

This resource list will help expand programmatic options for the **Crossroads** exhibition. Work with your local library and community centers to introduce books that focus on themes featured in the exhibition. Help libraries and bookstores to host book clubs, discussion programs or other learning opportunities, or develop a display with books on the subject. This list is not exhaustive or even all encompassing – it will simply get you started.

Historic and Classic Literature with Rural and Small-Town Subjects published through the 1920s

Prior to 1920, the nation's population lived predominantly in rural places including open country and small towns with fewer than 2,500 people. Thus, this "classic" literature includes novels that captured the nation's origin tale from coast to coast as well as novels written for a majority rural national audience. Most feature personal relationships among people living in rural and urban America, and cultural exchange through the eyes of white male and female authors (with the exception of Jean Toomer and his novel, *Cane*).

Willa Cather. *O Pioneers!* 1913. Overland Park: Digireads.com Publishing, 2017.

Two novels most relate to Crossroads themes. *O Pioneers!*, the drama in a Nebraska farming community, focused on the experiences of the Swedish Bergson family, and daughter Alexandra who inherits the farm and manages it despite drama among family and neighbors. Antonia Shimerda, daughter of a Bohemian immigrant, invests in farm life in Nebraska, marrying Anton Cuzak and mothering eleven children, though her choice does not isolate her from friends living in urban America. This book is part of a trilogy that includes: ***The Song of the Lark***. 1915 (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017) and ***My Antonia***. 1918. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1994.

James Fenimore Cooper. *Last of the Mohicans*. 1826. Overland Park: Digireads.com Publishing, 2016.

This classic story of the spread of European Americans into upper New York State, led by woodsman Hawkeye, or Natty Bumppo and his two Mohican friends. They become involved in the battles of the French and Indian War. The book portrays the American myth of the forces of civilization moving westward.

James Fenimore Cooper. *The Prairie*. 1827. London: Penguin Classics, 1987.

Fictitious frontier hero Natty Bumppo, referred to as the "trapper" or the "old man," continues to help settlers moving west into the prairie in the early 1800s. This book is the last of the Leatherstockings tales.

Edna Ferber. *So Big*. 1924. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010.

Ferber won the Pulitzer in 1924 for this work of fiction based it on the life of a market gardener in South Holland, Illinois, south of Chicago. Her descriptions of cabbages can make your mouth water, but it also conveys vividly the connections (and disconnections) between country and city, and between farmers and others.



Zane Grey. *Riders of the Purple Sage*. 1912. Zane Press, 2017.

The novel is about isolated Mormon settlements in rural southeast Utah and the conflict between Mormons, Gentiles and rustlers (all of whom are subject to lust and greed). Some seek community after the crisis abates, and others seek isolation in Surprise Valley.

Helen Hunt Jackson. *Ramona*. 1884. London: Signet, 2002.

Jackson's fictional account of Mexican-Californians after the Mexican American War, and young Ramona's experiences as a Scots-American Indian child in that culture, influenced popular perceptions of California. Hundreds of printings of the novel, several adaptations into film, and a play performed since 1923, sustain this romanticized notion of southern California life.

Sarah Orne Jewett. *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*. 1896. Signet, 2000.

Sarah Orne Jewett describes the men and women of small New England towns in this collection of short stories, depicting the complexities, joys, and beauties of life

Sinclair Lewis. *Main Street*. 1920. London: Signet, 2008.

In this classic tale of early twentieth century America, An idealistic young woman attempts to reform her hometown of Gopher Prairie. Lewis' book offers a commentary on small town life in the early twentieth century.

Edgar Lee Masters. *Spoon River Anthology*. 1914. Hard Press, 2006.

Short, free-verse poems that tell the stories of the life and death of more than two hundred people interned in the Spoon River cemetery in a small town in Illinois. The collection shattered the mythos of life in small town America--of community, family, and survival.

Frank Norris. *The Octopus*. 1901. London: Penguin Classics, 1994.

