

# WOMEN'S FICTION

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## CLASSIC WOMEN'S FICTION

**Women's fiction is, at its heart, contemporary fiction about women by women for women. These character-driven novels feature female characters with realistic struggles. These novels can depict a wide tonal range, spanning from breezily funny to achingly serious, but they almost always have positive, hopeful endings. They often feature a heavy overlap with the romance genre, though women's fiction tends to emphasize the protagonist's relationships in general. Therefore, character relationships with parents, children, siblings, and friends can be just as important as any potential romantic interest. Women's fiction novels also often chart the main character's personal growth. These classic women's fiction authors have been popular for decades.**

### **Danielle Steel:**

Steel dominated this genre in the 1980s and 1990s and remains one of the most popular authors in our system every year. Steel's work often focuses on wealthy women who are experiencing a crisis in their personal lives—a divorce, a cheating husband, or a scandal of some kind—but who rebuild themselves even stronger in the wake of these problems. Her work often has a strong romantic subplot, but the overall focus is more on the main character's personal journey and her family as they navigate these challenges.

If you like Danielle Steel:

- Jackie Collins
- Barbara Delinsky
- Terry McMillan
- Nora Roberts
- Emily Giffin
- Nicholas Sparks

## **Fern Michaels**

Michaels writes in a wide range of genres, including romance and romantic suspense, but she is best known for her women's fiction that focuses on women dealing with the aftermath of betrayal. Like Steel, Michaels' characters are often well-to-do, and though the books frequently feature romances, the novels also strongly prioritize the importance of family and friends as the main characters bounce back from their problems.

If you like Fern Michaels:

- Nora Roberts
- Danielle Steel
- Emilie Richards
- Jan Karon
- Luanne Rice
- Nicholas Sparks
- Sherryl Woods
- Debbie Macomber

## **Barbara Delinsky**

Delinsky also writes both romances and women's fiction and incorporates romantic subplots into her women's fiction. Unlike Steel and Michaels, Delinsky's main characters are ordinary women in small towns. Her leisurely paced books focus on strong female characters who are working through tragedies and other significant difficulties.

If you like Barbara Delinsky:

- Danielle Steel
- Belva Plain
- Kristin Hannah
- Luanne Rice
- Nora Roberts
- Fern Michaels
- Barbara Taylor Bradford
- Debbie Macomber
- Nicholas Sparks

## Amy Tan

Tan's lyrical, elegantly written novels overlap between women's fiction and literary fiction. She skyrocketed to initial fame in 1989 with her *The Joy Luck Club*, which remains her best-known work, but has written several novels that depict women in Chinese immigrant families navigating personal challenges. Her work is especially interested in multigenerational dynamics and mother-daughter relationships.

If you like Amy Tan:

- Zadie Smith
- Lisa See
- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
- Sandra Cisneros

## Terry McMillan

In the 1990s, McMillan's bestselling work inspired popular movies. Her bittersweet work, which focuses on affluent urban black women who feel unfulfilled in their lives, remains compelling. McMillan's witty, frequently funny novels emphasize the importance of friendship as the likable characters navigate personal and professional challenges.

If you like Terry McMillan:

- Kimberla Lawson Roby
- Danielle Steel
- Elizabeth Berg
- Anna Quindlen
- David Nicholls

## **Blast from the Past**

Joanna Trollope started her career as a historical romance author before pivoting to contemporary women's fiction in the 1990s. Her quaint, rural middle-class English settings can seem cozy on the surface, but her layered, complex characters grapple with rather significant personal challenges. These leisurely paced books are especially interested in family dynamics, and the strong women protagonists usually are navigating a family crisis.

Already like Trollope's work?

- Marcia Willett
- Barbara Kingsolver
- Rosamunde Pilcher
- Maeve Binchy

## **Branching out from Classic Women's Fiction**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Next-generation women's fiction (Jojo Moyes, Katherine Center, Liane Moriarty)
- Contemporary romance (Nora Roberts, Debbie Macomber, Sherryl Woods)
- Gentle reads (Adriana Trigiani, Jan Karon, Nicholas Sparks, Maeve Binchy, Rosamunde Pilcher)
- Literary fiction with a strong focus on female characters and their relationships (Barbara Kingsolver, Jacquelyn Mitchard, Anna Quindlen, Anita Shreve, Anne Tyler, Alice Hoffman)
- Historical fiction with a strong focus on women characters and their lives (Kristin Hannah, Marie Benedict, Lisa See)
- Historical fiction family sagas (Barbara Taylor Bradford, Belva Plain)
- Romantic suspense (Nora Roberts, Catherine Coulter, Jana DeLeon)
- Thrillers with a strong focus on female characters (Lisa Scottoline)
- Mysteries with a strong focus on women (Ann B. Ross, Anne George)

