

13) *“A classic is a work which persists as background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway.”*

Classics never go away. Even as the world changes, classic texts continue to be quoted and recognized for their relevance decades, centuries, and millennia later. They are there to be rediscovered by new readers, offer new insights, and remind individuals of their past. Sometimes the language is outdated, the situations no longer as dire, and the characters unrecognizable, but we still identify with the classics on some deeper level. Classics are always ready to be reintroduced back into mainstream society, and their effect on us can be unforgettable.

■ Italo Calvino (1923-1985) was an Italian journalist, novelist, and short story writer. He is known for his imaginative and postmodern style. His most famous works

are *Cosmicomics*, *Invisible Cities*, and *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

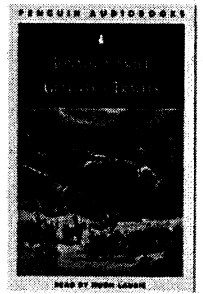
WHAT ARE THE APPEALS OF CLASSIC NOVELS?

By: Linda MacAfee

A novel's appeals allow us to determine if a book is a good suggestion for reader's advisory, an appropriate choice for display, or an apt addition to a reading list or book club discussion. What exactly is it about a classic novel that makes it appeal to young adults? A great way to engage teens with classic texts is by focusing on their individual appeal factors.

Setting/Frame

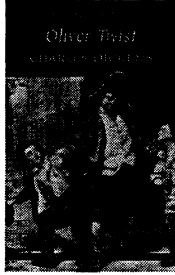
The time and place of a novel are crucial for establishing the suspension of disbelief that is necessary for immersing oneself wholly into a book. Some of the classic texts (certainly not an exclusive list) that establish an unforgettable setting are



Oliver Twist, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In *Oliver Twist* readers are invited into the gritty, harsh, and unforgiving world of criminals in 19th century London. The setting of *Oliver Twist* is as important as the characters themselves—it establishes the conditions of those living in poverty, and acts as a catalyst for its character's actions. It is a novel that will entertain and make teens question whether existence really is a question of nature versus nurture.

In *Gulliver's Travels*, the islands of the Lilliputs (the little people), the Brobdingnag (the tall people), the Glubbdubdrib (the historical ghosts), the Laputa (the flying island), and the Houyhnhnms (talking horses), are unforgettable. We get Gulliver's perspective on the cities' layouts, their governmental structures, their people's philosophy, and the



island's history. It is the different worlds Swift creates that endure in our minds after the story has ended. Teen will also appreciate the absurdity and hilarity of Swift's satire as he describes miniscule and giant people, flying islands, and talking horses.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn exposes readers to 17th century America as a young man and his companion float down the Mississippi River. The idyllic world of the raft is juxtaposed with the adventures and strife that happen in the towns that Huck and Jim sneak into for supplies. It is a constant battle between nature and human settlement that make for an intriguing sense of time, place, and atmosphere. This novel is a great escape for teens wishing to revel in a world governed purely by the whims of a young adventurer.



Character

Interesting and dynamic characters make us think in different ways—to question social norms, to see the world around us with different eyes, and to perhaps make us sit for a moment and ponder who we are. Some important classic novels that have characters that speak to teens include *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Dracula*, and *Pride and Prejudice*.

The Catcher in the Rye is told from 16-year-old Holden Caulfield's perspective. Everything about 1950s New York City and Pencey Prep Academy is filtered through his cynical yet perceptive attitude. We cannot escape Holden's mind for even a second, and are compelled to see what happens to him right through to the very end. Teens struggling with learning their place in the world will definitely relate to Holden's inner conflict.



Dracula is an epistolary novel, but through the letters we get a strong sense of the characters' personalities. It is the *absence* of Dracula's viewpoint that makes him an extremely compelling character, and we are always wondering about his motives. What are his thoughts during the events of the novel? The ambiguity of his character has spawned entire literary genres around vampires, horror, the gothic, and that act of personal invasion. Of all the characters in Bram Stoker's novel, it is Dracula that we remember the most. Teens interested in the current vampire craze might just want to pick up the classic text and immerse themselves in the character of the greatest vampire.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* gives readers the irrepressible Elizabeth Bennett and the alluring (but infuriating) Mr. Darcy. These characters are dynamic both in personality and in relation to one another. They have endured as iconic

individuals of love and romance, and it is their ability to elicit emotions from their readers that make them memorable. We get frustrated by Darcy's excessive pride and Elizabeth's inability to see her own affections, yet enjoy their witty and insightful conversations. Teens looking for sassy women and dashing young men will certainly find plenty of both in Austen's classic story.

Pacing

The pacing of a novel may determine whether or not teens will be able to read it all the way to the end. Typically, if a book is too slow teens may skip through the story and only read all the highlights. Pacing is difficult to judge, because what is slow for one person is fast paced for another. Older classics have the reputation for being slow-paced based on the language in which the story is written—usually much denser than a modern novel. At the same time, gossip about a novel oftentimes establishes

judgment before the novel can be read and critiqued based on its own merit. Some of the classics that would appeal to teens and fall into the category of being fast/moderately paced are *Kidnapped*, *Moby Dick*, and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

Stevenson's *Kidnapped* is a story of intrigue and a boy's journey into adulthood.



At the beginning of the story David Balfour learns he is the heir to the Shaws (his father's former home); however,

before he can claim his inheritance, David's uncle has him kidnapped. Awakening aboard Captain Hoseason's ship, David befriends a young sailor and a fleeing Jacobite. In his travels home, David is thrown into sea battles, sword fights, and treks across Scotland. *Kidnapped* is a great novel for any teen looking for a blend of

thrilling adventure and moderate dialogue and description.

Moby Dick is a story that blends suspense and fast-paced adventure. The opening events of the story allows for the creation of a foreboding atmosphere. While teens may find the beginning slow, they will get enveloped in the sense of mystery, intrigue, and danger surrounding Captain Ahab. Knowing such a character cannot exist without attracting adventure establishes the kind of pacing that always makes a reader keep reading. After the set-up, the pace of *Moby Dick* picks up as the crew battle against the whale. It is the pacing that makes this novel a classic read, and leaves you slightly breathless at the end.

What teen would not enjoy the fact that man is bested by a giant whale at the end?

Similar to *Moby Dick*, the *Journey to the Center of the Earth* uses its pacing to

keep readers intrigued about forthcoming events. The fast paced moments of the novel occur when the characters begin their journey into the center of the earth and encounter chambers filled with combustible gas, prehistoric mushrooms, lightning storms, and dinosaurs. At the same time, there are moments when the pacing slows in order for the reader to absorb the information being presented. There is a scientific basis to the character's decision to venture forth into the unknown earth, and the creatures they encounter are all discovered in their appropriate geological eras. This classic novel might be just the right story for a teen interested in science but enjoys fantastical adventures.