

Reading Across Cultures: A sampling of notable novels and short story collections that range across cultures.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Set in pre- and post-colonial Nigeria, this classic novel explores the theme of cross-cultural misunderstanding through the life of warrior and clan leader Okonkwo, who unsuccessfully tries to guide his people through a time of changing mores.

Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Ultima*. Set in 1940s New Mexico, Anaya's autobiographical coming-of-age story concerns the relationship between a Chicano child named Antonio, and the folk healer Ultima, who provides guidance to Antonio when he loses confidence in the teachings of his parents and the Catholic Church.

Bajwa, Rupa. *The Sari Shop*. In this dramatic depiction of the class gap in modern urban India, Bajwa limns the tale of an aspirational sari merchant whose dreams of self-improvement founder when he confronts the ruthless injustice with which social boundaries are enforced.

Batuman, Elif. *The Idiot*. A coming-of-age story about a high school overachiever of Turkish descent who plunges into the multicultural, multilingual, and multitalented world of the Harvard College Class of 1999.

Chang, Jade. *The Wangs vs. the World*. A hilarious debut novel about a wealthy but fractured Chinese immigrant family that once had it all and then lost almost every cent—and about the healing road trip they take across America that binds them back together.

Freudenberger, Nell. *The Newlyweds*. Romance is always fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding; introducing a cross-cultural element to a relationship increases the chances for miscommunication algorithmically. In this 21st-century novel of manners, electrical engineer George Stillman shops for an attractive bride on AsianEuro.com. However, his future wife, Amina Mazid, is far more complex a woman who carries far more familial baggage than he is prepared to deal with.

García Márquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A foundational work of magical realism, this novel recounts the rise and fall of the mythical town of Macondo through generations of the Buendía family. Like *Forrest Gump*, the Buendías find themselves witnesses to key moments in Colombian history. A humorous and inventive treatment of the nature of time and timelessness.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. A collection of stories about Indian and Pakistani immigrants living in the U.S.A. In this, her first published work, Lahiri adumbrates themes later developed in her bestselling novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*: the effects of cultural expectations on our most intimate relationships and the hazards of implicit bias.

Mbue, Mbolo. *Behold the Dreamers*. Set against the backdrop of the American financial crisis of 2008, Mbue's debut novel tells the story of a Cameroonian immigrant family striving to make a new life in Harlem.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. Ostensibly a backward glance at the lives and misadventures of two World War II veterans, Englishman Archie Jones and Bengali Samad Iqbal, Smith's breakout novel grapples with themes of immigration, exile, and the often bitter legacy of British colonialism.

RL 3/17