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Photo Courtesy: Ask Media Group Summer is in full swing and there’s nothing like heading to the beach — or the park — sitting by the water, contemplating the view, grabbing a good book and just immersing ourselves in it. That’s why we’re throwing out some ideas for the perfect summer novels. We are adhering to “beach reads” rules though: most of the titles here are either total page-turners or grant some instant gratification — or both. And all of them will transport you to faraway places or the kind of setting you’d enjoy spending a vacation at, either because of when they were written or where they are set. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads The oldest book on this list is the first one in a series of five psychological thrillers that Patricia Highsmith wrote about her infamous Tom Ripley character. Even if he’s a sociopath with more than murderous tendencies, the reader can’t avoid being on Ripley’s side while reading Highsmith’s engrossing novels.The whole series is set in Europe with the first book taking its protagonist and the reader to San Remo, Rome, Palermo and Venice. Plus, there’s a constant longing for a trip to Greece. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads This Australian classic is set in 1900 and features a group of boarders from an all-girls school in Victoria as they take a day trip to the nearby geological formation Hanging Rock. There are plenty of descriptions of proper picnic attire, the beauty of the landscape and the relationships that bond this group of teenagers and their teachers. And while Joan Lindsay’s writing style and the setting for this novel may have you drawing some parallels with other classic coming-of-age novels written by and starring women, the ending of Picnic at Hanging Rock could only have been written in the 1960s. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Allow me the hometown reference with this Spanish novel set in Barcelona in 1979. Written by the Galician-Catalan author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Southern Seas is the most famous of his novels starring the private detective Pepe Carvalho. He’s a gourmet who’s equally obsessed with food, literature and the city of Barcelona. Besides a methodical description of the city in the late 1970s, the book also includes references to a trip to the Southern Seas that never was. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Written by Japanese author Haruki Murakami, this coming-of-age novel follows the story of Toru Watanabe, a college student who is obsessed with American literature. He’s trying to figure out his life in Tokyo in the 1960s and ends up in relationships with two women who couldn’t be more different: there’s Naoko, the former girlfriend of his best friend, and Midori, one of his classmates.The story takes the reader from the bustling streets of Tokyo to the peaceful quietness of a rehab center lost in the mountains nearby Kyoto. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Small-time Miami loan shark Chili Palmer travels to Las Vegas, hoping to get a debt paid, and ends up in Los Angeles, where he learns about the movie-making business and how to become a producer. Set in Hollywood in 1990, this California classic masterfully blends suspense, thrills, humor and even the slightest hint of a Western. This story is so quintessentially Hollywood that there’s a 1995 movie adaptation starring John Travolta and a 2017 TV show with Chris O’Dowd, but you should definitely start with the Elmore Leonard novel. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads American novelist Donna Leon has been calling Venice home for years. Her first book in the mystery series that stars the Venetian police detective Guido Brunetti follows the investigation of a music conductor’s death after he’s poisoned during the intermission of a Verdi opera at La Felice.Leon has been steadily publishing one new Commissario Guido Brunetti installment a year for decades. So if you love the Venetian setting, crime stories and the constant descriptions of all the delicious foods (and drinks) that Brunetti ingests on a daily basis, this could definitely be the series for you. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Chances are we’ll never get to see Luca Gundagnino’s sequel to his Call Me by Your Name movie adaptation. And while André Aciman’s follow-up novel, Find Me, may leave hardcore fans of Elio and Oliver a little bit underwhelmed, there’s nothing like going back to the original material.Set against the backdrop of the Italian Riviera, this coming-of-age story follows the precocious Elio as he falls in love with Oliver, a graduate student and Elio’s parents’ guest for the summer. This iconic summer read perfectly captures the feeling of longing for someone and it features plentiful, engaging conversations, early morning swims, leisurely bike rides, a furtive relationship and a passionate trip to Rome. