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The classics. They're the bane of many a high schooler's existence. And yet, we all have one or two (or 20) classic books that we've been meaning to read... eventually. But when you walk into the bookstore, you're instantly distracted by all those shiny new books, and it seems like up and coming YA authors probably need your money a lot more than Charles Dickens does right now. Lucky for you, though, there's this secret, hidden realm known as the "public domain," where you can read all the classics books your literary heart desires. Right now. For free. Websites like Project Gutenberg have collected tens of thousands of public domain books for your reading pleasure. You can download e-books for your phone or kindle, or just read them right there in your browser. So if you're looking for a free way to read more contemporary works, allow me to direct you to your friendly local library. But if you're looking to read up on the classics, right now, from the comfort of your own phone, laptop, or sci-fi ocular implant, then here are a whole slew of incredible books that can be found and legally read for free in the wilds of the web.1Pride and Prejudice' by Jane AustenPride and Prejudice is the rom-com to end all rom-coms. Just try not to fall for the awkward, rich, emotionally repressed Mr. Darcy as he goes about unintentionally ruining Lizzie's life (and finally, awkwardly, sweeping her off her feet).2The Count of Monte Cristo' by Alexandre DumasThe ultimate revenge tale still holds up over 170 years later. In Alexandre Dumas' classic novel, a man is imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, and decides to deal with it by becoming fabulously wealthy and then utterly destroying the men who imprisoned him.3Dracula' by Bram StokerEvery sexy vampire in modern media owes a huge debt to the original Count himself. Bram Stoker's Dracula is rightfully known as one of the greatest horror stories of all time, complete with bloodsucking, shape-shifting, and one very charismatic Transylvanian.4Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' by Lewis CarrollThe trippiest of classic children's books is still a great read for adults. Join little Alice as she falls down a rabbit hole and deals with all kinds of weird nonsense while continually eating unidentified objects and changing size all over the place.5Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' by Arthur Conan DoyleSherlock Holmes is everyone's favorite irritating detective, along with his long-suffering sidekick, Dr. John Watson. Read all about their adventures in this collection of mysteries, and put your own deductive powers to the test.6Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus' by Mary Wollstonecraft ShelleyYou probably know Frankenstein's monster as that big flat-top fellow with the neck bolts. But if you read Mary Shelley's original novel, you just might discover that the real Frankenstein's monster is a sensitive giant baby-man who speaks French and just wants to be loved.7Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself' by Harriet A. JacobsIncidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is the collected memoirs of Harriet Jacobs, who survived slavery in North Carolina and seven years of hiding in a tiny, coffin-like room. She eventually escaped to reunite with her children in the North, and wrote this beautifully nuanced account of her life and her perilous road to freedom.8The Complete Works of William Shakespeare' by William ShakespeareLook, you don't really have to read all of Shakespeare. But you do have the option to, with this free edition of The Complete Works. Here you'll find every last Shakespeare play, from the classic tragedies to the forgotten comedies to the very, very long histories.9Jane Eyre: An Autobiography' by Charlotte BrontëJane Eyre is a great book to read if you're considering getting married to your boss, but you haven't yet checked his attic for any lurking ex-wives. It's a classic coming of age tale, a Gothic romance, and a surprisingly modern take on being a young, independent woman.10The Picture of Dorian Gray' by Oscar WildeThe Picture of Dorian Gray teaches us all a valuable lesson: 'hot guys are evil and not to be trusted.' Sure, there's a little more to it than that, but you'll just have to read it for yourself and find out.11Anne of Green Gables' by L. M. MontgomeryOne of the top two spunky redheaded orphans named Anne, Anne of Green Gables is that rare, delightful character who never seems dated. She's always there to cheer you up with her various scraps and fantasies and her bucolic Canadian county life.12Ulysses' by James JoyceUlysses is famous for being long and confusing, but now you can test that reputation for yourself. Sure, Joyce's writing style is a little unconventional, but if you can get past the forty page run-on sentences, you might find that Ulysses is one of the strangest, funniest, most beautifully human books out there.13Little Women' by Louisa May AlcottFour sisters grow up together in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, dealing with minor trials and devastating tragedies as they go. It's a coming-of-age story that puts sisterhood front and center, in all its joy and frustration.14Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave' by Frederick Douglass15Les Misérables' by Victor HugoVictor Hugo revolutionized the idea of writing fiction for social change with his stunning (and very long) novel, Les Misérables. Hugo tells the stories of various French citizens, all revolving around Jean Valjean, a man who was imprisoned for nineteen years for stealing a loaf of bread.16Great Expectations' by Charles DickensOne of Dickens' best loved works of fiction, Great Expectations has plenty of Dickensian orphans, reversals of fortune, poverty, crime, and one terrifying spinster in a rotting wedding dress.17Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea' by Jules VerneLet's clear this up once and for all: the twenty thousand leagues refer to distance traveled while under water, not depth. They are not twenty thousand leagues deep. Also it's one of the greatest hard sci-fi novels ever written.18Poems by Emily Dickinson' by Emily DickinsonJoin your new best friend Emily Dickinson for a reclusive journey out into nature, where you might brush up against all manner of flowers and also probably Death itself.19The Souls of Black