



Quick Lit

Here are brief summaries of some of the most asked-about novels in quizbowl. Hopefully, this will pique your interest and encourage you to find out more about these great works of literature.

Moby-Dick – Melville

Titular white sperm whale is relentlessly tracked by Captain Ahab onboard the *Pequod*. He is helped in his quest by Queequeg, Starbuck, Stubb, Tashtego, Ishmael, and others, who all die, except for Ishmael, in the end.

The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald

Set in Roaring 1920's New York, Nick Carraway narrates the story of Jay Gatsby, a man who obsesses over the beautiful but vapid Daisy Buchanan. Her husband, Tom, has an affair with Myrtle Wilson who is accidentally killed by Daisy while driving Jay's car. Myrtle's husband kills Jay believing him to be the murderer, and then commits suicide.

Don Quixote – Miguel de Cervantes

This picaresque novel features a middle-aged man from La Mancha who believes chivalric books to be literal truth. Thus, he goes on quests as a knight-errant in search of adventure with his horse Rocinante and his squire Sancho Panza. He calls his neighbor's farm girl Dulcinea his love. In the end, he dies after having his belief in chivalry broken through a number of practical jokes.

Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

The Bennet family has a bunch of daughters; eventually, most of them fall in love with someone and/or get married. Elizabeth, the second oldest, is the protagonist. She marries Fitzwilliam Darcy, the owner of Pemberley estate, and a man apart from the genteel norms of aristocratic British society.

Jane Eyre – Charlotte Bronte

Jane attends the Lowood School before working at Thornfield Hall as a governess. At Thornfield, she falls in love with her employer, Edward Rochester, who (unfortunately for Jane) is married to the crazy Bertha Mason. Eventually, Bertha burns Thornfield down and commits suicide. Afterwards, Jane returns to Rochester, marries him, and has his son.



Ulysses – James Joyce

Set on one day, June 16, 1904, it tells, through the use of stream-of-consciousness technique, the story of Leopold and Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus, as they wander through life on the streets of Dublin.

1984 – George Orwell

Winston Smith works for the Party, which is led by Big Brother, pushing propaganda on the Proles. Winston gets tired of his job at the Ministry of Truth, so he decides to rebel. This ends badly for him and his lover, Julia, at the hands of O'Brien in Room 101.

Scarlet Letter – Nathaniel Hawthorne

Puritan woman, Hester Prynne, commits adultery with pastor, Arthur Dimmesdale, and has baby by him named Pearl. Her husband, Roger Chillingworth, gets mad and deaths occur.

Anna Karenina – Leo Tolstoy

Titular Russian chick loves Count Vronsky, but he doesn't requite her love the way she desires, so she jumps in front of a train to end her emotional anguish. The Levins also figure prominently in the novel.

Lady Chatterley's Lover - D.H. Lawrence

Lady Chatterley has an affair with Oliver Mellors the gamekeeper of Wragby Hall after her husband, Clifford, is made impotent by an injury in WWI.

Crime and Punishment – Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The student Raskolnikov murders the pawnbroker Alyona Ivanova and her sister Lizaveta. He later falls in love with the prostitute Sonya and is pursued by the detective Porfiry. He eventually is sent to prison in Siberia.

Les Miserables – Victor Hugo

Paroled convict Jean Valjean turns his life around, becomes a well-respected mayor and adopts the orphaned daughter (Cosette) of a dying factory worker (Fantine), rescuing her from the evil innkeeper Thenardier. Though Valjean has turned his life around, he is still pursued by Inspector Javert for violating the terms of his parole years before.

Red Badge of Courage – Stephen Crane

Henry Fleming is a young Union soldier at an unnamed Civil War battle (based on the Battle of Chancellorsville). In the end, Henry is the hero of a dangerous charge on the Confederates. Jim Conklin and Wilson are among the few named characters in the novel.

Candide – Voltaire

Candide, the nephew of Baron Thunder-ten-tronkh is in love with Cunegonde. Along with his tutor Pangloss (based on the philosopher Leibniz), the three travel the world on a series of misadventures that takes them from the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake to South America, to El Dorado, and finally to Constantinople.

