

B.I.O. UNIVERSITY

THE '50' GREAT BOOKS COURSE, 2026:

Approx. 30 weeks of reading in a year (100-200 pp per week);

A Four Year Course; an 'Associates Degree'

One Seminar Weekly (Thursday afternoons, online and in person);

Pass/Fail; Oral Examinations Only.



[The Great Books Program - B.I.O. Uni](https://biou.jo/en/the-great-books-program)

biou.jo/en/the-great-books-program

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this seminal course is to introduce the reader to the best and most influential books ever written in all fields insofar as this is humanly possible in a 4-year course. It nourishes the reader intellectually and spiritually. Though based in Orthodox Christianity, it arms the reader with general knowledge about the whole of humanity and the whole of history. It thereby enriches the reader for the rest of their life. It also, God willing, inculcates into them the habit of reading 'great books' by showing them what 'great books' are, and are not, and how beneficial they can be.

THE 50 BOOK READING LIST:

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YEAR ONE: WORLD HISTORY

(10 Books / 30 weeks)

On Reading in General

1. How to Read a Book (Mortimer and Van Adler {20th Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—Before reading many books, it is important to know how to read. Books should be read with three questions in mind: how? What? And why? So, as the authors point out, readers must first notice the structure of books, then the meaning and content, and then should engage with them and see if they agree with them or not. This is the basic gist of this book, and no other book sets it out so well.

[How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading: Adler, Mortimer J., Van Doren, Charles: 9780671212094: Amazon.com: Books](#)

426 pp

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World History

2. The History of the World Abridged (J.M.Roberts {20th Century}) [6 weeks]

What and Why?—An abridgement of the best one-volume summary of world history, notwithstanding the dubious rendering of the rise of early man.

[Amazon.com: A Concise History of the World: 9780195211511: Roberts, J. M.: Books](#)

632 pp

3. The History of the Church (Eusebius {d. 4th Century}) [4 weeks]

What and Why?—Eusebius sets out all the heart-rendering suffering of the early Christians like no other book. It is the earliest source on the subject, and also on the fate of the disciples and the apostles. It is indispensable to understanding early Christian history.

[The History of the Church: From Christ to Constantine \(Penguin Classics\): Eusebius, Louth, Andrew, Williamson, G. A., Louth, Andrew: 9780140445350: Amazon.com: Books](#)

480 pp

4. The Orthodox Church (Timothy Ware {20th Century}) [4 weeks]

What and Why?—This is a brilliant, and now gold standard, account of the history of Orthodoxy.

[The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity: Ware, Timothy: 9780141980638:](#)

[Amazon.com: Books](#)

368pp

5. The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque (Sidney H. Griffith {21st Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—Shows the unknown history and challenges, intellectual and physical, of Christians under Islamic rule, who for around 500 years were the majority of Christians in the world.

[The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam: Griffith, Sidney H.: 9780691146287: Amazon.com: Books](#)

240pp

6. A History of the Bible (John Barton {20th Century}) [4 weeks]

What and Why?—The Bible is a collection of smaller books, from different times, with different authors, in different languages, based on different manuscripts, with different interpretations and translations. Different Christian denominations selected—and still have—different Canonical Books. It is important for Christians to be aware of these.

[A History of the Bible: The Book and Its Faiths: Barton, John: 9780143111207: Amazon.com: Books](#)

640pp

7. Muhammad (His Life Based on the Earliest Sources) (Martin Lings {20th Century}) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—This book explains the history of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), as Muslims know and understand him. It is important for that reason, and written in beautiful English.

[Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources: Lings, Martin: 9781594771538: Amazon.com: Books](#)

384pp

8. The Crusades through Arab Eyes (Amin Ma'louf {20th Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—Written by an Arab Christian and based on Arab language sources, it shows how what it was like for Arabs (Muslims and Christians both) to be on the receiving end of the different Crusades.

[The Crusades Through Arab Eyes \(Saqi Essentials\): Maalouf, Amin: 8601419936212: Amazon.com: Books](#)

320pp

9. Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglas (Frederic Douglas {19th Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—Frederic Douglas was a slave in the American South in the nineteenth century. Everyone in the world needs to read this eloquent work to remember the horrors of slavery.

[Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave \(Penguin Classics\): Douglass, Frederick, Dworkin, Ira, Dworkin, Ira: 9780143107309: Amazon.com: Books](#)

224pp

10. The Story of My Life (Helen Keller {20th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—Some 5% of people are disabled in some way. This is a remarkable story of someone who was completely disabled (deaf, dumb and blind) and yet managed to communicate, and thrive, through touch alone. There is perhaps no other memoir in history quite like it.

[Story of My Life, The: Keller, Helen: 9788175994034: Amazon.com: Books](#)

408pp

YEAR TWO. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

(15 Books / 30 weeks)

Orthodox Spiritual Writings

1. The Way of the Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way (Anonymous {19th Century}) [2 weeks]

[The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way \(Shambhala Classics\): Savin, Olga, Hopko, Father Thomas: 9781570628078: Amazon.com: Books](#)

264pp

2. Early Christian Lives (Penguin Books) [2 weeks]

[Early Christian Lives \(Penguin Classics\): Athanasius, Jerome, Severus, Sulpicius, Gregory the Great, White, Carolinne: 9780140435269: Amazon.com: Books](#)

288pp

3. 'Writings from the *Philokalia*: On the Prayer of the Heart'. (Nicodemius of the Holy Mountain and Macarius of Corinth {19th Century})(One Volume Abridgement of the *Philokalia*) (trans. Palmer) [4 weeks]

[Writings from the Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart: Kadloubovsky, E., Palmer, G. E.H.: 9780571163939: Amazon.com: Books](#)

440pp

4. The Divine Names and Mystical Theology (Pseudo Dionysius the Aereopagite {6th Century}) [2 weeks]

[Pseudo Dionysius: The Complete Works \(Classics of Western Spirituality \(Paperback\)\): Pseudo Dionysius, Paul Rorem, Karlfried Froehlich, Jean Leclercq: 9780809128389: Amazon.com: Books](#)

336pp

5. The Ladder of Divine Ascent (John Climacus {7th Century}) [3 weeks]

[By Luibheid - John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent \(New edition\): Luibheid: Amazon.com: Books](#)

301pp

6. Complete Works, (Nil Sorsky {16th Century}) [1 week]

[Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings \(The Classics of Western Spirituality\) - Kindle edition by Sorsky, Nil, George A. Maloney, George A. Maloney. Religion & Spirituality Kindle eBooks @ Amazon.com.](#)

164pp

7. Spiritual Counsels (Nicodemius of the Holy Mountain ({19th Century})) [2 weeks]

[Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel: Bebis, George S., Chamberas, Peter A.: 9780809104192: Amazon.com: Books](#)

240pp

Orthodoxy in the Modern World

8. Thinking Orthodoxy (Constantinou {21st Century}) [3 weeks]

[Amazon.com: Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind \(Audible Audio Edition\): Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou Ph.D., Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou Ph.D., Ancient Faith Publishing: Books](#)

400pp

Catholic Spiritual Writings

9. Confessions of a Sinner (St. Augustine {5th Century}) (*Abbreviation of The Confessions*) [1 week]

[Great Ideas Confessions of a Sinner: Saint, Augustine Of Hippo: 9780141018836: Books - Amazon.ca](#)

132pp

10. The Soul's Journey into God (St Bonaventure {13th Century}) [2 weeks]

[Amazon.com: Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis \(The Classics of Western Spirituality\): 9780809121212: Cousins, Ewert: Books](#)

384pp

11. The Shorter *Summa* (St Thomas Aquinas {13th Century}) / Peter Kreeft {21st Century}) [2 weeks]

[A Shorter Summa: The Essential Philosophical Passages of Saint Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica: Kreeft, Peter: 8601420905207: Amazon.com: Books](#)

162pp

12. Dark Night of the Soul (St. John of the Cross {16th Century}) [2 weeks].

[Dark Night of the Soul: Peers, E. Allison, Cross, St. John of the: 9781604592634: Amazon.com: Books](#)

140pp

Protestant Classics

13. Fear and Trembling (Soren Kierkegaard {19th Century}) [2 weeks]

[Fear and Trembling \(Penguin Classics\): Kierkegaard, Søren, Hannay, Alastair, Hannay, Alastair, de Silentio, Johannes: 8601409694139: Amazon.com: Books](#)

160pp

14. The Golden Fountain, or The Soul's Love for God (Lilian Staveley {20th Century}) [1 week]

[The Golden Fountain - or, The Soul's Love for God. Being some Thoughts and - Confessions of One of His Lovers: Staveley, Lilian: Amazon.com: Books](#)

44pp

15. The Four Loves (C.S. Lewis {20th Century}) [1 week]

[The Four Loves: Lewis, C. S.: 9780062565396: Amazon.com: Books](#)

192pp

YEAR THREE. PHILOSOPHY, WORLD RELIGIONS, ECOLOGY

(15 Books / 30 weeks)

General Philosophy

1. The Last Days of Socrates {*Euthyphro/Crito/The Apology/Phaedo*} (Plato {4th Century BC}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—The American-British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (d. 1947 CE) famously said (of Plato alone): ‘The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.’ These four dialogues explore piety, ethics, the soul, and death respectively.

