

Christian's Top 20 Recommended Reading Books for the SAT

A note on difficulty ratings: These personally-subjective ratings are on a scale of 1-10, where 1 would be very easy to read, and 10 is very difficult. These ratings are simply my opinion. Don't be scared of the harder books – in fact, those are some of the best reads on this list!

The books are ordered by easy/medium/difficult, but other than that, they are not in any particular order. I hope you find these categories and summaries helpful in making your decisions!

*They are also excellent sources of both **vocabulary** and **SAT essay evidence**!*

If you haven't already considered purchasing an Amazon Kindle e-reader for yourself or your student, I highly recommend it. These e-readers are ultra-portable, inexpensive, and allow you to instantly download thousands of books wirelessly. Plus, the fancy new technology may get stubborn students more interested in reading for pleasure!

The [Amazon Kindle](#) is a black-and-white budget e-reader. The [Kindle Fire](#) is a premium color e-reader with advanced features. These two products are the #2 and #1 best-selling products on ALL of Amazon.com, which says a lot about how amazing they are. Highly, highly recommended purchases!

All of the blue-underlined hyperlinks in this list can be clicked on to go directly to Amazon.com where you can purchase either an electronic Kindle copy or a hard copy. I hope this is convenient and helpful!

Easier books: Whether the vocabulary is easier than most other books on this list, or they are shorter, or simply very fun and straightforward reads, these are good choices for students who don't spend much time reading, or who feel like they have weak vocabularies.

[The Giver, by Lois Lowry](#)

Difficulty: 3/10

In this tightly-controlled society, everyone seems to be happy and well-fed. Jobs are assigned according to individual skills. But Jonas, an eleven-year-old boy, gets a job unlike anybody else's, and begins to discover the dark secrets of his own seemingly-ideal world.

[Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, by J.K. Rowling](#)

Difficulty: 5/10

If you haven't heard of Harry Potter, you've been living under a rock for the past decade! Get the book that started it all – a classic modern masterpiece of young-adult fantasy. At the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a vast epic adventure begins to unfold in the first book of this seven-book series.

[*Twilight*, by Stephanie Meyer](#)

Difficulty: 5/10

A young girl with an uneventful life falls in love with... a VAMPIRE! And things get crazy from there. A suspenseful romance and adventure novel!

[*Watchmen*, by Alan Moore](#)

Difficulty: 5/10

The only graphic novel on this list. Don't call it a "comic book" – this is a masterpiece of grim storytelling, rich with themes and deep character development. In an alternate Cold-War era reality, a motley band of aging heroes struggle to stay relevant... and keep the world in one piece. An all-time favorite of mine.

Medium-level books: Many of these will be right in the "sweet spot" for students of various levels. Generally longer, denser, and more vocab-filled than the easy category, you'll find some serious classics among this selection of novels.

[*1984*, by George Orwell](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

The ultimate dystopian novel. What happens when the government has grown so powerful and massive that even your thoughts are under their control? A tale of rebellion, individualism, and forbidden love.

[*The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

A collection of stories about American soldiers in the Vietnam war, this hard-hitting and realistic book brings all the terror, violence, action, and dry humor of men caught in the crossfire.

[*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, by Ken Kesey](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

Is "craziness" the price of being truly free? A group of insane asylum inmates are shaken up by the arrival of a new arrival who's determined not to submit himself to the rigid control of the head nurse.

[*Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

What would happen if you were stranded on a desert island with the rest of your school? Would you all get along and peacefully await rescue... or would you panic and devolve into fear and violence? Follow a band of British schoolchildren as they try to maintain civility on an isolated rock in the middle of the ocean.

[*Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

A great partner book to *1984*, this book revisits the idea of the “Utopian” society that actually steals all freedom from the individual, and again examines the results of standing up to a repressive society.

[*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

A novel that sparkles with wit and quotable quotations, Wilde is at his best in this classic novel. Dorian Gray is an astonishingly handsome and gifted young man rising through the ranks of high society... but why does he never seem to age or grow less beautiful? And what is the price of such perfection?

[*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway](#)

Difficulty: 7/10

My favorite book of all time – a painful, beautiful, romantic war story. I don’t want to say too much, other than that this is an adventure for the ages, and in my opinion the greatest English-language novel ever written.

[*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain](#)

Difficulty: 7/10

On the surface, it’s the simple adventure story of two young boys as they hang out around the Mississippi River. Of course, it’s much more than that – a “Great American Novel,” and a deep look at the good and bad of an American society as it struggles with race issues in the late 1800s.

[*The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald](#)

Difficulty: 6/10

Can the American Dream of success and riches become a nightmare? What happens when you rise too far, too fast? Can old loves ever be rekindled? And just who is the “Great Gatsby?” Each time I read this book, it gets better and better.

Advanced Books: Some are long. Some are difficult. Some are long and difficult. But *all* of these books are extremely rewarding reads – even life-changing, in some cases. These are books you can be proud of reading at any age.

[*Crime and Punishment*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky](#)

Difficulty: 8/10

One of the most realistic psychological studies ever told... an investigation into the mind of a violent criminal with a good heart. I was paranoid for weeks after I read this novel; it's so well-written that I started to feel like *I* was the one with a dangerous secret!

[*The Fountainhead*, by Ayn Rand](#)

Difficulty: 7/10

Another of my personal favorite books, this one is a “love it or hate it” selection. Critics condemn Rand's inflexible philosophy, her clunky writing style, and her long-windedness. I fell in love with the larger-than-life heroes, the powerful message in support of individuality, and the epic adventure story of an architect who will blow up his own buildings to make a point. Keep an open mind.

[*Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen](#)

Difficulty: 8/10

This novel focuses on the life of a female protagonist as she grows up in early 19th-century England. The fascinating customs and dialogue weave a legendary romance story as Elizabeth Bennet tries to decide who she will marry – the charming and wealthy Mr. Bingley, or the rude and cold Mr. Darcy.

[*Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brönte](#)

Difficulty: 8/10

One of the earliest “feminist” novels, the strong female lead of this book struggles with issues of individuality and her place in her society while trying to find love and fulfillment. Fascinating for its in-depth study of Jane's inner dialogue and emotions.

[*Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare](#)

Difficulty: 9/10

A classic among classics, this is the tale of a young man's indecision and rage over the wrongful death of his father. Would you kill your uncle if a ghost commanded you to? One of the greatest and most memorable of Shakespeare's works.

[War and Peace, by Leo Tolstoy](#)

Difficulty: 10/10

War and Peace... even the name inspires awe and fear. Books don't really come any bigger than this one. The writing style is one of a kind, sweeping from individual characters as they love, fight, scheme, and die, and zooming out to panoramic birds-eye views of history and famous battles. It took me a whole summer to read this one, but I'm still proud of it.

[Les Misérables, by Victor Hugo](#)

Difficulty: 10/10

An epic on the same scale as *War and Peace*, it's another great novel that "has it all" – adventure, love, war, mystery, comedy... an incredible window into French culture and life in Paris, and part of the reason Victor Hugo is a national hero in France. I loved every moment of this book, even if it took me months and months to finish it.

Conclusion:

Pick three of the books that interest you the most, and order them today! Any one of them can help with your reading speed, comprehension, and vocabulary-building. Remember, a good goal to set is between 30 minutes to an hour of free reading each day.

Don't forget to read my URGENT REPORT on the SAT Critical Reading section, which was included in today's download, if you haven't read it already!

Affiliate Disclaimer: I just want to let you know that if you purchase any of the books on this list, I may receive a small commission at no cost to you. I promise that I absolutely would still recommend these books to you whether I earn money from your purchases or not! Have fun reading them!