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie sets this story — that deals with immigration, race and the feeling of belonging — in Lagos, London and New Jersey. Her protagonist is Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who moves to the United States to further her studies. Americanah makes for a great read not only as an engaging and entertaining novel but also as a study about race in America from the perspective of a non-American Black person. The novel also packs a complex love story between Ifemelu and Obinze, who moves to London and has to live there as an undocumented immigrant. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads I don’t care if you’ve already seen the star-packed HBO miniseries and know not only who the killer of this story is but also the identity of the person who dies and whose investigation propels the whole plot, Liane Moriarty’s soapy thriller still very much deserves a read.On the one hand, instead of the rugged coast of Northern California, the novel Big Little Lies is set in the suburban Northern Beaches of Sydney. On the other hand, the book jams enough humor and sharp banter — especially when it comes to the inclusion of dialogue from the police interrogations among the many parents who take their kids to the same school as our protagonists — that you’ll find enough nuggets of new material to more than justify the read. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Taylor Jenkins Reid’s historical fiction bestseller is set between the publishing world of present-day New York and the classic Hollywood of the 1950s, 1960s and onward. When the relatively unknown journalist Monique Grant is tasked with writing a profile on the legendary actress Evelyn Hugo, she can’t believe her career-changing luck.The novel guides the reader through a series of interviews between Monique and Evelyn in which the former star tells her origin story and the reasons behind her many marriages throughout the years. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Andrew Sean Greer’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel stars Arthur Less as a novelist with a dwindling career and a broken heart. As if all of that wasn’t enough already, Less is on the brink of turning 50. When his former long-time boyfriend invites Less to his wedding, our hapless protagonist decides to embark on a series of back-to-back international trips with a “ramshackle itinerary” to avoid the much-dreaded event. Greer’s fun and never-quiet novel takes the reader and its protagonist from the foggy shores of San Francisco to New York City, Mexico City, Turin, Paris, Berlin, Morocco, India and Japan. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads The last published novel of late spymaster John le Carré is a return to some of his career-defining themes in the world of international espionage, which he describes with precision — and without a glimpse of glamour or spectacle. The novel stars Nat, a reluctant-to-be-out-of-the-field agent in his late forties, who has had a long career developing sources in Russia. Nat’s back in London and somehow can’t avoid getting himself involved in yet another surveillance plot. The book is set in 2018 and there’s constant chatter among its characters regarding Brexit and the Trump administration. Le Carré favors none of those. Even if you don’t like international thrillers featuring double agents that much — who doesn’t though? — Agent Running in the Field is still worth a read if only to appreciate Le Carré’s succinct yet masterfully rich and descriptive prose. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Let’s add Beach Read to this list of beach reads because Emily Henry’s romance novel truly does its title justice. Set in a small Michigan town, the novel tells the story of bestselling romance author January and acclaimed fiction writer Gus. They end up being neighbors and living side-by-side in lakefront cottages. One thing leads to another and they end up making a deal: by the end of the summer he’ll be the one to pen a romance book and she’ll write a dark and bleak one. They both need to teach the other everything they need to know to be able to produce something in a genre they’re not used to working in. Of course, besides all the procrastinating and writing, there’s also time for love. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Last year’s revelatory novel The Vanishing Half tackles the subject of passing when it comes to racial identity. The Brit Bennett-penned historical novel, which is already being developed into a limited series by HBO, tells the story of two identical twin sisters from a small town in rural Louisiana where the majority Black population is so light-skinned that one of the sisters passes as a white woman for most of her life after fleeing town.The action encompasses several decades starting in the 1950s and weaves together the life of the assimilated sister — who’s leading a double life in New Orleans first and then Los Angeles — with that of the other one, who is forced to return home. Photo Courtesy: Goodreads Let’s close this list with an August