[The Last Days of Socrates \(Penguin Classics\): Plato, Rowe, Christopher, Rowe, Christopher, Rowe, Christopher: 9780140455496: Amazon.com: Books](#)

256pp

2. *Gorgias* (Plato {4th Century BC}) [1 week]

What and Why?—The *Gorgias* explores the good and happiness.

[Gorgias \(Hackett Classics\): Plato, Zeyl, Donald J.: 9780872200166: Amazon.com: Books](#)

136pp

3. The Consolations of Philosophy (Boethius {6th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—A pleasant and completely convincing treatise on the virtues of philosophy.

[The Consolation of Philosophy \(Penguin Classics\): Boethius, Ancius, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor: 9780140447804: Amazon.com: Books](#)

155pp

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Ethics

4. The Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle) {4th Century BC} [2 weeks]

What and Why?—This is the most influential book on ethics ever written. Aristotle tells you what sentiments are, and so what virtue is and how it lies between two extremes. If Plato’s philosophy is epitomised by the Delphic inscription ‘Know Thyself’, Aristotle’s philosophy is epitomised by the other great Delphic inscription, ‘Nothing in Excess’.

[The Nicomachean Ethics \(Penguin Classics\): Aristotle, Tredennick, Hugh, Thomson, J. A. K., Barnes, Jonathan: 9780140449495: Amazon.com: Books](#)

400pp

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Political Philosophy

5. The Republic (Plato {4th Century BC}) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—The Republic explores justice, the cardinal virtues and politics. It explains how the state mirrors the soul, so that politics can only be healthy when the souls of a society are balanced, and this balance can only come through moral education. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this book. Plato’s allegory of the Cave in Book VII is arguably the greatest passage in literature.

[Republic \(Oxford World's Classics\): Plato, Waterfield, Robin: 9780199535767: Amazon.com: Books](#)

560pp



Logic, Grammar, Rhetoric

6. The *Trivium* (Sister Miriam Joseph {20th Century}) [4 weeks]

What and Why?—One does not understand the tools of thought—logic, grammar and rhetoric—until one reads this excellent primer.

[Amazon.com: The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric: 9780967967509: Joseph, Sister Miriam, McGlinn, Marguerite: Books](#)

292pp



World Religions

7. The World's Religions (2nd Edition) (Huston Smith {20th Century}) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—The best one-volume book on the subject, written in a way to offend no one. It sums up all the major religions today in a sympathetic way, quoting key texts. It is crucial for general knowledge about all the religions in the world.

[The World's Religions: A Study of the Essential Teachings of the World's Major Faiths \(Plus\): Smith, Huston: 9780061660184: Amazon.com: Books](#)

448pp

8. The Tao Te Ching (Lao-Tzu) (Thomas Cleary) [1 week]

What and Why?—Beautiful and Seminal Taoist Classic. Cleary's translation makes the theology understandable.

[Tao Te Ching Tao Te Ching Translation by Thomas Cleary](#)

50pp?



Islam

9. A Thinking Person's Guide to Islam (Ghazi bin Muhammad {21st Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—A widely acclaimed educated primer on Islam, written in English for Western people.

[A Thinking Persons Guide to Islam: The Essence of Islam in Twelve Verses from the Qur'an : H.R.H. Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

226pp

10. *Taj al-'Arus* / The Refinement of Souls (Ibn 'Atta Allah Al-Iskandari {13th Century} (trans. Amjad Mahmoud) [1 week]

What and Why?—A beautiful but simple guide to the spiritual life in Islam as Muslims know it.