Situated in the late 1880s, *The Octopus* chronicles the dispute between wheat ranchers in the San Joaquin Valley of California and a railroad monopoly, the Pacific & Southwestern. Frustrated, self-reliant farmers came to see the railroad as the villain in their efforts to succeed: it represented the consolidation and conformity of the Gilded Age business world. The poet, Presley, who narrated the action, saw similar tendencies in farmers who were land-greedy and monopolistic in their own right. Norris also wrote *The Pit* (1903) about marketing wheat on the Chicago Board of Trade.

O.E. Rolvaag. *Giants in the Earth*. 1925. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1999.

The work of a Norwegian-American author, this novel follows the struggles of a Norwegian homesteading family trying to make a new life on the land in the Dakota Territory. The family face an array of odds, from snowstorms, locusts, hunger, and loneliness to the challenge of fitting into a new culture and raising children in a new land.

Henry David Thoreau. *On Walden Pond*. 1854. London: Signet, 2012.

While *On Walden Pond* is a highly philosophical and spiritual treatise, Thoreau's writing throughout is addressed to rural farmers in New England whom he feels have become enslaved to their ownership of the land.

Jean Toomer. *Cane*. 1923. New York: Liveright, 2011.

Toomer's classic work of the Harlem Renaissance depicts African American life in the South through sketches, poems, and short stories. The first section (of three) focuses especially on African American experience in the rural South.

Edith Wharton. *Summer*. 1917. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2016.

Charity Royall, raised in the home of a prominent man in a small town, is unsure of her place in society in a mountain community. This book depicts the natural surroundings and the people of this small New England town.

Owen Wister. *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*. 1902. London: Penguin Books, 1988.

This quintessential American novel depicts Wyoming territory and the cowboy lifestyle at the turn of the twentieth century. Wister's actors reflect many of the stereotypical characters of the mythic American west in this good versus evil story. *The Virginian* is considered by some to be the first great novel of American Western literature.

Classic Literature with Rural and Small-Town Subjects Published between the 1930s and 1960s

Rural life remained an important subject as those who grew up in a majority rural nation went on to live their lives. Subjects ranged from feel-good stories about morality and community cohesion to tragedies of personal challenges, cultural conflict, and political corruption. The subject matter of the novels incorporated perspectives beyond white rural America, and the voices conveying the stories became more diverse.

Erskine Caldwell. *Tobacco Road*. 1932. Important Books, 2014.

Seeped in controversy at the time it was written, *Tobacco Road* portrays poor sharecroppers and the townspeople who ridicule them in the Georgia piedmont during the Depression years. Caldwell portrays the strong connection between the Lester family and the land, at a time of great change in southern agriculture.

William Faulkner. *Absalom, Absalom*. 1936. Vintage, 1990.

Roommates at Harvard University remember the experiences of Thomas Sutpen who sought wealth and power in frontier Mississippi. He bought 100 square miles from Indians near Jefferson, Mississippi, in fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and established Sutpen Hundred. He lost everything after the war due to his own depravity.

Additional Faulkner novels and stories further Crossroads themes. ***As I Lay Dying*** (1930) describes Addie Bundren's back-country family's efforts to honor her wishes and travel across 1920s Mississippi to bury her in her hometown of Jefferson. ***The Sound and the Fury*** (1929) is about members of the Compson family who struggle with mental illness and disability while trying to retain their family's reputation in Jefferson, and the strong African American family in service to them.

Ralph Ellison. *The Invisible Man*. 1952. Vintage, 1995.

The first half of the book deals with issues of segregation and racism in the rural South during the 1920s and 1930s.

Edna Ferber. *Giant*. 1952. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2000.

Giant follows three generations of Cattle Barons and Oil Tycoons in Texas. The movie was adapted into a film in 1956.

Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

This story set in rural Florida the poverty and discrimination that an African American family faces in the early twentieth century South. Hurston was an important writer and folklorist of the Harlem Renaissance. This book is often considered one of her best works.

Harper Lee. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. 1960. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002.

