

Featured on The Nerd League

By Katie Knecht

You might have heard that the winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize for Literature was [recently announced](#), and the award went to [Kazuo Ishiguro](#). Less controversial than last year's selection of singer/songwriter Bob Dylan, Ishiguro is a traditional English novelist who was born in Japan. The honor is given as recognition of a body of work rather than one particular piece. The 62-year-old author has published seven acclaimed novels, as well as several screenplays and short stories, and has dabbled in songwriting.

Perhaps you've never heard of him, maybe his name is familiar, or maybe you just haven't gotten to his books yet. But if you like to stay up to date on an author the [Swedish Academy](#) considers to have "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world", but aren't sure where to start, get going with this crash course on Ishiguro's works.

1. ["The Remains of the Day"](#), 1989

Largely considered Ishiguro's best book, "The Remains of the Day" centers around an English mid-century butler, Stevens, who is extremely particular and even more serious about his job. The receipt of a letter from a past colleague prompts him to recount his own history as he sets out to visit this former lead housemaid. The novel is set over a period of days, but the reader comes to understand much about Stevens and the perceptions he has of himself and his past.

This first-person book is a fast read, is oddly satisfying in its tediousness, and sets a great foundation for all of Ishiguro's works. It's [one of my favorites](#) of all time. Plus, there's [a film](#) starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson you can check out afterward (even though we all know the book is always better than the movie).

2. ["Never Let Me Go"](#), 2005

Noted by *Time* magazine as the year's best novel, "Never Let Me Go" offers a gentle transition into Ishiguro's science fiction tendencies. Kathy, the book's protagonist, looks back on her childhood at a boarding school in England and slowly reveals an unusual history. While dystopian and somewhat elusive, this work is very much grounded in human behavior that Ishiguro is an expert at exploring: a person's past and their relationship to it.

Another first-person narration, this book is relatable, quick to read, and sets you up for Ishiguro's more...shall we say...*interesting* works. It's also [a movie](#) starring Keira Knightly and Andrew Garfield.

3. [“When We Were Orphans”](#), 2000

This book definitively steps into one of Ishiguro’s worlds of distorted reality. The novel’s unreliable narrator and his jumble of thoughts, past and present, is not for everyone—even Ishiguro considers it one of his weaker works. Englishman Christopher Banks, a detective, is called home to China to solve an important case—though we are not sure why it is so vital—and in the process we learn about his childhood and separation from his parents. Ultimately, Banks is seeking his parents, and along the way the distinction between fact and imagination is blurred.

This first-person read, though challenging at times in its ambiguity, is pivotal to understanding and appreciating the rest of Ishiguro’s works.

I hope this list helps you start on your Ishiguro journey. While sometimes ambiguous, his works are masterpieces in restrained emotion, simple but beautiful language, and they dare to step into the unknown. As the [New York Times](#) said, “He creates worlds that are clear in a sentence-by-sentence way, but in which the big picture recedes against the horizon. His novels are about discovery and revelation, and how slowly they arrive even for the most meticulous observer.”

Good luck!