release from one of 2020’s bestselling authors. After her Mexican Gothic was chosen as Best Horror novel last year by the Goodreads users, author Silvia Moreno-Garcia returns with Velvet Was the Night. The Mexican Canadian author sets the action in 1970s Mexico City and writes about Maite, a secretary obsessed with romance stories and her beautiful neighbor Leonora. When the object of her fixation disappears, Maite starts looking for her — but she isn’t the only one. In addition to tracking your progress and seeing what your friends on Goodreads are reading and favoriting, you can use this social network to see what its millions of users (statistics website Statista estimated Goodreads had 90 million registered members in July 2019) are perusing and how much they’re liking their reads. Need some more help navigating the site? Here are some of Goodreads features that can help you choose your next book: Reviews: Book reviews are one of Goodreads’ most appealing offerings. And while those reviews are written by users, not professional book critics at major publications, some of those who write book reviews do it regularly. They may even be bloggers who read about specific topics or genres. Think about it like the type of restaurant review you can get on Yelp. Per Goodreads review guidelines, commercial reviews are not allowed. If a reviewer receives a free copy of a book, they must disclose it in the review. Some reviewers receive advanced readers’ copies (ARCs), which makes it possible for a review to hit Goodreads before a book’s publication date. Ratings: Lazy readers, like myself, prefer to give a book just a 1-5 star rating instead of writing an actual review to go with it. Most books have a bigger number of star ratings than actual reviews. I trust Goodreads’ users enough that I might avoid a book with a rating lower than 3.5 stars. Also, the bigger the number of ratings, the more reliable the metric tends to be. I use ratings and reviews in conjunction to help me determine whether I should start reading something or not. One of the most recent reviews for the first book in the Bridgertons series, for instance, already warns the reader about the book’s most controversial passage. So, even if that book has a 3.89 rating, a review can help you make a final decision. And yes, reviews might end up being a bit spoilery. So be careful when you do your research. Lists: They can be created by users or the Goodreads’ team and they are a good way to find reads in specific genres. If you like a book, you can see what lists that title is included on and discover something similar. There are lists for everything, from Scandinavian/Nordic Mysteries to Science Fiction Books by Female Authors or Food Books for Readers to Devour. The classics. They’re the bane of many a high schooler’s existence. And yet, we all have one or two (or 20) classic books that we’ve been meaning to read... eventually. But when you walk into the bookstore, you’re instantly distracted by all those shiny new books, and it seems like up and coming YA authors probably need your money a lot more than Charles Dickens does right now. Lucky for you, though, there’s this secret, hidden realm known as the “public domain,” where you can read all the classics books your literary heart desires. Right now. For free.Websites like Project Gutenberg have collected tens of thousands of public domain books for your reading pleasure. You can download e-books for your phone or kindle, or just read them right there in your browser. So if you’re looking for a free way to read more contemporary works, allow me to direct you to your friendly local library. But if you’re looking to read up on the classics, right now, from the comfort of your own phone, laptop, or sci-fi ocular implant, then here are a whole slew of incredible books that can be found and legally read for free in the wilds of the web:1’Pride and Prejudice’ by Jane AustenPride and Prejudice is the rom-com to end all rom-coms. Just try not to fall for the awkward, rich, emotionally repressed Mr. Darcy as he goes about unintentionally ruining Lizzie’s life (and finally, awkwardly, sweeping her off her feet).2’The Count of Monte Cristo’ by Alexandre DumasThe ultimate revenge tale still holds up over 170 years later. In Alexandre Dumas’ classic novel, a man is imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit, and decides to deal with it by becoming fabulously wealthy and then utterly destroying the men who imprisoned him.3’Dracula’ by Bram StokerEvery sexy vampire in modern media owes a huge debt to the original Count himself. Bram Stoker’s Dracula is rightfully known as one of the greatest horror stories of all time, complete with bloodsucking, shape-shifting, and one very charismatic Transylvanian.4’Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’ by Lewis CarrollThe trippiest of classic children’s books is still a great read for adults. Join little Alice as she falls down a rabbit hole and deals with all kinds of weird nonsense while continually eating unidentified objects and changing