This novel depicts children and coming of age in a small town in Alabama. A murder rocks the town and a lawyer and his two children strive to make sense of the community in which they live. Lee portrays the challenge of race and class in the rural South, but shows us how a community can persevere in the face of these challenges.

Margaret Mitchell. *Gone with the Wind*. 1936. New York: Scribner, 2011.

Set in Georgia through the Civil War years, this novel reveals the struggles of a plantation family as they seek to survive and persist through these challenging years.

John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*. 1939. London: Penguin Classics, 2006.

Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize winning book follows a family during the Dust Bowl Migration of the 1930s, as they lose their homestead and must travel west to California to find more opportunity. The author provides a tragic story that shows the inequalities and hard realities of life in the Depression era.

Phil Strong. *State Fair*. 1932. Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1996.

Strong's portrayal of the Iowa State Fair illustrates a familiar and popular rural event. The novel covers the experiences of a family at the state fair, from the pickle contest to the livestock shows.

Robert Penn Warren. *All the King's Men*. 1946. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996.

Warren received the Pulitzer Prize for this novel depicting a southern politician's ethical and moral corruption during the 1930s, based on Huey P. Long and his dominance in Louisiana politics. The novel does not focus on rural-urban conflict, but links state capitols to power and influence.

Classic Literature with Rural and Small-Town Subjects Published between the 1970s and 1990s

During the late twentieth century, the farm crisis captivated public attention. Literature (and other popular culture) depicted rural and small-town Americans as persevering against great odds. African American, American Indian, and Latina/o authors captured the public's attention with compelling novels about historic and contemporary issues. These novels often tell the story of persistence.

Sherwood Anderson. *Winesburg, Ohio*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

This novel features short stories of small town America at the end of the nineteenth century. Told through the eyes of the young reporter George Willard, who becomes a

confidant of the town's solitary figures, these stories depict the pain, despair and loneliness of life in a small town, but also the ways that neighbors work together to build a life in the community.

Maya Angelou. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Random House, 1993.
Autobiography of Maya Angelou. Follows her life growing up in the rural south during the Jim Crow Era.

H.G. Bissinger. *Friday Night Lights*. 1988. Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2015.
Football dominates Texas culture, especially small-town communities. This book depicts a successful high school football team in Odessa, Texas, and show the power of sport to bridge a community.

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. *From the River's Edge*. St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 1991.
This novel follows the Sioux tribe in South Dakota in the 20th century and depicts reservation life for Native Americans in rural areas.

Louise Erdrich. *Love Medicine*. 1984. Harper Perennial, 2016.
Erdrich's first novel, *Love Medicine*, takes place in an oil boom town in North Dakota. It focuses on relationships across time between families living in an unidentified North Dakota reservation. Erdrich, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, and an accomplished author with numerous awards, revised *Love Medicine* twice. Her other novels, such as the award-winning *The Round House* (2012) and *LaRose* (2016) occur in the same location. In *LaRose*, Landreaux Iron accidentally shot Dusty Ravich while deer hunting. The Iron family their son, LaRose, to the Ravich family to convey their grief and allay the Ravich family loss. The award-winning novel recounts other trauma experienced by LaRose's Ojibwe ancestors.

Fannie Flagg. *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*. Random House, 1987.
Explore small town life in 1930s Alabama through Fannie Flagg's classic novel, told through the stories of Mrs. Threadgoode. The story revolves around the Whistle Stop Cafe, where family and neighbors, both white and African American, face an array of life's challenges, including racism.

Ernest J. Gaines. *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. New York: Bantam, 1971.
This book narrates the story of the fictional Jane Pittman and her life from slavery, through emancipation and into the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Gaines provides insights into how African Americans persisted and continued to build community through these difficult times. He addressed the generation gap between elderly African Americans and younger civil rights advocates through a conflict on a 1970s Louisiana sugar cane plantation in *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983). He conveys a strong sense of people and place in *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), focused on a small Cajun community in 1940s Louisiana and a young black man convicted of murder and sentenced to die.