Folk' by W. E. B. Du BoisIf you've heard the phrase "double consciousness" tossed around recently, that's a reference to The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois. One of the seminal works in the history of sociology, this book collects some of the foundational essays about race in America, still all too relevant today.20The Works of Edgar Allan Poe — Volume 1 by Edgar Allan Poe' by Edgar Allan PoeThe Works of Edgar Allan Poe can be found online in several disturbing volumes, complete with all of his creepy poetry, his murderous tales, and everything in between.21The Awakening, and Selected Short Stories' by Kate ChopinThe Awakening is often credited as one of the first modern feminist novels. Chopin's heroine gradually "awakens" to the fact that she, and most women, are systemically oppressed by society. So Edna decides to take her life into her own hands, regardless of what her husband or anybody else wants for her. If you've decided to read more, you're not alone. According to Statista in 2018, 23% of respondents resolved to read more in the new year. Yet reading surged in the early days of the pandemic, with 41% of respondents reporting reading more books.One of the challenges with books is making time to read them all. In their classic guide How to Read a Book, Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren propose a solution: Don't try to read them all, because most of them aren't worth it. They write, "Every book should be read no more slowly than it deserves, and no more quickly than you can read it with satisfaction and comprehension."You can get the best ideas from most books simply by skimming them. Skimming also prepares you to learn more when you actually read the book. Howard Yale McClusky published an experiment in the Journal of Educational Psychology that concluded that preliminary skimming could improve the subsequent reading process for students. There are two levels to Adler and Van Doren's method of skimming. One involves sifting through the table of contents, the index, and conclusions of each chapter and making note of what you already know or whether this book contains information you want to learn.The second is known as superficial reading, which is basically reading through a book really fast, just to get a surface-level understanding of it. You may know superficial reading as "speed reading," a term popularized in the 1950s by Evelyn Wood and her husband. It has since become a key part of self-help, with an author or startup reviving interest in it every few years or so.Even though speed reading is a useful technique, our obsession with reading faster and learning more is misplaced. Reading two books doesn't make a person twice as learned as a person who reads one book twice (or even once, carefully). Here's how you can really use skimming to your advantage.Read 10% of a nonfiction book, and apply one lesson from itThere's a lot of value in simply getting one idea from a book. Joss Whedon did not finish Getting Things Done, but he got the idea of taking "next actions" from it.Similarly, Curtis Jackson writes in Hustle Harder, Hustle Smarter, after reading The 48 Laws of Power, all he can remember is, "As the student, never outshine the master." He muses, "There were 47 other laws in that book, but that's the one that stayed lodged in my brain. And because it's never left me, I've been able to apply it so many times over the years. I've literally made millions by remembering to follow that principle."Don't feel bad for skimming instead of reading. The author would likely appreciate that you've at least skimmed their book, rather than not read it at all. And if the book was any good, it's likely that when you skim the book you'll realize how important it is you read the whole thing. I generally like to read 50 pages, but they don't have to be the first 50.Skim uninteresting booksI read for a lot of reasons, pleasure being the least of them," author and master choreographer Twyla Tharp writes in The Creative Habit. Tharp is in search of inspiration or insights that she can apply to her work. If you can relate to Tharp—and need to read documents for your work, or to improve your skills—then the technique of skimming will be incredibly useful. That doesn't mean you shouldn't read for fun; it's worth noting that reading for pleasure has its own health benefits as well.Francis Bacon said, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few are to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."I could relate to Bacon's comparison of reading on food. Whenever I picked up a book, I felt the need to finish it, an impulse similar to finishing all the food on my plate. Read more slowlyWhen you do find a book you like, don't try to rush through it to the end. Slow down and take notes. Reread certain parts you don't understand. Connect the book's ideas with other ideas or experiences you have.Skimming, or speed reading, is simply a tool to support the overall reading experience, but it is not an alternative to reading. It helps you choose the right thing to read. Learning is not about how many books you read, or even how fast you read. It's about what you get from each of those books, and deliberately choosing which books to spend your hours, days, weeks, months, and years with.Herbert Lur is the author of There Is No Right Way to Do This, a book that supports people with their creative work. He is also the editorial director at Wonder Shuttle, an editorial studio that makes publications for software companies. There are a number of different online sites that allow someone to read the book "Speak." The book "Speak" by Laurie Halse Anderson describes a traumatic event at the end of the summer and its effects on the freshman year of high school for a girl named Melinda. The full text of the book is available on archive.org. It is also available on various other websites; for example, it is available in PDF format on the South Dade Senior High website, sdsdhs.net. In addition, as of 2014, the site onreadz.net offers the full text in an e-book format for clear viewing. Disney Story Central is an online, interactive library of more than 500 Disney books and stories covering classics from "Cinderella" and "Pinocchio" to new favorites like "Finding Nemo" and "High School Musical." Kids can read their favorite Disney books, earn points and rewards, and even add their creative touch to the books. Disney Story Central