

Instructors' choice(s): Representative Canadian Short Fiction

* = accessible ** = slightly more difficult

1. * **Thomas Chandler Haliburton** (1796-1865), "The Clockmaker" (1836) [from *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, ed. Wayne Grady (1980)]. The first story of 22 satirical sketches on two complementary characters, the well-mannered, conservative Englishman and the shrewd and practical-minded Yankee who plies his trade in Nova Scotia.
2. * **Susanna Moodie** (1803-1885), "Brian, the Still-Hunter" (1836) [from *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, ed. Wayne Grady (1980)]. Anecdotal story revolving around the arrival of a hunter at a pioneer woman's cabin in Ontario. Moodie's stories show interest in the exploration of character.
3. * **Stephen Leacock** (1869-1944), "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of St. Pythias" [from *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912)].
[available online at <http://www.fullbooks.com/Sunshine-Sketches-of-a-Little-Town1.html>]
Satirical portrayal, by Canada's earliest humorist, of Canadian small-town life, with a wink at Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. Theme: mocks Canadian (colonial) identity, Canadian chauvinism. Irony of voice; reversal of reader's expectations. Canada as Anglo-American colony.
4. ** **Ethel Wilson** (1888-1980), "The Buried Life" (1949) [from *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, selected by Jane Urquhart (2007)]. A young woman is startled by her great-aunt's passion for poetry and love when she visits her ageing aunt. Intertextuality of Matthew Arnold's poem "The Buried Life". [available online at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/arnold/writings/buriedlife.html>]
5. * **Morley Callaghan** (1903-1990), "Last Spring They Came Over" (1927) [from *Morley Callaghan's Stories* (1959)]. A story by one of Canada's exquisite short-story writers, who consorted with Hemingway and Fitzgerald in 1920s Paris. Two British immigrants move to Canada but fail to accommodate and make a success, in part because of their deeply ingrained British Empire sense of superiority.
6. ** **Thomas Raddall** (1903-1994), "The Wedding Gift" [from *At the Tide's Turn and other Books* (1959)]. Plays upon the theme of survival in Canada's snowy wilderness, as it narrates how a clumsy minister escorts a young wife-to-be through the Canadian bush, only to be cleverly ensnared into marriage by the woman. With a sympathetic wink at feminism.
7. ** **Sinclair Ross** (1908-1996), "The Lamp at Noon" (1938) [from *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* (1982)]. One of the finest examples of so-called "prairie realism." The suffocating and maddening dust storms of the 1930s form the backdrop to a young marriage's collapse into tragedy, as male ambition and stubborn persistence has to fight it out with female dreams of escape and self-fulfilment. External nature reflects inner life and emotion.
8. ** **Joyce Marshall** (b. 1913), "The Old Woman" (1952) [from *Any Time at All and Other Stories* (1993)]. Young British woman follows her WWI soldier-love into the isolation of the wilds of French Canada, only to find herself locked up in a marriage to a man whose love for his gigantic dynamo-machine ("the old woman") wins out over his love for his wife, until she transgresses the linguistic and cultural border and discovers a creative and independent life of her own in helping to deliver babies for French-Canadians.
9. * **Margaret Laurence** (1926-1987), "The Mask of the Bear" [from *A Bird in the House* (1970)]. Set in Laurence's Manawaka territory. Coming-of-age theme. A young wannabee writer-girl discovers that the realities of love and death in adult life are painfully different from what she had imagined.

10. * Mordecai Richler (1931-2001), “The Summer My Grandmother was Supposed to Die” [from *The Street* (1969)]. Canada’s foremost Jewish novelist examines – with wry humor and cutting irony – the foibles of Jewish-Canadian family life on Montreal’s Urbain Street as it seeks to cope with a grandmother who persistently refuses to die.

11. ** Alice Munro (b. 1931), “The Beggar Maid” [from *Who Do You Think You Are?/ The Beggar Maid* (1978)]. Canada’s pre-eminent short fiction writer still going strong. A long short story/ succinct novella, which depicts the evolution of a relationship from adolescence to maturity governed by a contradictory dynamics of begging for and resisting love. As always handled with magnificent subtlety and craftsmanship of language.

12. ** Austin C. Clarke (b. 1934), “Griff!” [from *When He was Young and Free and Used to Wear Silk* (1971)]. Caribbean-Canadian author of a.o. trilogy of novels set in Toronto. Story about a well-educated, British-trained Caribbean black man in Toronto who takes out his sense of male inferiority and his inability to conquer his addiction to gambling on his wife. Effective portrayal of Caribbeans in Toronto.

13. * Leon Rooke (b. 1934), “The Woman Who Talked to Horses” [from *Sing Me No Love Songs, I’ll Say You No Prayers* (1984)]. A sarcastic and distrustful farmer (narrator) reluctantly invites a woman to his horse farm to cure his horses through whispering, but finds himself the loser, materially, spiritually and morally. Character revelation through voice, action and dialogue.

