

A FREE GUIDE FROM KEYSTONE DAILY

25 Books for a Conservative Household

A reading list by age, from the first picture book to the Federalist Papers

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A shelf that holds a family together

Twenty-five books, from the first picture book to the Federalist Papers, chosen for a household that wants its kids to grow up grateful, capable and free.

The list runs by age, but none of it is only for children. The founding documents are short enough to read aloud at the table, and the picture books are the ones grandparents still ask for. Every title here is in print or in the public domain, and most are on the shelf at your public library.

Three rules we used: the book had to be good on its own terms, not just agreeable; it had to be one a parent could hand over without a lecture; and it had to earn a second reading.

25	7	1	0
Books, by age, from 3 to adult	Public domain or free online	Read-aloud habit that outlasts all of them	Textbooks

AGES 3 TO 7

Picture books and first read-alouds

#	Title and author	Why it is on the list
1	**The Bible** KJV or ESV	The first book on the list and the last one a family stops reading. A children's story Bible for the youngest, the full text as soon as they can follow it.
2	**Make Way for Ducklings** Robert McCloskey	Boston, a policeman who stops traffic, and a mother who gets her brood home. Order, courtesy and a city that works.
3	**The Little House** Virginia Lee Burton	A house watches the city grow around it. The gentlest book ever written about progress and what it costs.
4	**The Tale of Peter Rabbit** Beatrix Potter	Disobedience has consequences, and there is still supper. A moral tale children ask for again.
5	**Little Bear** Else Holmelund Minarik, pictures by Maurice Sendak	A first chapter book about a mother who is always there. Simple sentences, deep security.

AGES 8 TO 12

Chapter books that build character

#	Title and author	Why it is on the list
6	**Little House in the Big Woods** Laura Ingalls Wilder	Self-reliance, family work and a Christmas with one stick of candy. Start here and read the whole series.
7	**The Chronicles of Narnia** C.S. Lewis	Seven books about courage, betrayal and forgiveness. Read in publication order, starting with The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.
8	**Johnny Tremain** Esther Forbes	A Boston apprentice on the eve of the Revolution. The best introduction to why 1776 happened.
9	**Little Britches** Ralph Moody	A boy learns ranching, honesty and the value of a man's word from his father in Colorado. Fathers should read it first.
10	**Where the Red Fern Grows** Wilson Rawls	A boy, two hounds and the Ozarks. Earning what you want, and losing what you love.
11	**The Hobbit** J.R.R. Tolkien	An ordinary fellow leaves his comfortable home and finds he has courage. The doorway to Middle-earth.
12	**Carry On, Mr. Bowditch** Jean Lee Latham	A real New England boy teaches himself navigation and writes the book sailors still use. Self-education as adventure.

TEENS

Books that answer the questions they are starting to ask

#	Title and author	Why it is on the list
13	**Animal Farm** George Orwell	Every revolution's promise and every tyrant's method, in a barnyard. Ninety pages that inoculate a reader for life.
14	**To Kill a Mockingbird** Harper Lee	A father who does the right thing when the town will not, and a daughter who watches. Conscience over crowd.
15	**The Screwtape Letters** C.S. Lewis	A senior devil coaches a junior one on how to ruin a soul. Teenagers recognize every trick.
16	**Up from Slavery** Booker T. Washington	Born enslaved, founded Tuskegee. The most American argument for work, thrift and dignity ever written. Public domain.
17	**The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin** Benjamin Franklin	The original self-improvement book, by a man who practiced it. Public domain.
18	**Shane** Jack Schaefer	A stranger, a homestead, and the difference between strength and violence. A Western that is really about fatherhood.

#	Title and author	Why it is on the list
19	**The Old Man and the Sea** Ernest Hemingway	Endurance without complaint. Short enough to finish in an evening and talk about for a week.

ADULTS

The shelf behind the kitchen table

#	Title and author	Why it is on the list
20	**The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights** pocket edition	Keep one in the glove box and one by the phone. Read the whole thing once a year on the Fourth. Public domain.
21	**The Federalist Papers** Hamilton, Madison and Jay	Why the Constitution is built the way it is, from the men who built it. Start with Nos. 10, 51 and 78. Public domain.
22	**Democracy in America** Alexis de Tocqueville	A Frenchman explains Americans to themselves in 1835, and gets most of it right for 2026. Public domain.
23	**The Road to Serfdom** F.A. Hayek	How central planning erodes freedom one reasonable step at a time. The Reader's Digest condensed version is a fine start.
24	**Economics in One Lesson** Henry Hazlitt	The seen and the unseen. The lesson every politician forgets and every household budget remembers.
25	**Mere Christianity** C.S. Lewis	Radio talks that became the clearest case for the faith in plain English. Lewis's third appearance on this list is no accident.
26	**Witness** Whittaker Chambers	A former Soviet spy's account of leaving communism for faith and country. Long, and worth every page.

THE HABIT

Twenty minutes a night

The list matters less than the routine. Families that read aloud keep reading aloud long after the kids can read alone.

- [ ] Pick one read-aloud for the whole family and one book each child reads alone
- [ ] Same time every night; twenty minutes beats an hour on Saturday
- [ ] Let the kids see you reading a real book, not a phone
- [ ] Library card for every child who can sign their name
- [ ] Public-domain titles: free at gutenberg.org and on most e-readers
- [ ] Read the Constitution aloud once a year; it takes about 30 minutes
- [ ] Keep a family book list on the fridge and tick them off

KEEP GOING

More of what holds it all together

Keystone Daily's Family desk covers schools, parents and culture every weekday, with a plain answer to what each change means at home.

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