Kent Haruf. *Plainsong*. 1999. Vintage Books, 2000.
Set in the small town of Holt, Colorado, on the High Plains of Denver, this novel shares the stories of several unsettled lives--a high school teacher raising his boys alone; a pregnant teenager with nowhere to go, and two elderly bachelors working on the family homestead. In this story of survival, their lives intersect, connected by the landscape and community.

Tony Hillerman. *The Blessing Way*. 1990. Harper Perennial, 2009.

Focused on the Four-Corners area (Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah). The books are all rural. All take into account the conflicting views of Hopi and Navajo and Americans over the land and life on the land). Hillerman describes the landscape in vivid ways, the environment in different seasons, and the life of a policeman living in a trailer in remote rural locations. *Coyote Waits* (1990) is another in the series.

Linda Hogan. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner, 1994.

Solar Storms is a coming-of-age story about Angela, a troubled 17-year-old girl who returns to her Native American family's homeland. Hogan beautifully describes the land as Angela discovers herself and her heritage.

Garrison Keillor. *Lake Wobegon Days*. Viking Penguin, 1985.

Set in the fictional community of Lake Wobegon, this collection of story by Garrison Keillor captures the character of life in small-town America.

William Maxwell. *So Long, See You Tomorrow*. 1980. Vintage, 1996.

This award-winning novel based on fact, is set in the author's boyhood home of Lincoln, Illinois. It describes a person who lives a lie after a murder. The novel emphasizes childhood trauma, lasting consequences, and regret.

N. Scott Momaday. *House Made of Dawn*. 1968. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2010.

Momaday represents the first generation of contemporary American Indian Literature (Native Americans writing in their own voices telling their own stories). *House Made of Dawn* is a novel profoundly influenced by American Indian oral traditions. *House Made of Dawn* is a Pulitzer prize-winning novel that richly describes American Indian life from the author's first-hand knowledge. The book chronicles the life of a young Native American boy, Abel, and his struggles with reservation life after World War II.

Marilynne Robinson. *Housekeeping*. 1980. Picador, 2004.

This award-winning novel is timeless, with family memories ranging from the sod house of the plains to late-20th-century Fingerbone, Idaho (resembling Robinson's hometown of Sandpoint). *Housekeeping* chronicles relationships among three generations of women caring for each other as best they can on a large inland lake in mountainous northern Idaho.

Ferrol Sams. *Run with the Horseman*. 1982. London: Penguin Books, 1984.

This coming-of-age story describes a young boy growing up on a red-clay farm in Georgia in the 1930s--from killing hogs to chopping cotton--and his mother, cousin, and family who help teach him the painful truths about growing up. Other Sams books further Crossroads themes, including *Down Town* (2007) focused on residents of a small southern town, and the drama that plays out over more than 100 years after the Civil War.

Leslie Marmon Silko. *Storyteller*. 1981. London: Penguin Books, 2012.

Storyteller is a compilation of photos, memoirs, and stories about Silko's Native American family.

Jane Smiley. *A Thousand Acres*. Anchor, 1991. Anchor, 2003.

This Pulitzer-prize winning novel is set on a thousand-acre farm in Iowa owned by a family of a father and his three daughters.

Lee Smith. *Fair and Tender Ladies*. 1988. Berkley, 2011.

Smith's classic novel follows the life of Ivy Rowe, born on Blue Star Mountain in western Appalachian, from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. She raises her children on the family farmstead, persisting through the challenges and struggles of being a farmer's wife. Smith emphasizes the power of community, family, and tradition.

Helena Maria Viramontes. *Under the Feet of Jesus*. New York: Dutton, 1995.

Families of Latina/o migrant laborers survive in temporary dwellings, and struggle with pesticide exposure.

Alice Walker. *The Color Purple*. 1982. Mariner Books, 2003.

Set in rural Georgia in the 1930s, the novel focuses on four African-American women and the issues they face in the segregated South.

James Welch. *Winter in the Blood*. 1974. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.

