



15 Famous British Authors

The UK has been spoilt for choice when it comes to famous authors. Dating right back to the 1300s, some of the biggest names in literature come from right here in the UK. Let's take a look at the top 15 authors every Brit will most likely know and their works.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)

Often called the father of English literature, we'll start off with Geoffrey Chaucer. In the run up to the years of Shakespeare, Chaucer was the face of English literature for the most part of the 1300s. Unusually, he used Middle English as the vernacular in his books and poems as opposed to Latin or French, perhaps contributing to the transition society-wide. Chaucer grew up in a wealthy family and worked in the court of Edward III, where he was known for his story-telling abilities. He eventually became an MP under Richard II and it's at this time he wrote his most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer was the first great English writer to be buried at Westminster Abbey in Poet's Corner and he can still be visited today.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Shakespeare is, perhaps, one of the most studied authors across the world and his list of famous works is extensive - 38 plays, 154 sonnets and many other poems. Unfortunately, not so much is known about the early years of William Shakespeare but it is known that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and, at some point, moved to London with his wife and kids to start his writing career. He founded an acting company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, which put on plays regularly. Some of his most famous works include *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*. He is buried in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon at the parish church, Holy Trinity.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Wordsworth is a famous poet from the Lake District in the north-west of England. His poems are known for expressing his love of nature as he grew up in the beautiful countryside. He travelled Europe extensively to further deepen his love for

nature. Wordsworth's writing started when he was at school, encouraged by his family and headmaster. Similar to Chaucer, he also took an interest in politics, both in the UK and in France. He often expressed his love of democracy as well as his political feelings, including passionate comments about the French Revolution, through letters to political authorities. He's most famously known for his controversial *Lyrical Ballads* as well as *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, Composed upon Westminster Bridge* and *The Prelude*. He is buried at St Oswald's church in Grasmere in the Lake District.

Jane Austen (1775-1817)

Jane Austen is the first female author we'll talk about today. Born in Hampshire to a reverend, her creativity was inspired by a close-knit family and her writing was encouraged by her father. She had a formal education at boarding school, was provided access by her father to a literature collection in their home library and was given books, paper and writing tools by her family to enable her to get started in the writing world. Her daily notebooks have also been published as writings themselves. It is widely known that Jane would write plays and have her parents and siblings act them out at home. Jane's famous works are known for their romantic storylines and, despite a proposal, Jane never married herself. She admitted to falling in love once with Tom Lefroy, although his family didn't see Jane as a good prospect and discouraged any relationship.

Following the death of Jane's father, the Austen family was thrown into a financial crisis. Jane sold the copyright to one of her novels, *Susan*, although the copyright owner decided not to publish. It wasn't until late in Jane's life when financial stability returned that her most famous works were published. These include *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. She sadly died of illness and is buried at Winchester Cathedral.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Charles Dickens is known as a social critic who used his writing to highlight social issues of the people of his time. Dickens had a difficult upbringing in Portsmouth. His father was imprisoned for debt and at the age of 12 he started working in a factory to support his family. Luckily, his father was able to come to an agreement with his creditors and sent Dickens off to an academy, which he left to become a law clerk. After a short time in this role, he made his first transition to the literary world, first as a stenographer, then as a newspaper reporter and he eventually started publishing novels. He lived through hardships during his life, watching the deaths of many of his family members, including his children, and had his own glimpse of death with the Staplehurst railway accident. However, Dickens was a successful author so much so that he did reading tours over in America. His most famous works include *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*, all of

which highlight issues such as working conditions, healthcare, poverty and exploitation.

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

Charlotte Brontë was one of three Brontë sisters (alongside Emily and Anne) and a brother (Branwell), all of whom wrote. Born into the family of a reverend, the Brontës grew up in Yorkshire in the north-east of England. Charlotte was sent to a school and went on to become a governess. She returned to her hometown and, alongside her sisters, attempted to set up their own school, which was unsuccessful. Under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, the three siblings published works including *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Sadly, both Emily and Anne died shortly after and Charlotte ended up marrying Reverend Nicholls. Whilst expecting a child, Charlotte sadly caught pneumonia and died. They are buried around Yorkshire in Haworth and Scarborough.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Virginia Woolf is known across the UK as a truly innovative writer who, as a female, used her writings to challenge society roles and explore feminist ideas. Woolf was brought up in literary surroundings with her father being an author and her mother also writing books on her profession of nursing. She grew up in a well-off family in Kensington, London, and socialised in high-society circles. However, she suffered traumas as a young girl, being sexually abused by two of her half-brothers, the sudden death of her mother and half-sister and the stomach cancer, and eventually death, of her father, which led to a mental breakdown and ultimately being institutionalised. She pursued her studies at King's College London, where she started to meet radical feminists. She eventually met Leonard Woolf, who she married, and started to socialise in the Bloomsbury area of London, consisting of many authors, novelists and intellectuals. She eventually established her own publishing house, Hogarth House, and published her own writing as well as that of her husband. Her famous works include *Mrs Dalloway*, *To The Lighthouse* and *A Room of One's Own*.