[The Refinement Of Souls \[Taj Al-Arus Al-Hawi Li Tahdhib Al-Nufus\]: Shaykh ibn Ata Allah 'Sakandari: 9780957693739: Amazon.com: Books](#)

118pp

11. Minhaj Al-Abidin / The Path of Worshippers (Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali {12th Century}) (trans. Faghfoory)[2 weeks]

What and Why?—Al-Ghazali is by far the most influential Islamic Scholar over the last 900 years. This is Al-Ghazali's last work, summarising the whole spiritual path in Islam. However, it does not concentrate on the doctrine, rites and practices (like his Magum Opus, the Ihya 'Ulum al-Din.) Rather, like Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain's Spiritual Counsels, he focuses on the virtues, the vices and the proper uses of the limbs.

[Path of Worshippers to the Paradise of the Lord of the Worlds, The: Minhaj al-abidin ila jannat rabb al-alamin: al-Ghazzali, Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad: 9780761855729: Amazon.com: Books](#)

218pp

Autology, Anthropology, Psychology

12. A Thinking Person's Guide to their Self (Ghazi bin Muhammad {21st Century}) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—Explains the crucial topics of self-knowledge, spiritual anthropology, and spiritual psychology (including topics like virtue ethics and the science of thoughts) based in Islam but quoting widely from Christian and other sources, and contrasting them with modern theories.

Forthcoming

13. Man's Search for Meaning (Viktor Frankl {20th Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?—Professor's Frankl's holocaust memoir should be read by everyone on earth, not merely for its true depiction of unspeakable cruelty and suffering, but for his solution (his 'Logotherapy theory') to prevent and cure mental illness. His basic premise agrees with 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4), and that without this purpose in life, people go mad.

[Man'S Search For Meaning 1St \(First\) Edition Text Only: Viktor E. Frankl: Amazon.com: Books](#)

154pp

Ecology

14. The Inner Life of Animals (Peter Wohlleben {21st Century}) [2 Weeks]

What and Why?—Different animals have every faculty and every quality human beings have including emotions and reason. What no animal has apart from human beings is the potential for all the qualities together. This book helps human beings appreciate that and so respect and love animals more.

[The Inner Life of Animals: Love, Grief, and Compassion—Surprising Observations of a Hidden World \(The Mysteries of Nature, 2\): Wohlleben, Peter, Billingham, Jane, Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff, Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff: 9781771648028: Amazon.com: Books](#)

288pp

15. The Hidden Life of Trees (Peter Wohlleben {21st Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—Trees are living, sentient, self-aware and communicating beings. Moreover, each one is like a city which hosts thousands of other creatures. This book helps human beings appreciate that, and so respect and love trees and plants more.

[The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World \(The Mysteries of Nature, 1\): Wohlleben, Peter, Billingham, Jane, Simard, Suzanne, Flannery, Tim: 9781771643771: Amazon.com: Books](#)

288pp

YEAR FOUR: WORLD LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

(12 Books / 30 weeks)

World Literature

1. *The Iliad* (Homer {8th Century BCE}) (trans. Lattimore) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—The Iliad is its first epic ever written. When presented with a priceless casket and asked what to keep in it, Alexander the Great said ‘a copy of The Iliad’. Because of its beautiful ‘parataxis’ style, and because of Achilles’ dramatic movement from passion to compassion, it was considered by the Ancient Greeks as the finest poetry ever. It is also one of the most culturally influential books ever written.

[Amazon.com: The Iliad of Homer: 8601417981696: Homer, Lattimore, Richmond, Martin, Richard, Martin, Richard: Books](#)

608pp

2. *The Odyssey* (Homer {8th Century BCE}) (trans. Lattimore) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—The word ‘nostoi’ (‘return’) in Ancient Greek is related to the word ‘nous’ meaning ‘intellect’. The epic poem of Odysseus’ return home is thus not merely a great story, but a symbolic tale representing the return of the soul and the intelligence to the Spirit. This is actually how it was understood by ancient Greeks like Porphyry. The Odyssey is arguably culturally even more influential than The Iliad. Many of its tropes—the lotus eaters, the cyclops, the suitors in ones in home—have important spiritual symbolism even today.

[Amazon.com: The Odyssey of Homer: 9780061244186: Homer, Richmond Lattimore: Books](#)

374pp

3. *La Vita Nuova* (Dante Alighieri {14th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—Dante’s moving story of his early profound and all-consuming love for Beatrice with a number of sonnets on the subject. It shows—and it’s a true memoir—the sweetness, innocence, power and the beauty of Platonic love. Dante is only nine years old when he first sees his eight-year-old neighbour Beatrice Portinari at the Ponte Vecchio in Florence, and then he spends the rest of his life (and projected afterlife in The Divine Comedy) thinking about her. So much so, that he can never physically go near her whilst she is alive without fainting, so that their love is never consummated, but rather, transmuted into something entirely celestial.

