

... And the top five are:

1. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)
2. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
3. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)
4. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967; trans. Gregory Rabassa)
5. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

The list continues inside...

Having trouble choosing your next book? Why not try a story on for size? Read the first line to see if a novel has what it takes to catch your interest.

If you think one of the novels on this list has the right stuff for you—or if you just have to know what happens next—check with your local library for availability.

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Didn't care for the top 25? Or just want more? Here are a few more first lines that really snagged my interest!

124 was spiteful. **Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)**

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel. **William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)**

All this happened, more or less. **Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)**

I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974. **Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (2002)**

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it. **C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952)**

Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person. **Anne Tyler, *Back When We Were Grownups* (2001)**

Most really pretty girls have pretty ugly feet, and so does Mindy Metalman, Lenore notices, all of a sudden. **David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System* (1987)**

The rented Toyota, driven with such impatient exuberance by the Senator, was speeding along the unpaved unnamed road, taking the turns in giddy skidding slides, and then, with no warning, somehow the car had gone off the road and had overturned in black rushing water, listing to its passenger's side, rapidly sinking. **Joyce Carol Oates, *Black Water* (1992)**

The day I died started out bad and got worse in a hurry. **MaryJanice Davidson, *Undead and Unwed* (2004)**

The 25 Best First Lines From Novels



Can you identify the top five novels?

#1 Call me Ishmael.

#2 It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

#3 A screaming comes across the sky.

#4 Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.

#5 Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins.

Find the answers inside.

6. Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. **Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (1877; trans. Constance Garnett)**

7. Riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs. **James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939)**

8. It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. **George Orwell, *1984* (1949)**

9. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. **Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)**

10. I am an invisible man. **Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)**

11. The Miss Lonelyhearts of the New York Post-Dispatch (Are you in trouble?—Do-you-need-advice?—Write-to-Miss-Lonelyhearts-and-she-will-help-you) sat at his desk and stared at a piece of white cardboard. **Nathanael West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933)**

12. You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. **Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)**

13. Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested. **Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925; trans. Breon Mitchell)**

14. You are about to begin reading Italo

Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. **Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979; trans. William Weaver)**

15. The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. **Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (1938)**

16. If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. **J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)**

17. Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. **James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)**

18. This is the saddest story I have ever heard. **Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (1915)**

19. I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost:—Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,—I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me. **Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy***

(1759–1767)

20. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. **Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850)**

21. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. **James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)**

22. It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents, except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the house-tops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness. **Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (1830)**

23. One summer afternoon Mrs. Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. **Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)**

24. It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not. **Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985)**

25. Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. **William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)**

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