

## The Oxford Book of American Short Stories

From Oxford University Press, USA

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**The Oxford Book of American Short Stories** From Oxford University Press, USA

"How ironic," Joyce Carol Oates writes in her introduction to this marvelous collection, "that in our age of rapid mass-production and the easy proliferation of consumer products, the richness and diversity of the American literary imagination should be so misrepresented in most anthologies." Why, she asks, when writers such as Samuel Clemens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Saul Bellow, and John Updike have among them written hundreds of short stories, do anthologists settle on the same two or three titles by each author again and again? "Isn't the implicit promise of an anthology that it will, or aspires to, present something different, unexpected?"

In *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, Joyce Carol Oates offers a sweeping survey of American short fiction, in a collection of fifty-six tales that combines classic works with many "different, unexpected" gems, and that invites readers to explore a wealth of important pieces by women and minority writers. Some selections simply can't be improved on, Oates admits, and she happily includes such time-honored works as Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," and Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." But alongside these classics, Oates introduces such little-known stories as Mark Twain's "Cannibalism in the Cars," a story that reveals a darker side to his humor ("That morning we had Morgan of Alabama for breakfast. He was one of the finest men I ever sat down to...a perfect gentleman, and singularly juicy"). From Melville come the juxtaposed tales "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," of which Oates says, "Only Melville could have fashioned out of 'real' events...such harrowing and dreamlike allegorical fiction." From Flannery O'Connor we find "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," and from John Cheever, "The Death of Justina," one of Cheever's own favorites, though rarely anthologized. The reader will also delight in the range of authors found here, from Charles W. Chesnutt, Jean Toomer, and Sarah Orne Jewett, to William Carlos Williams, Kate Chopin, and Zora Neale Hurston. Contemporary artists abound, including Bharati Mukherjee and Amy Tan, Alice Adams and David Leavitt, Bobbie Ann Mason and Tim O'Brien, Louise Erdrich and John Edgar Wideman. Oates provides fascinating introductions to each writer, blending biographical information with her own trenchant observations about their work, plus a long introductory essay, in which she offers the fruit of years of reflection on a genre in which she herself is a master.

This then is a book of surprises, a fascinating portrait of American short fiction,

as filtered through the sensibility of a major modern writer.

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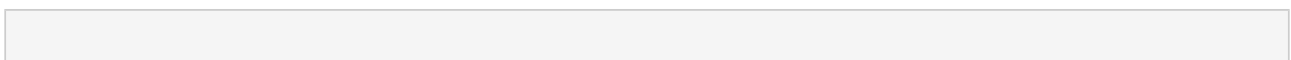
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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

In these lean times, it is difficult to imagine many libraries champing at the bit to purchase yet another anthology of American short stories. But institutions seeking to expand the diversity of their holdings in this area may find this collection the perfect choice. "Familiar names, unfamiliar titles" is the *raison d'être* for this new volume. Along with some old chestnuts such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," editor Oates presents many fresh selections such as Edith Wharton's "The Journey" and John Cheever's "The Death of Justina." She includes lesser-known minority and women writers such as Jean Toomer and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman alongside stories by newcomers Amy Tan, Louise Erdrich, and David Leavitt. Each author is given a brief biographical introduction. Recommended for serious literary collections.

- *Rita Ciresi, Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park*

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Review

"Provides a history of not only the evolution of the short story, but also of American culture....The collection is more than a survey of writing styles. It is a celebration of the diversity of American culture."--Denver Post

"Joyce Carol Oates has cast her net further and deeper, drawing from American literature's impressive past and substantial cultural wealth....Exceptional."--Booklist

"Readers who take an encompassing view of American literature and culture will love this book, which brilliantly captures the range and heft of the remarkable American contribution to the short story genre. With penetrating introductions by Joyce Carol Oates to each writer, this is an anthology of the finest kind, a collection of stories dazzling in variety but unified by an editor of singular intelligence and vision."--Arnold Rampersad, Princeton University

"Oates' collection of stories is the finest anthology I've ever read in 33 years of teaching."--Robert L. Kelly, Alpena Senior High School

"I appreciate the comprehensive selection of authors, representing a variety of gender, ethnic and class perspectives, as well as complete chronological coverage."--Joel R. Brouwer, Michigan State University

"Joyce Carol Oates, a master fabulist who is also one of our finest critics, has given us a treasury that represents the astonishing range of the American short story. But instead of another showcase of 'greatest hits,' Oates ventures further afield, to uncover a series of neglected but refulgent gems. This is a collection with guts--and brains. Best of all, it's a collection that unfolds, as its editor promises, the larger story of American writing, in all its hues and timbres."--Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University

"Whether for the classroom or the bedtable, The Oxford Book of American Short Stories is indispensable, the best fiction selected and introduced by one of America's finest writers. It's a treasure!"--Cathy N. Davidson, Duke University

"This is a splendid volume of short stories which reflect the wealth of brilliance built up over the years by a wide ranging field of American writers. Oates has done an outstanding job in making this selection....She does not always go for the well known stories by delights us with some that have remained somewhat

obscure."--Yorkshire Gazette and Herald

"Ambitious and innovative....Only a novelist would ever think up such a project. Only a very good one could pull it off....Eclectic."--Observer (London)

"To a short story lover it is hard to think of a book that could give more pleasure."--Scotland on Sunday

About the Author

**Joyce Carol Oates** is one of America's preeminent writers. Since 1978, she has been on the faculty of Princeton University and is a co-editor of *The Ontario Review*.

## Users Review

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**James Miguel:**

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