

Three Authors Share Who's on Their Bookshelves

We asked three world-renowned female authors — Alka Joshi, Dina Nayeri and Leïla Slimani — to share some of their personal favorite writers. Their diverse list includes authors from China, India, Iran, Morocco, Korea and more.

At Room to Read, we place immense value on the power of books to act as windows that expand the diversity of our literary palates and provide greater insight into perspectives and experiences unlike our own. Books create a more understanding, peaceful, just and equal world today and for future generations. Check out these author recommendations below and continue to gain knowledge and awareness of our world through the written word.

Alka Joshi

Alka Joshi was born in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India and moved to the United States at the age of nine. She has a B.A. from Stanford University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from California College of the Arts. Joshi recently entered the fictional writing world after running her own advertising and PR agency for 30 years. She published her first novel "The Henna Artist" in March 2020 and second novel "The Secret Keeper of Jaipur" in June 2021 as part of The Jaipur Trilogy. Joshi is currently writing the third book of the trilogy and a screen adaptation of "The Henna Artist" is underway.

Alka Joshi recommends you read work by...

Ha Jin

Ha Jin is the pen name of Chinese American poet and novelist Xuefei Jin. Born in Liaoning, China, Jin earned a B.A. in English studies from Heilongjiang University and a M.A. in Anglo-American literature at Shandong University. Jin emigrated to the United States to obtain his Ph.D. at Brandeis University and currently teaches at Boston University. Jin started publishing work in the 1990s, and continues to publish novels, with his most recent novel "A Song Everlasting" in 2021. Start with reading "Waiting."

Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry is an Indian Canadian writer born in Bombay, India to a Parsi family. Mistry's first three published novels were shortlisted for the Booker Prize and are all set in India and explore themes of family life, poverty, discrimination and societal influence. Mistry attended the University of Toronto and started publishing collections of short stories and novels three years after graduating from university. Start with reading "A Fine Balance."

Dina Nayeri

Dina Nayeri is an Iranian American author whose work has been published in 20-plus countries, including two novels, numerous essays and a book of creative nonfiction called "The Ungrateful Refugee" that won the Geschwister Scholl Preis. Nayeri is a graduate of Princeton, Harvard and the Iowa Writers Workshop. In autumn 2021, she was a Fellow at the American Library in Paris. She is currently working on plays, screenplays and nonfiction books in addition to recently joining the permanent faculty at the University of St. Andrews.

Dina Nayeri recommends that you read work by...

Bahram Beyzai

Bahram Beyzai is an Iranian playwright, theatre director and screenwriter. Beyzai comes from a family of notable poets, yet he chose to pursue his own path and began playwriting in the 1960s, becoming one of the founders of the Iranian Writer's Guild. In 1970, Beyzai began his film career by directing the short film "Amu Sibilou," and continued filmmaking for the decades to come. His cinematic style is known for exploring themes of "crisis of identity" and subverting the Western narrative. Start with reading "Death of Yazdgerd."

Forugh Farrokhzad

Forugh Farrokhzad was an Iranian modernist poet and film director born in Tehran in 1935. Farrokhzad's publications varied from former Iranian poetic traditions, which gave her the reputation of being a "rebel poet," particularly in her assertion of femininity using a feminine perspective at a time when literature and the arts in Iran were dominated by men. Start with reading "Sin: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad."

Matthew Salesses

Matthew Salesses is a Korean American fiction writer and essayist who earned a Ph.D. in literature and creative writing from the University of Houston and an M.F.A. in fiction from Emerson College. In 2015 Buzzfeed named Salesses one of 32 Essential Asian American Writers, and his essays have been published in "Best American Essays 2020," NPR "Code Switch" and The New York Times "Motherlode" among others. Much of his work reveals realities of Korean American life. Salesses currently works as an assistant professor of creative writing in the M.F.A./Ph.D. program at Oklahoma State University. Start by reading "The Hundred-Year Flood."

Leïla Slimani

The French Moroccan writer and journalist was born in 1981 in Rabat. Her first novel "Adèle" was published in 2019 followed by her world bestseller "The Perfect Nanny," which won the prestigious Prix Goncourt in France in 2016 and the Début Book of the Year award in the UK in 2019. The first volume of her trilogy, "The Country of Others," received the Grand Prix de l'Héroïne Madame Figaro. Its sequel, "Regardez-Nous Danser," came out in France earlier this year. Leila is also the author of several works of nonfiction, which tackle topics of sexuality in Morocco and elsewhere.

Leïla Slimani recommends that you read work by...

Vasily Grossman

Vasily Grossman was a Soviet writer and journalist who was born to a Jewish family in Ukraine. After studying to be a chemical engineer at Moscow State University, Grossman switched careers and began writing full-time and was accepted into the Union of Writers. During World War II, Grossman wrote first-hand accounts of the battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk and Berlin; his eyewitness reports of a Nazi extermination camp, following the discovery of Treblinka, were among the earliest accounts of a Nazi death camp by a reporter. Start by reading "Life and Fate."

Abdellah Taïa

Abdellah Taïa is a Moroccan writer and filmmaker born in Rabat who first learned about the diversity of literature through his father's job at a library. Since pursuing writing as a career, Taïa has published eight novels, many autobiographical as he shares his personal experience as the first openly gay Arab writer and only openly homosexual Moroccan writer and filmmaker. Taïa's work provides deep insight into social experiences growing up in a homophobic society, and his publications and career act as sources of continued inspiration for many around the world. Start by reading "Mon Maroc."

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