

READ, READ, READ to Prepare for AP Lit Exam

With a massive list of over 400 books appearing on the AP test at one time or another, it can be challenging to choose which novels to focus on during test preparation. To help you, I've put together a list of the titles that have appeared most frequently on the AP Lit exam, including how many times as well as the most recent year it appeared.

- ***Invisible Man*** (Ralph Ellison) – 28 times - 2016 (American)
The most popular, intense novel on the AP Lit test is one of the most modern. Written in 1952 by African-American author Ralph Ellison, the book is centered around an unnamed black man's attempt to discover his identity, despite who society tells him he is. The man, "invisible" to those around him, must find out how to live in a white-majority city.
- ***Wuthering Heights*** (Emily Bronte) – 23 times - 2017 (British)
Bronte's classic novel about love and revenge is told by three different narrators and relates the history of two homes, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and the bonds that were formed and broken between those who dwelled there.
- ***Great Expectations*** (Charles Dickens) – 20 times - 2016 (British)
Dickens' renowned story of orphan Pip and his journey to find happiness and success in a confusing world has remained a classic for generations.
- ***King Lear*** (William Shakespeare) – 17 times – 2014 (British)
Lear trumps other classic Shakespeare works as the most often-appearing work by the Bard. In this tragedy, King Lear banishes a daughter who speaks out against him, never suspecting that his other two daughters are plotting against him.
- ***Heart of Darkness*** (Joseph Conrad) – 18 times -2016 (British)
This short but complex novel is a fascinating narration about storytelling and the exploration of the attitudes people hold on what constitutes a barbarian versus a civilized society and the attitudes on colonialism, racism, and European imperialism. ****Note: We will be reading this in class.**
- ***Jane Eyre*** (Charlotte Bronte) – 18 times; 2017 (British)
This dramatic romance tells of a governess who falls for her student's mysterious father who has a tragic and horrifying secret.
- ***Crime and Punishment*** (Fyodor Dostoyevsky) -- 17 times – 2016 (Russian)
The crime, the punishment, and everything that goes on psychologically in-between.
- ***Moby Dick*** (Herman Melville) -- 15 times; 2009 (American)

This is the famous tale of the great white whale, *Moby Dick*, and the crazed captain, Ahab, seeking revenge against him. Note that *Billy Budd*, another Melville novel has also appeared on the exam over 10 times.

- ***Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*** (James Joyce) – 14 times – 2013 (British)
Joyce’s challenging semi-autobiographical novel is written in stream-of-consciousness and tells the story of a young Irish boy’s aspirations to become an artist despite the forces that pull him down.
- ***Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*** (Mark Twain) – 14 times -2011 (American)
This classic American novel of a rebellious boy and his journey up the Mississippi River is representative of American literature and American humor.
- ***The Scarlet Letter*** (Nathaniel Hawthorne) – 14 times -2015 (American)
Set in the harsh Puritan community of 17th-century Boston, this tale of an adulterous entanglement that results in an illegitimate birth reveals Hawthorne's concerns with the tension between the public and the private selves. Publicly disgraced and ostracized, Hester Prynne draws on her inner strength to emerge as the first true heroine of American fiction.
- ***Their Eyes Were Watching God*** (Zora Neale Hurston) – 13 times; 2014 (Amer.)
Hurston’s 1937 classic is an enduring and witty Southern love story. Told in the captivating voice of a woman who refuses to live in sorrow, bitterness, fear, or foolish romantic dreams, it is the story of fair-skinned, fiercely independent Janie Crawford and her evolving selfhood through three marriages and a life marked by poverty, trials, and purpose.
- ***The Awakening*** (Kate Chopin) – 13 times – 2014 (American)
Set in New Orleans and the Louisiana coast at the end of the 19th century, the novel centers around Edna Pontellier’s struggle to reconcile her unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the South.
- ***Catch-22*** (Joseph Heller) – 14 times – 2016 (American)
This satirical novel portrays the darkly funny and absurd existence of Yossarian the Assyrian as he struggles to make it as a bombardier through the latter half of World War II. The novel mercilessly lampoons the absurdity of military bureaucracy.
- ***The Great Gatsby*** (F. Scott Fitzgerald) – 13 times – 2016 (American)
The timeless story of Jay Gatsby and his love for Daisy Buchanan is widely acknowledged to be the closest thing to the great American novel ever written. The green light at the end of the dock – need I say more!

[Note: *The Kite Runner* has appeared on the AP Lit exam for five years! 2011-2016]

Other books of note that have appeared frequently:

Obviously, something by Shakespeare is always on the test; in addition to *King Lear*, the most frequent titles have been *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Julius Caesar*.

Never Let Me Go (Kazuo Ishiguro) Poignant love story about boarding school students who attend a school where teachers are known as guardians and students are encouraged to produce art and maintain a healthy lifestyle

Poisonwood Bible (Barbara Kingsolver) Five separate narrators including the wife and four daughters of a fierce Evangelical Baptist who takes his family to the Belgian Congo in 1959. A suspenseful epic of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa.

1984 (George Orwell) The year 1984 has come and gone, but Orwell's nightmarish vision of the world we were becoming is timelier than ever!

Cry, the Beloved Country (Alan Paton) Paton's impassioned novel about a black man's country under white man's law is a work of love and hope, courage and endurance, born of the dignity of man.

A Prayer for Owen Meany (John Irving) Eleven-year old Owen Meany, playing in a Little League baseball game, hits a foul ball and kills his best friend's mother. Owen doesn't believe in accidents; he believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1963 event is both extraordinary and terrifying.

Waiting for Godot (Samuel Becket) An absurdist play in two acts about two homeless, family-less men who come together each day to pass the time

Beloved (Toni Morrison): Set after the American Civil War, this story is inspired by the tale of an African-American slave, Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery in Kentucky late January 1856 by fleeing to Ohio, a free state.