Welch grew up on the reservations of his parents who were Blackfeet and A'aninin. *Winter in the Blood* chronicles a few days in the life of a man living on Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, giving an authentic portrayal of life on the north central Montana reservation.

Contemporary Literature with Rural and Small-Town Subjects Published between 2000 and the Present

How do novelists today convey ideas about rural and small-town subjects to readers distant from farm fields and rural crossroad? These selections indicate that fiction today depicts historic situations as well as current issues that relate to all *Crossroads* themes (rural identity, conflict, cooperation, persistence, and managing change).

Jerry Apps. *Cranberry Red: A Novel*. Madison: Terrace Books, 2010.

This is the fourth novel in a series about a rural Ames County, Wisconsin, community, economics and land use. *Cranberry Red* features an agricultural agent working with risky products including genetically modified organisms.

Wiley Cash. *The Last Ballad: A Novel*. New York: William Morrow, 2017.

Set in the Appalachian foothills in 1929, this story chronicles how a woman working in a textile mill fought for dignity and against injustice with the arrival of organizers.. Ella Mae Wiggins challenges the insular company town and the ways in which the company seeks to control the lives of the workers. Her experience transformed her family and community.

Wayne Caldwell. *Cataloochee: A Novel*. Random House, 2009.

A Civil War story about place and family that introduces three generations of hardworking families in the North Carolina mountains, building community and transforming the region into a home until the government starts relocating families to create the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, established in 1934.

Bonnie Jo Campbell. *American Salvage*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009.

Presents a collection of stories that feature rural and working-class characters trying to cope with life in post-industrial America.

Mark Childress. *One Mississippi*. Little, Brown, and Company, 2007.

High school student Daniel Musgrove moves to a small town in Mississippi in the 1970s and faces racism as he adapts to the culture of the deep South. With his friend, he commits a small crime that engulfs the entire community.

Sandra Dallas. *Tallgrass*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007.

Conflict between a small Colorado town and Japanese-American internees during WWII.

Julia Franks. *Over the Plain Houses*. Hub City, 2016.

This novel depicts a North Carolina mountain community as a USDA agent comes to their community in 1930 to instruct the farm families about how to modernize their homes and farms. The author portrays the myths and mysteries of traditional small town and farm life in a region experiencing modern ideas and ways of life.

Charles Frazier. *Cold Mountain*. Grove Press, 2006.

Based on stories passed down through the author's family, *Cold Mountain* illustrates a wounded Confederate soldier's passion for the land and his drive to return to his homeland in the North Carolina mountains.

Jen Gish. *World and Town*. New York: Knopf, 2010.

This work portrays the challenges of immigrants in small town America. Hattie Kong loses her husband moves to a small New England town, joined by an immigrant Cambodian family on the run from the city. All are searching for a new start in a small town challenged at the turn of the twentieth-first century by chain stores, cell phone towers, struggling family farms and fundamentalist Christians. The author explains the meaning of home, of community, and of America.

John Grisham. *A Painted House*. New York: Bantam Books, 2001.

In this story of 1952 Arkansas, two groups of migrant workers come into the Delta region to work the Chandler cotton farm. As a murder creates suspicion and uncertainty for the town, the community struggles to make sense of these challenges.

Denisa Nickell Hanania. *The Sharecroppers*. Xulan Press, 2013.

This book depicts the lives of a family of sharecroppers in Arkansas, depicting the day-to-day and year-to-year struggles of those growing cotton in the South. The novel reveals the challenges and hardships of those living on the land, but also their persistence and the power of family and community.

Edward P. Jones. *The Known World: A Novel*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2003.

Pulitzer Prize winning novel that focuses on families of enslaved people in Virginia, and white and African America owners, and relationships to communities and the land, and exchange between country and town and city.

Sue Monk Kidd. *The Secret Life of Bees*. Penguin Press, 2003.

Fourteen-year-old Lily runs away from home in 1964 with her African American maid, Rosalee. They take refuge in the home of the three African American Boatwright sisters, beekeepers and honey makers.