is designed to be used primarily on Apple iOS devices with the Disney Story Central app; however, you may also access your books through the website. Wide selection of reading levels and Disney characters Option to have books read out loud Separate reward system/bookshelf for each child New and exclusive content being added all the time Token purchase system allows for access to individual books rather than getting a subscription. Subscription price may be prohibitive for some families Family subscription limited to three kids You first need to create an account to use on Disney Story Central. If you already have an account on Disney.com, you can link it to your Disney Story Central account. Add each of your children by either connecting to their pre-existing Disney accounts or creating new ones. If you're ready to subscribe, you can do so at this point, or you can take advantage of the available free trial. The registration system can be a bit cumbersome because you have to enter a unique username and password for each of your kids in addition to your own registration. It's not complicated, but if you do sign up for a subscription, keep in mind that you may need to add each child separately. I found this to be a bit confusing. Parents should also know that you'll be recognized in the system by your "D-Name" (a nickname you choose) as opposed to your username or real name. Once you choose a D-Name, it stays with you throughout the Disney system. This is a lesson I learned the hard way while playing around with Pixie Hollow. Now all of my notes to my kids through Disney Digital Books will be signed "Liri, Fernglimmer." I'd prefer "Mom," but it could be worse. From your parental account, you can send canned motivational messages to your kids and suggest books that they may enjoy. I would like to be able to set the reading level and turn quizzes on and off from my parent account, but you need to be logged into the child's account to set those options. The selection of titles available on Disney Story Central is incredible. Additional titles are released on a regular basis, including some exclusive content, so your kids aren't going to be bored anytime soon. Kids can browse for books using a scrolling carousel or by searching. Books can be filtered for those that are appropriate for their reading level. The reading level options range from basic picture books and early readers to minimally illustrated chapter books. There are three main ways to enjoy the books: Standard: These are perfect for reading together or for reading independently. Optional quiz questions throughout test and reinforce comprehension. Clicking on a word with the "magic pen" reads the word out loud and a dictionary feature can provide word definitions. Look and Listen: Look and Listen titles are geared towards younger readers. These books are read out loud as the words are highlighted on the screen to encourage basic literacy skills. Story Builder: This is where kids can bring their own creativity to the site. They choose from a small selection of popular Disney titles, such as "Wall-E," "Cinderella" and "Finding Nemo." Each book has a story that is missing some of the words and pictures. Kids add their favorite story-related pictures and fill in the missing words (noun, adjective or verb) from a small list. I think it would be more fun to do it Mad Libs style (hint! hint!) but it's still cool anyway. Completed stories can be saved or printed and made into a book. Disney Story Central includes fun features that go above and beyond the basic educational. For example, each child has a virtual room called "My Space." This area can be customized with a background and is the holding spot for rewards, favorite books and messages from other users (these are canned; there is no open communication on the site). And, as if reading Disney books weren't fun enough, Disney Story Central includes built-in encouragement: Points for correctly answering quiz questions, completing books and other tasks A fireworks show upon finishing a book Badges and surprises as point levels increase Encouraging messages from the parent account With all of the bells and whistles on Disney Story Central, it shouldn't be surprising that there is some room for improvement. They are mainly smaller annoyances, but here are some areas that my family found frustrating while navigating the site: The animated book carousel on the website for browsing titles is fun but tedious when you already know what you want. We'd love a drop down menu for quick access. You can only go through a book page by page (or jump to the end). We'd like to be able to go to a specific page, especially in the anthologies. The quiz feature defaults to "on" for each book, even when you turn it off. It would be great to be able to set it off for the session (or overall), especially for early readers. The parent account doesn't acknowledge the subscription status. Parents can't read books without logging into their kids' accounts. I've been assured that this will change, so it may no longer be the case when you try it. There are two ways to enjoy Disney Story Central. The first is through a monthly subscription at \$9.95, or you can purchase an annual subscription is \$79.95. The subscription includes a parent account and accounts for up to three children in the same household, and grants unlimited access to hundreds of Disney books. The second way is to purchase Disney Story Central Tokens. You can spend these to purchase new titles individually. A free trial is available that provides access to eight pre-selected books. Gift subscriptions are available. They're a nice option for family and friends who live out of town or who aren't quite sure what your kids would enjoy. Disney Story Central is designed to impress. If the sheer number of books doesn't entice you, the beautiful illustrations will. I love the idea of having a library of books to take with you wherever you have Internet access. The educational features like the quizzes, dictionary, and ability to read troublesome words out loud will bring an added appeal for parents who want to encourage their kids to understand what they're reading. Yes, there is room for improvement, but overall, Disney Story Central is fun and sure to be a big hit among families who have fallen in love with generations of their classic tales. Visit Disney Story Central

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