14. ** Carol Shields (1935-2003), “Scenes” [from *Various Miracles* (1985)]. Carol Shields, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and Governor General’s Award for *The Stone Diaries* (1993) in this story, as in her novels, shows herself the “poet of the quotidien” and the happy compromised life: a forty-four year-old woman with “an aptitude for monogamy” in memory revisits the memorable scenes of her girlhood, growing up in a mid-sized mid-Western Canadian town.

15. * Roch Carrier (b.1937), “The Hockey Sweater” (1979), “Le chandail de hockey” in the original French, transl. by Sheila Fischman [available online at <http://www.hrhs.ca/english> and film on YouTube]. The National Film Board of Canada turned the story into a movie. The story is widely considered an allegory for the linguistic and cultural tensions between anglophone and francophone Canadians, and an essential classic of Canadian literature. An excerpt from the story is now featured in both official languages of Canada on the reverse of the Canadian five-dollar bill.

16. ** Margaret Atwood (b.1939), “Bluebeard’s Egg” (1983) [from *The Penguin Anthology of Stories by Canadian Women*, selected by Denise Chong (1997)]. Wry commentary in Atwood’s deadpan humorous voice on the politics of sex and heterosexual relationships in downtown Toronto examining the emotions, betrayals, and casualties of such relationships.

17. ** Clark Blaise (b. 1940), “A Class of New Canadians” [from *A North American Education* (1973)]. Of mixed French-Canadian/ English-Canadian/ American descent Blaise (married to Bharati Mukherjee), is one of the significant voices of “multicultural” CanLit. An inveterate border-crosser and “resident alien”. This story imagines an American instructor of EFL who has embraced French-Canadian culture as an alternative to US imperialism. Teaching English in Montréal to a multicultural class of “new Canadians,” he hopes to impress upon them that mastery of English is the gateway to cultural power and material success in Canada, only to find that most of his pupils consider Canada as a passing-through station to the US.

18. * Sandra Birdsell (b. 1942), “The Wild Plum Tree” [from *Night Travellers* (1982)]. A Jamaican teacher in home for wayward women (abused and pregnant girls) battles with his pupils, one of whom reveals in her drafts for an essay on “the wild plum tree” how she was violently impregnated. Feminist, postmodernist.

19. * Thomas King (b. 1943), “One Good Story, That One,” “A Coyote Columbus Story” [from *One Good Story, That One*, 1993][second story is available online]. Thomas King, one of Canada’s major First Nations writers, uses post-modern irony and postmodernist narrative techniques to turn the tables on his white readers and their stereotypical understanding of Canada’s indigenous peoples. Hilarious. The same applies to his story “Borders” in the same book in which a stubborn Blackfoot woman crossing the border between Canada and the USA refuses to state her citizenship of either country maintaining she’s Blackfoot.

20. ** Guy Vanderhaeghe (b. 1951), “Dancing Bear” [from *Man Descending* (1982)]. Flemish-Canadian author’s story about a German-Hungarian immigrant who, suffering from Alzheimer, does battle with his caretaker, Mrs. Hax, in a moving attempt to preserve his autonomy and self-respect, as in flashbacks he thinks back to scenes from his boyhood involving a dancing bear with whom he identifies. A triumph of the art of realism, and a must for animal rights’ supporters.

21. ** Rohinton Mistry (b. 1952), “The Ghost from Firozsha Baag” [from *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987)]. Indian-Canadian author’s story about how a cook-housekeeper who works for a white family in Mumbai and is belittled for her superstitious beliefs gains the respect of her white masters. Set in India but written in Canada, this story exemplifies the stage of transnational CanLit (Canada as “global village”).

22. ** Aritha van Herk (b. 1954), “Debris” [from *Carol Shields: Evocation and Echo*, eds. Aritha van Herk and Conny Steenman-Marcusse (2009)]. Dutch-Canadian writer van Herk brings forth the cleaning gene and importance of laundry in this mock heroic tale to pay homage to Carol Shields’s oeuvre. Always a word wizard this is van Herk at her best.

23. * Yeshim Ternar (b. 1956), “Ajax Là-Bas [from *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, eds. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond (1990)]. The Turkish-Canadian protagonist goes house-cleaning to pay for her studies and shows that such an employee is a thinking, imagining and fully appreciative human being. Ternar’s characters demonstrate a philosophical acceptance of being different.

24. * Lynn Coady (b. 1970), “Jesus Christ, Murdeena” [from *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, selected by Jane Urquhart (2007)]. In a Coady story there is only a hair’s-breadth distance between humor and horror. Murdeena’s walks are irritating enough, but when she begins walking around in her bare feet and calling herself the reincarnation of Jesus, “the Way and the Light,” people around her are frankly annoyed. It never occurs to anyone that Murdeena has slipped her moorings, perhaps driven over the edge by small-town boredom. Only the reader is let in on the (very dark) joke.

25. * Madeleine Thien (b. 1974), “Simple Recipes” [from *The Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories*, selected by Jane Urquhart (2007)]. Many of Thien’s stories revolve around struggles relating to generation and culture. She is the first-generation daughter of Chinese-Malaysian immigrants. This story contains a vivid description by a young Canadian girl of her Malaysian-born father making rice. The difficult process of sifting the good and bad grains has metaphorical implications of gains and losses in life.

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