## **CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S FICTION**

**Christian women's fiction follows the same general principles of secular women's fiction, though through a religious lens. In these novels, women rely on their faith to sustain them through tough times.**

### **Karen Kingsbury**

Kingsbury writes in several Christian fiction subgenres but is best known for her contemporary Christian women's fiction. Her fast-paced work emphasizes both plot and character, and her female characters navigate difficult personal challenges with the help of their faith. Her books emphasize the character's personal growth, especially spiritually, and can focus on difficult subjects, such as abuse, through a Christian perspective. There is often a romantic subplot in her books, and family relationships are especially emphasized in the plots in general.

If you like Karen Kingsbury:

- Terri Blackstock
- Francine Rivers
- Lisa Tawn Bergren
- Beverly Lewis
- Lori Wick
- Tracie Peterson
- Dee Henderson
- Nicholas Sparks

## **Francine Rivers**

Rivers began her career as a secular romance novelist before shifting to writing Christian contemporary and historical fiction after her own conversion. Her complex, strong characters face realistic and often heavy challenges in these gritty books that can grapple with issues ranging from rape to incest. Rivers' leisurely paced work feature a strong evangelical Christian focus, and no matter how difficult the situations the characters face, their faith always guides them through.

If you like Francine Rivers:

- Karen Kingsbury
- Angela Elwell Hunt
- Beverly Lewis
- Tracie Peterson
- Dee Henderson
- Terri Blackstock

## **Melody Carlson**

Carlson writes Christian fiction for both teens and adults, with a mixture of contemporary and historical settings. In her books, compelling characters in interesting situations face realistic problems and are guided through these challenges with their Christian faith. The tone is ultimately hopeful and heartwarming, though characters can face intense problems on the journey to the end.

If you like Melody Carlson:

- Robin Jones Gunn
- Amy Clipston
- Leisha Kelly
- Karen Kingsbury
- Beverly Lewis
- Tracie Peterson

## **Blast from the Past**

Robin Jones Gunn initially gained fame writing relatable Christian fiction for teenagers in the 1990s before expanding into contemporary Christian fiction for adults. Her heartwarming books feature likable characters dealing with realistic problems, including romantic dilemmas, with the help of their strong Christian faith and often are part of a series. Friendships are often important elements of the plots, and the books are uplifting and have a keen sense of humor.

Already like Gunn's work?

- Melody Carlson
- Karen Kingsbury
- Lori Wick
- Haywood Smith
- Jan Karon
- Philip Gulley

## **Branching out from Christian Women's Fiction**

Like Christian women's fiction but interested in trying other genres?

- Christian romance (Tracie Peterson, Robin Lee Hatcher, Amy Clipston)
- Christian historical fiction (T. Davis Bunn, Lynn Austin)
- Christian romantic suspense (Dee Henderson, Terri Blackstock, Colleen Coble)
- Gentle reads (Adriana Trigiani, Jan Karon, Nicholas Sparks, Maeve Binchy, Rosamunde Pilcher)
- Closed-door secular romance (Debbie Macomber)

## COMEDIC WOMEN'S FICTION

**Comedic women's fiction deals with realistic problems with laugh-out-loud humor. This genre was once called chick lit, though readers and publishers have now largely moved away from that term, considering it dismissive.**

### **Jennifer Weiner**

Weiner's fast-paced, conversational work features realistic characters dealing with relatable problems but always with plenty of wit and humor. The laugh-out-loud humor coexists equally with often serious issues. Her work often highlights parent-child relationships and usually features smart, funny characters who come into their own during the course of the book.

If you like Jennifer Weiner:

- Marian Keyes
- Abbi Waxman
- Susan Isaacs
- Elin Hilderbrand
- Jane Green
- Emily Giffin
- Sophie Kinsella

## **Sophie Kinsella**

Kinsella is best known for her Shopaholics series, and her warm, funny work is noted for her entertaining characters who must navigate personal and professional challenges. Her likable characters often live in a big city, like London, and work exasperating jobs, but sustained by their family and friends, they ultimately find love, happiness, and personal growth.

If you like Sophie Kinsella:

- Marian Keyes
- Meg Cabot
- Sophie Cousens
- Jane Green
- Helen Fielding
- Sarah Strohmeyer
- Emily Giffin
- Jennifer Weiner
- Lauren Weisberger

## **Blast from the Past**

After launching her career in the 1990s, Irish writer Marian Keyes is widely considered a pioneer of “chick lit,” though she personally dislikes the term. Her books feature sassy, funny female characters who, alongside their friends, navigate contemporary life in big cities as working women. Though the books are hilarious, the characters often deal with darker issues than most other books in this genre, including battling alcoholism or significant depression. Keyes writes with insight and humor drawn from her own personal experiences.