Marilynne Robinson. *Gilead*. 2004.

This Pulitzer-prize winning novel, begins in 1956 in Gilead, a fictional rural town based on Tabor, in southwestern Iowa. A dying Congregationalist minister, John Ames, recounts his life and lessons learned from abolitionists, pacifists, and army chaplains, and his own struggles with self-righteousness and racism. Two subsequent novels, *Home* (2008) and *Lila* (2013) continue the Gilead saga. Lila sheds light on migrant laborers in the Midwest.

Robert James Waller. *The Bridges of Madison County*. New York: Warner Books, 1992

Walker's story follows the life of photographer Robert Kincaid who comes to Madison County to document covered bridges. He meets a farm wife, and they fall in love. The book depicts the power of the land and the challenges of rural life.

Jesmyn Ward. *Salvage the Bones*. 2010

In the rural Gulf Coast community of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, pregnant fifteen-year-old Esch and her three brothers prepare for a major hurricane.

Karen Wilson. *The River with No Bridge*. Five Star Publishing, 2017.

The story of a woman who travels through the rural Midwest.

Daniel Woodrell. *Winter's Bone*. 2006. New York: Back Bay Books, 2010.

Set in the harsh poverty of the Ozarks, this novel explores the power of family to persist at all costs. After the father skips out on charges of running a crystal meth lab, a daughter works to keep the family home and protect her family.

Rural Memoir

Authors from rural America convey their personal stories to readers, often emphasizing childhood memories, including the good, the bad, and the ugly of country life. Local presses, and state historical society and state university presses continue to publish rural memoir. Host states can consult state press catalogs to identify useful titles for their reading lists.

Truman Capote. *In Cold Blood*. 1966. Vintage, 1994.

The author tells the story of the Herbert Clutter family, savagely murdered in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. This book reads like a classic southern gothic story set in the midwest.

Robert Drake. *For the Record: A Robert Drake Reader*. Mercer University Press, 2001.

Drake, who died in 2001, wrote short stories about growing up western Tennessee. These stories feature residents of small-town Woodville, and their routines during the 1930s and 1940s. Although the lifestyle has largely vanished, it reflects the tensions and struggles of the contemporary South.

Homer Hickam. *October Sky*. Dell, 1999.

In 1957, Homer Hickam lived in the small town of Coalwood, West Virginia, a community that faced an uncertain future. The son of the mine's superintendent, Hickam discovered how to turn scrap metal into rockets but also how to sustain hope in this mining town.

Zora Neale Hurston. *Dust Tracks on the Road*. 1942. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

Hurston portrays her own story here, from childhood poverty in the rural South to her work as a leading writer in the Harlem Renaissance. Her stories of her childhood and teenage years are among the most moving.

Terry Kay. *The Year the Lights Came On*. 1976. University of Georgia Press, 1989.

Kay's memoirs about the arrival of rural electrification in northeast Georgia after World War II is a classic coming-of-age story. Electricity changes lives forever; some things are gained and others are lost.

Carson McCullers. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. 1940. Mariner Books, 2000.

In a mill town in the deep South, people are drawn towards a deaf-mute who moves into their community. Carson depicts the characters who are drawn to him and the way he changes their lives.

Matthew Neill Null. *Allegheny Front*. Sarabande Books, 2016.

Null's book describes his home state of West Virginia, sharing stories about the people and animals in this disappearing rural world.

Clifton Taulbert. *Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored*. 1991. Penguin Books, 1995.

The author shares childhood stories of growing up in a small Mississippi Delta town in the 1950s, exploring both the challenges of survival but the ways in which people worked together to persist under Jim Crow. His stories illustrate how segregation created a sense of community lost after integration.

Jeannette Walls. *Glass Castle: A Memoir*. New York: Scribner, 2005.

Walls recounts life on the edge in rural America.

Another novel, ***Half-Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel*** (2009), is about Walls' grandmother, Lily Casey Smith, who grew up in Texas and operated a ranch in Arizona.