening long.

BIG NOVELS WORTH THE CLIMB

- [Middlemarch](#), George Eliot. Regularly called the best English novel. It earns it around page two hundred and never lets go.
- [Anna Karenina](#), Leo Tolstoy. Two marriages, one railway, and everything about how people actually behave.
- [Crime and Punishment](#), Fyodor Dostoevsky. A murder in the first fifty pages, and five hundred pages of what it does to a mind.
- [Moby Dick](#), Herman Melville. Stranger and funnier than school made it. Skip nothing.
- [Great Expectations](#), Charles Dickens. The tightest Dickens, and the best place to start with him.
- [Jane Eyre](#), Charlotte Brontë. A voice so direct it still feels modern.
- [Little Women](#), Louisa May Alcott. Warmer and sharper than its reputation as a children's book.

SHORT AND SHARP: FINISHED IN A WEEKEND

- [The Great Gatsby](#), F. Scott Fitzgerald. Nine chapters. Possibly the best-built novel in English.
- [The Time Machine](#), H. G. Wells. The book that invented time travel, in an afternoon.
- [Dubliners](#), James Joyce. Fifteen stories. The approachable Joyce, and the last one, "The Dead," is perfect.
- [Mrs Dalloway](#), Virginia Woolf. One June day in London, from the inside of a dozen heads.

- [The Awakening](#), Kate Chopin. A hundred and fifty pages that got its author blacklisted in 1899.
- [A Room with a View](#), E. M. Forster. Italy, England, and choosing the life you actually want.
- [Short Fiction](#), Anton Chekhov. The stories every other short-story writer learned from. Dip in anywhere.
- [The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes](#), Arthur Conan Doyle. Twelve cases. Still the template.

GOTHIC, STRANGE, AND ADVENTUROUS

- [Frankenstein](#), Mary Shelley. Written at nineteen. Not the film; better.
- [Dracula](#), Bram Stoker. Told in letters and diaries, which makes it far scarier than it has any right to be.
- [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#), Oscar Wilde. A horror story where every second line is a quotable joke.
- [Treasure Island](#), Robert Louis Stevenson. Every pirate cliché you know started here, and it still moves.

COMFORT READS

- [Pride and Prejudice](#), Jane Austen. You know the story. The sentences are the point.
- [The Age of Innocence](#), Edith Wharton. Old New York, a doomed romance, and the first Pulitzer awarded to a woman.

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- **O'Reilly**: DRM-free where sold directly as files.
- **Tor**: the major science fiction and fantasy publisher that dropped DRM entirely in 2012, and it stuck.
- **Verso, Haymarket**, and many university presses: frequently DRM-free, and they discount direct sales heavily.
- **Leanpub and Gumroad**: author-direct platforms; effectively always DRM-free, and far more of the price reaches the writer.

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4. **Ask.** Small presses answer email, and it is a normal question.
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