size all over the place.5’Adventures of Sherlock Holmes’ by Arthur Conan DoyleSherlock Holmes is everyone’s favorite irritating detective, along with his long-suffering sidekick, Dr. John Watson. Read all about their adventures in this collection of mysteries, and put your own deductive powers to the test.6’Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus’ by Mary Wollstonecraft ShelleyYou probably know Frankenstein’s monster as that big flat-top fellow with the neck bolts. But if you read Mary Shelley’s original novel, you just might discover that the real Frankenstein’s monster is a sensitive giant baby-man who speaks French and just wants to be loved.7’Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself’ by Harriet A. JacobsIncidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is the collected memoirs of Harriet Jacobs, who survived slavery in North Carolina and seven years of hiding in a tiny, coffin-like room. She eventually escaped to reunite with her children in the North, and wrote this beautifully nuanced account of her life and her perilous road to freedom.8’The Complete Works of William Shakespeare’ by William ShakespeareLook, you don’t really have to read all of Shakespeare. But you do have the option to, with this free edition of The Complete Works. Here you’ll find every last Shakespeare play, from the classic tragedies to the forgotten comedies to the very, very long histories.9’Jane Eyre: An Autobiography’ by Charlotte BrontëJane Eyre is a great book to read if you’re considering getting married to your boss, but you haven’t yet checked his attic for any lurking ex-wives. It’s a classic coming of age tale, a Gothic romance, and a surprisingly modern take on being a young, independent woman.10’The Picture of Dorian Gray’ by Oscar WildeThe Picture of Dorian Gray teaches us all a valuable lesson: hot guys are evil and not to be trusted. Sure, there’s a little more to it than that, but you’ll just have to read it for yourself and find out.11’Anne of Green Gables’ by L. M. MontgomeryOne of the top two spunky redheaded orphans named Anne, Anne of Green Gables is that rare, delightful character who never seems dated. She’s always there to cheer you up with her various scraps and fantasies and her bucolic Canadian country life.12’Ulysses’ by James JoyceUlysses is famous for being long and confusing, but now you can test that reputation for yourself. Sure, Joyce’s writing style is a little unconventional, but if you can get past the forty page run-on sentences, you might find that Ulysses is one of the strangest, funniest, most beautifully human books out there.13’Little Women’ by Louisa May AlcottFour sisters grow up together in Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women, dealing with minor trials and devastating tragedies as they go. It’s a coming-of-age story that puts sisterhood front and center, in all its joy and frustration.14’Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave’ by Frederick Douglass15’Les Misérables’ by Victor HugoVictor Hugo revolutionized the idea of writing fiction for social change with his stunning (and very long) novel, Les Misérables. Hugo tells the stories of various French citizens, all revolving around Jean Valjean, a man who was imprisoned for nineteen years for stealing a loaf of bread.16’Great Expectations’ by Charles DickensOne of Dickens’ best loved works of fiction, Great Expectations has plenty of Dickensian orphans, reversals of fortune, poverty, crime, and one terrifying spinster in a rotting wedding dress.17’Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea’ by Jules VerneLet’s clear this up once and for all: the twenty thousand leagues refer to distance traveled while under water, not depth. They are not twenty thousand leagues deep. Also it’s one of the greatest hard sci-fi novels ever written.18’Poems by Emily Dickinson’ by Emily DickinsonJoin your new best friend Emily Dickinson for a reclusive journey out into nature, where you might brush up against all manner of flowers and also probably Death itself.19’The Souls of Black Folk’ by W. E. B. Du BoisIf you’ve heard the phrase “double consciousness” tossed around recently, that’s a reference to The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois. One of the seminal works in the history of sociology, this book collects some of the foundational essays about race in America, still all too relevant today.20’The Works of Edgar Allan Poe’ — Volume 1 by Edgar Allan PoeThe Works of Edgar Allan Poe can be found online in several disturbing volumes, complete with all of his creepy poetry, his murderous tales, and everything in between.21’The Awakening, and Selected Short Stories’ by Kate ChopinThe Awakening is often credited as one of the first modern feminist novels. Chopin’s heroine gradually “awakens” to the fact that she, and most women, are systemically oppressed by society. So Edna decides to take her life into her own hands, regardless of what her husband or anybody else wants for her.

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