Already like Keyes’s work?

- Mary Kay Andrews
- Jennifer Weiner
- Sophie Kinsella
- Sue Margolis
- Jane Green
- Helen Fielding

## **Branching out from Comedic Women’s Fiction?**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Humorous contemporary romance (Emily Henry, Christina Lauren, Abby Jimenez)
- Women’s fiction with a keen sense of humor (Katherine Center, Susan Mallery)

## **WOMEN'S FICTION WITH VIVID SETTINGS**

**Some women's fiction authors also feature vivid, atmospheric settings as a recurring feature in their work. For many readers, the sense of community and the appealing locale, often but not always coastal, is a strong part of the draw for these books, alongside the realistic female characters who are dealing with relatable problems in their lives.**

### **Elin Hilderbrand**

Hilderbrand's heartwarming books are all set on Nantucket, and for that reason, they are the quintessential beach read. The characters are often well-to-do but face universal problems, like contending with unfaithful spouses, grief, or illness. The tone can be bittersweet but always with a sense of hopefulness. The complex characters in these readable, emotionally resonant books often uncover secrets and navigate challenges related to their past coming to light.

If you like Elin Hilderbrand:

- Nancy Thayer
- J. Courtney Sullivan
- Mary Kay Andrews
- Emily Giffin
- Jamie Brenner
- Mary Alice Monroe
- Meg Mitchell Moore
- Dorothy Benton Frank

## Robyn Carr

Carr writes interconnected series that are centered on small towns, often in the mountains of California. The books have a strong romantic emphasis as well, but the focus on community throughout also makes these excellent women's fiction reads. Carr's characters are often military veterans. Her heartwarming work has a sense of humor and often incorporates challenges drawn from social issues, such as domestic violence, addiction, poverty, and PTSD. She is best known for her Virgin River series.

If you like Robyn Carr:

- Jodi Thomas
- Kristin Hannah
- JoAnn Ross
- Sherryl Woods
- Debbie Macomber
- Susan Mallery
- Susan Wiggs
- Linda Lael Miller

## Fannie Flagg

Best known for *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Flagg's funny, heartfelt fiction focuses on strong women in rural, small Southern towns. Her work often emphasizes family relationships and features eccentric, colorful characters. Flagg's characters contend with difficult and even heartbreaking circumstances, but the humor and the characters' humanity always shine through.

If you like Fannie Flagg:

- Rebecca Wells
- Anne George
- Haywood Smith
- Philip Gulley
- Joshilyn Jackson
- Ann B. Ross
- Adriana Trigiani
- Jan Karon
- Lorna Landvik
- Rita Mae Brown
- Dorothea Benton Frank
- Elizabeth Berg
- Maeve Binchy
- Olive Ann Burns

## **Blast from the Past**

Dorothea Benton Frank's novels center on her birthplace, Sullivan's Island in South Carolina's Lowcountry. Frank's books usually focus on women who find themselves on the island after facing disappointment and heartbreak elsewhere and rebuild their lives and selves with the help of the supportive island community. Featuring strong women, her work vividly highlights the coastal Lowcountry setting and is often humorous.

Already like Frank's work?

- Mary Kay Andrews
- Mary Alice Monroe
- Adriana Trigiani
- Jill McCorkle
- Anne Rivers Siddons
- Maeve Binchy
- Anne Tyler

## **Branching out from Women's Fiction with Vivid Settings**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Other women's fiction with a strong emphasis on setting (Sarah Addison Allen, Diane Chamberlain, Joanna Trollope)
- Historical fiction family sagas (Barbara Taylor Bradford, Belva Plain)
- Gentle reads (Jan Karon, Maeve Binchy)
- Romances with vivid settings (Sherryl Woods)
- Mysteries with strong female characters and vivid settings (Anne George, Ann B. Ross)

## **NEXT-GENERATION WOMEN'S FICTION**

**Women's fiction writers who first debuted in the 21st century maintain the genre's traditional focus on fiction about women by women for women. The emphasis, though, is often on more financially modest characters and settings than the classic books from the 1980s, which often instead featured wealthy and glamorous people. The personal growth of the characters is also a significant aspect of many of these novels, as well as an emphasis on relatable characters with realistic problems. These books can feature a wide range of tones, from humorous to bittersweet.**

### **Jojo Moyes**

Moyes writes both historical and contemporary fiction, but her emphasis is always on interesting women characters and their personal growth as they learn to love and accept themselves. Moyes's work often feature romantic relationships, as well as realistic and sometimes complex family dynamics. Her novels are thoughtful and insightful without being sentimental and feature a range of settings.

