



Great Classics of Chinese Literature

Literature Study Guide Version 3.1

©The Rockford Quiz Bowl Company 2026 · rockfordqb.com

Although there are other great classic works of Chinese literature, the works below are often collectively called the Four Great Classics. They are listed in likely chronological order by their publication (the publication date of *Water Margin* is uncertain). They were originally published from the 1300s through the 1700s.

Classic	Details
Romance of the Three Kingdoms	written by Luo Guanzong ; named for being set during the Three Kingdoms period after the fall of the Han dynasty, during the conflict of the Shu , Wei , and Wu states; in the novel, Liu Bei , Guan Yu , and Zhang Fei swear the Peach Garden Oath and fight against Cao Cao at the Battle of Red Cliffs; before the battle, Liu Bei recruits Zhuge Liang , who performs a fake ritual to redirect the wind and places straw human figures in boats to "borrow" arrows from Cao Cao
Water Margin	possibly written by Shi Nai'an and sometimes called All Men are Brothers or Outlaws of the Marsh ; a group of 108 outlaws nicknamed the Stars of Destiny who meet at Liangshan Marsh under the leadership of Chao Gai and have conflicts with the Song dynasty government
Journey to the West	written by Wu Cheng'en ; a Buddhist monk (Xuanzang or Tang Sanzang) sets out west toward India to collect sutras (holy texts), accompanied by the monkey king Sun Wukong , Pigsy (Zhu Bajie) , Sandy (Sha Wujing) , and White Dragon Horse (Bai Long Ma); Sun Wukong is born from a stone egg, wields a staff that can grow and shrink, has eaten the Peaches of Immortality that the Jade Emperor told him to guard, and spends five hundred years trapped under a mountain after he urinates on a set of five pillars that turn out to be the fingers of the Buddha
Dream of the Red Chamber	written by Cao Xueqin and sometimes called The Story of the Stone ; the novel follows the decline of two branches of the Jia family; Jia Baoyu is born with a piece of jade in his mouth