Agatha Christie (1890 - 1976)

Agatha Christie is a well-known crime writer who wrote 66 detective novels and 14 short story collections. She was born in Devon and at the age of five, taught herself to read. By the time of the First World War, Christie's sister bet her that she wouldn't be able to write a detective story. What started out as a bet eventually turned into one of the greatest detective characters in the world, Hercule Poirot. Her character is said to be based on the Belgian refugees who fled to the English countryside during WWI. By the time the war came to an end, Christie had also created the characters Tommy and Tuppence and Miss Marple. Christie then travelled extensively around the then British Empire and, later, on the Orient

Express. These travel experiences are widely recognised as sets in many of her novels. After two marriages and towards the end of Christie's life, she settled in the UK. Her very last public appearance was at the opening night of the film version of her book, *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Wilfrid Owen (1893 - 1918)

Wilfrid Owen found success as a war poet during WWI. He was born in Shropshire to a railway clerk and enlisted in the army in 1915 to fight for his country. He was sent to France during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, where he started writing about the awful conditions through poetry. He briefly suffered shell shock and returned to the UK for hospitalisation, where he continued his writing. Ultimately, he returned to the front line in 1918 and was killed just one week before the Armistice. His most well-known poems include *Futility*, *Strange Meeting*, *Dulce et Decorum est* and *Arms and the Boy*.

Enid Blyton (1897-1968)

Enid Blyton was a famous children's author, who was born in London and grew up in Kent. She started her writing career at a young age, founding a magazine of short stories called Dab. She went on to become a teacher and governess and wrote educational books as well as poetry on the sidelines. She married the editor of a publishing firm, George Newnes, who encouraged her to start writing children's novels. She started her own family and found huge success as a children's writer. She eventually divorced and remarried and had a hugely successful life as both a writer and businesswoman. Her most famous works include *The Famous Five*, *The Secret Seven* and *Malory Towers*, which also became hit TV series. Many of Blyton's works have recently come under scrutiny due to her Victorian attitudes towards race. Some of her original works have been reworded or edited.

C.S. Lewis (1898 - 1963)

Clive Staples Lewis, known more commonly as C.S.Lewis, was born in Belfast in Northern Ireland. He came to England at an early age to attend school here and, as a very intellectual young boy, was accepted into University College Oxford. During WWI, he enlisted in the army and shortly after returning to the UK following the Armistice, he started to publish his own works under the pseudonym of Clive Hamilton. Despite declaring himself Atheist and Theist, he eventually converts to Christianity and many of his future books can be seen as pro-Christian writings. For the years to come he published numerous books and was awarded with literary prizes and honorary doctorate degrees and became the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University. His most famous works are *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Space Trilogy*.

George Orwell (1903-1950)

Eric Arthur Blair was born in India to a British official, his father, and the daughter of a teak merchant in Burma, now Myanmar, his mother. They returned to England in 1911, where Orwell attended boarding school and was recognised by his teachers for being highly intellectual. He attained scholarships to some of the best schools in England, Wellington and Eton, but ultimately returned to India in 1922 as a police officer. He was shocked by the treatment of the Burmese by the British and wrote about this imperial rule in his first writing using the pseudonym George Orwell. He felt so guilty about colonialism he took on the role of a poor person, spending time in the slums of Paris and London and working in laborious jobs across England. He declared himself an anarchist, then a socialist and eventually a communist and expressed his political opinions through his works. His most famous pieces are *Animal Farm*, *1984*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

Roald Dahl (1916-1990)

Roald Dahl is, perhaps, one of the greatest British children's writers with 19 books under his belt. Born in Wales, Dahl attended boarding school and eventually joined the RAF during WWII. He moved to Washington D.C. to work as a spy for the British government and it was here that another novelist encouraged him to write. He started with books targeted at adults with a military influence but he eventually turned to younger audiences, which is where he found great success. His most famous works include *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach* and *the BFG*. Many of his works have become musicals in the West End and global hits as films.

Ian Fleming (1928-1964)

Ian Fleming was born in London to a world of wealth and privilege. His father was a Conservative MP and he had a strong education not just here in the UK but also in Germany and Switzerland. He started his career as a journalist and moved into banking and stock-broking before becoming an officer in the British navy during WWII. Following the war he split his time between the UK and Jamaica and it was during this time he created the character James Bond. Bond, known as 007, is a British spy who uses the latest gadgets to catch the bad guys. His endeavours are explained across the series of 12 novels, which have now been turned into hugely successful films. Infamous phrases, such as "*the name's Bond, James Bond*" and "*shaken not stirred*" are often quoted by people around the world. Names of the Bond novels include *Casino Royale*, *From Russia with Love* and *Goldfinger* but he was also known for the children's book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

J.K.Rowling (1965 - present)

Joanne Kathleen Rowling is perhaps the most successful British author to date being the name behind the *Harry Potter* series. She lived a relatively “normal” life, growing up with her sister and parents in Gloucestershire and Wales before studying at Exeter University. In 1990, Jo first came up with the idea of the character Harry Potter while sitting on a train to London. She moved to Portugal, married, had her first child, divorced and returned to Edinburgh to work as a teacher but she wrote in every spare moment she could. Her first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in 1997 under the name J.K.Rowling, as her publisher suggested being a female author may not appeal to her target audience. A further six books in the series were published in the following years and they went on to become hugely successful films under Warner Bros. She's also written accompanying books and screenplays, such as *Fantastic Beasts*. She now does a huge amount of charity work and is said to be the richest writer in the world following the success of her series.