If you like Jojo Moyes:

- Maeve Binchy
- Marisa de los Santos
- Sally Hepworth
- Elinor Lipman
- Steven Rowley
- Rosamunde Pilcher
- Taylor Jenkins Reid
- Gail Tsukiyama
- Liane Moriarty
- Kate Morton
- Uzma Jalaluddin
- Jodi Picoult
- Kristin Hannah
- Elin Hilderbrand
- Jenny Colgan
- Nicholas Sparks

## **Katherine Center**

Center's relatable, likable protagonists endure dramatic upheavals in their personal lives—whether it's a divorce or a career change—that end in personal growth and self-acceptance. Romances are often a significant aspect of the plot, but the main character's personal development and journey toward finding contentment with their life is prioritized. Center's heartwarming, uplifting, emotionally resonant work is frequently hilarious but also delves into serious topics, like grief and caretaking.

If you like Katherine Center:

- Carley Fortune
- Kristan Higgins
- Annabel Monaghan
- Marisa de los Santos
- Mhairi McFarlane
- Abbi Waxman
- Abby Jiminez
- Christina Lauren
- Emily Henry
- Ali Hazelwood

## **Liane Moriarty**

Moriarty's insightful novels focus less on personal growth than the others featured here, but they do depict sympathetic characters with realistic issues and interesting relationship and family dynamics. The domestic situations in her books often have a suspenseful edge as secrets are unveiled, often with dramatic repercussions. Despite the tense edge generated from the suspense, Moriarty's books also have a sense of humor that lightens the tone.

If you like Liane Moriarty:

- Jojo Moyes
- Kimberly McCreight
- Sally Hepworth
- Lisa Jewell
- Megan Abbott
- Tana French
- Celeste Ng
- Ruth Ware
- Jodi Picoult
- Paula Hawkins
- Jane Green
- Greer Hendricks

## **Susan Mallery**

Mallery started her career as a romance writer in the 1990s but pivoted to writing women's fiction in the 2010s. Her women's fiction novels feature smart, relatable, layered characters dealing with everyday problems and depict realistic-seeming friendships and familial relationships, including spousal, parental, and sibling. Mallery's work is warm and humorous but also delves into difficult subjects thoughtfully.

If you like Susan Mallery:

- Susan Elizabeth Phillips
- Jill Shalvis
- Robyn Carr
- Sherryl Woods
- Debbie Macomber
- Kristan Higgins

## **Taylor Jenkins Reid**

Reid's work spans both historical and contemporary settings, but she focuses on relationships regardless of the setting. Romance is often a strong subplot, but family and friends also are heavily emphasized. Reid's characters find themselves navigating complicated, anguishing personal and professional crises that force them to make dramatic, difficult decisions. Tonally, her work can be quite bittersweet and poignant but always ends on an ultimately hopeful note.

If you like Taylor Jenkins Reid:

- Jojo Moyes
- Kristin Harmel
- Josie Silver
- Colleen Oakley
- Jessica Anya Blau
- Colleen Hoover
- Emily Henry
- Christina Lauren
- Abby Jimenez
- Carley Fortune
- Rebecca Serle
- Katherine Center

## **Blast from the Past**

Sarah Addison Allen's debut novel *Garden Spells* was an immediate hit when it was first released in 2007. Her subsequent work have all been bestsellers, though she doesn't circulate in our system as much as she once did. Her books blend women's fiction with magical realism and Southern small-town settings as they focus on Southern families with supernatural elements. Allen realistically captures complicated family and community dynamics, with a heavy dose of romance, in her lighthearted, feel-good novels populated with quirky, likable characters.

Already like Allen's work?

- Alice Hoffman
- Rebecca Wells
- Emilia Hart
- Laura Esquivel
- Brunonia Barry
- Joshilyn Jackson
- Kate Morton
- Karen White
- Sarah Jio

## **Branching out from Next-Generation Women's Fiction**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Classic women's fiction (Barbara Delinsky, Joanna Trollope)
- Contemporary romance (Emily Henry, Abby Jiminez, Christina Lauren)
- Gentle reads (Adriana Trigiani, Jan Karon, Nicholas Sparks)
- Literary fiction with a strong focus on female characters and their relationships (Barbara Kingsolver, Jacquelyn Mitchard, Anna Quindlen, Anita Shreve, Anne Tyler, Alice Hoffman)
- Historical fiction with a strong focus on women characters and their lives (Kristin Hannah, Marie Benedict, Lisa See)
- Historical fiction family sagas (Barbara Taylor Bradford, Belva Plain)
- Romantic suspense (Nora Roberts, Catherine Coulter, Jana DeLeon)
- Mysteries with a strong focus on women (Ann B. Ross, Anne George)
- Thrillers with strong women characters (Lisa Scottoline)
- Suspense with strong female characters (Lisa Jewell)