[Amazon.com: Vita Nuova \(Oxford World's Classics\): 9780199540655: Dante Alighieri, Musa, Mark: Books](#)

128pp

4. *Don Quixote* (Miguel De Cervantes {17th Century}) [5 weeks]

What and Why?—Don Quixote is not only the first novel, it is the funniest novel ever. It summarizes all the romances and epics before it, and shows (and that is its stated purpose) how they warp a reader’s mind so that in the end he confuses fiction with fact. It is even also the start of meta-fiction (self-consciously, self-mocking fiction). It is a sheer delight.

[Don Quixote: Complete and Unabridged \(Signet Classics\): de Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel, Starkie, Walter, Friedman, Edward H.: 9780451531285: Amazon.com: Books](#)

1056pp

5. Hamlet (William Shakespeare {17th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—Shakespeare is arguably the best playwright in human history and his plays show the full gamut of human passions in an intelligent and beneficial way. Hamlet is remarkable for the hero's dramatic movement, and his becoming ready for action and for death, i.e., in his sanctification.

[By William Shakespeare - The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark \(Folger Shakespeare Library\) \(Updated\) \(3/25/12\): William Shakespeare: Amazon.com: Books](#)

60pp?

6. Moby Dick ((Herman Melville {19th Century}) [3 weeks]

What and Why?—The classic tale of an all-encompassing obsession. American language and literature at its peak.

[Moby-Dick: or, The Whale \(Penguin Classics\): Amazon.co.uk: Melville, Herman, Quirk, Tom, Delbanco, Andrew: 9780142437247: Books](#)

600pp

7. The Brothers Karamazov (Fyodor Dostoevsky {19th Century}) [5 weeks]

What and Why?—Of all novelists ever, Dostoevsky is perhaps the most adept at showing the complexities and contradictions of the human soul. On top of that, the 3 Brothers Karamazov, Dmitri, Ivan, Alexei and represent the will, the mind and the spirit respectively (with their father Fyodor as the body, and their illegitimate brother Smerdyakov as the Devil). Through these allegories Dostoevsky asks the question, 'what happens to human beings (and Russia) without belief in God?'

[Amazon.com: The Brothers Karamazov: A New Translation by Michael R. Katz: 9781324095101: Dostoevsky, Fyodor, Katz, Michael R.: Books](#)

928pp

8. The Metamorphosis (Franz Kafka {20th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—A man wakes up and finds he is a vile cockroach. There is no solace or escape. It represents the absurdity of the human condition without God precisely. It is a stunning indictment.

[Amazon.com: The Metamorphosis: A New Translation by Susan Bernofsky: 9780393347098: Kafka, Franz, Bernofsky, Susan, Cronenberg, David: Books](#)

128pp

9. The Little Prince (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry {20th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—A lovely allegory of different types of worldly people in seemingly naïve children's tale.

[The Little Prince: The enchanting illustrated classic children's story, with original translation, perfect for children aged 7 to 9: Amazon.co.uk: Saint-Exupery, Antoine de, Woods, Katherine: 9781405288194: Books](#)

80pp

10. Animal Farm (George Orwell {20th Century}) [1 week]

What and Why?—An allegory of how revolutions start and then end up with tyranny, represented through the tale of animals in a farm. A poignant meditation on politics, still valid today.

[Amazon.com: Animal Farm: \(English Edition\): 9798312854039: Orwell, George: Books](#)
100pp

The History of Science

11. A Short History of Nearly Everything (Bill Bryson) [4 weeks]

What and Why?—Arguably the best one-volume history of science written; replaces Asimov's (now anyway outdated) New Guide to Science as a popular science primer.

[A Short History of Nearly Everything: Bryson, Bill: 9780767908184: Amazon.com: Books](#)

544pp

12. The Science Delusion / a.k.a. Science Set Free (Rupert Sheldrake {21st Century}) [2 weeks]

What and Why?— A seminal book wherein Sheldrake reveals the myths of modern science that desacralize the world and dehumanize human beings.

[Science Set Free: 10 Paths to New Discovery: Sheldrake, Rupert: 9780770436728: Amazon.com: Books](#)

400pp