



# Good reads

## Literature in contemporary America

*"It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous."*

*Robert Benchley, humorous writer and author*

One way to think about American literature is to divide American readers and what they read into three main groups. First, there are those who only read when they're checking the local television schedule or following instructions on the internet. Second, there are those who spend most of their reading time (including evenings and weekends) studying important documents, instruction manuals, websites, and other materials for their jobs. And third, there are those who enjoy literature so much that it's a regular part of their life. They read books, magazines, and other writing, or they listen to literature on CDs, the radio, or in other forms. Further, many of

these ordinary Americans are not only readers, they are also writers.

Here is a closer look at that third group of readers.

## Books and other forms of writing

According to one survey, in one year 93 million Americans had read a novel or short story, 25 million had read poetry, and 7 million had read a play. About 19 million had used the internet to learn about, read, or discuss literature. And more than 27 million had at sometime taken a class or lesson in creative writing themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Looking at what Americans are reading often reflects what American readers are thinking. In the first few days after the September 11 attacks in 2001, for example, book sales in the US plunged. People were in mourning and shock; no one went shopping. However, in the weeks following, sales suddenly zoomed