## ISSUES-ORIENTED WOMEN'S FICTION

**Some women's fiction authors maintain the genre's keen interest in the lives of women while also incorporating their characters' stories with hard-hitting plots about contemporary social issues. These books are often thought-provoking, heavy, and emotional and can be substantially darker than others in the genre. These authors handle the controversial current events storylines sensitively and evenhandedly, delving into the emotional fallout and impact the situation has on the characters.**

### **Jodi Picoult**

Picoult writes sensitive, thoughtful novels about realistic, everyday women caught in the middle of controversial contemporary issues. Her work shows contrasting viewpoints on various topics, which can range from end-of-life decisions to medical emancipation, with nuance and sympathy. Picoult's fast-paced, compelling books tend to be suspenseful and dramatic as they explore the characters' choices connected to heart-wrenching ethical quandaries. Her novels are especially interested in depicting the difficult family dynamics that can spring from these crises and often examine the medical and legal implications of the situation. Picoult's books tend to not have romantic subplots.

If you like Jodi Picoult:

- Sue Miller
- Anita Shreve
- Diane Chamberlain
- Ann Hood
- Kristin Hannah
- Jacquelyn Mitchard
- Luanne Rice
- Lisa Genova
- Anna Quindlen
- Randy Susan Meyers
- Liane Moriarty
- Lisa Scottoline
- Amy Bourret

## **Diane Chamberlain**

A psychotherapist by training, Chamberlain writes contemporary and historical novels that probe how ordinary women and their families respond to extraordinarily circumstances. Like Picoult, Chamberlain's characters deal with controversial topics, conveyed sympathetically and thoughtfully, though Chamberlain tends to incorporate more elements of mystery, suspense, and romance into her books. Chamberlain's work also tends to center around an incident of violence in the past and family secrets that surface and usually has a North Carolina setting.

If you like Diane Chamberlain:

- Sue Miller
- Dani Shapiro
- Jodi Picoult
- Anita Shreve
- Kristin Hannah
- Joshilyn Jackson
- Heather Gudenkauf

## **Blast from the Past**

Anita Shreve's writing career spanned over 40 years and generated considerable critical acclaim in the 1990s. Shreve's thoughtful, elegantly written work that blended women's fiction and literary fiction examines women facing extraordinary, frequently tragic circumstances who have to rebuild their lives. She is especially interested in probing the characters' emotional responses to their situations and how they interact with each other. Like Picoult and Chamberlain, Shreve writes with considerable nuance about controversial social issues, though her work has a far more leisurely, measured pace.

Already like Shreve's work?

- Jodi Picoult
- Diane Chamberlain
- Sally Beauman
- Sue Miller
- Marianne Wiggins
- Jacquelyn Mitchard

## **Branching out from Issues-Oriented Women's Fiction**

Enjoy this genre but looking to try another one with similarities to it?

- Literary fiction with a strong focus on female characters and their relationships (Barbara Kingsolver, Jacquelyn Mitchard, Anna Quindlen, Anita Shreve, Anne Tyler, Alice Hoffman)
- Women's fiction that deals with darker topics (Marian Keyes, Robyn Carr, Joanna Trollope)
- Next-generation women's fiction (Jojo Moyes, Katherine Center, Liane Moriarty, Susan Mallery)
- Historical fiction with a strong focus on women characters and their lives (Kristin Hannah, Marie Benedict, Lisa See)
- Historical fiction family sagas (Barbara Taylor Bradford, Belva Plain)
- Legal thrillers (Lisa Scottoline)
- Medical thrillers (Tess Gerritsen, Robin Cook, Michael Palmer)

## Looking for more suggestions on what to read?

- Fill out our online Berryville Library's What Should I Read Next? form.  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf7VfQV7xaYIoTACTX7kX\\_TdTPHwQ1i9UnqBwVDS3gGrYcpcg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116325047873771509704](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf7VfQV7xaYIoTACTX7kX_TdTPHwQ1i9UnqBwVDS3gGrYcpcg/viewform?usp=sharing&oid=116325047873771509704)
- Request a reader's advisory consultation at the library. You can call, email, or stop by the library to learn more.



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