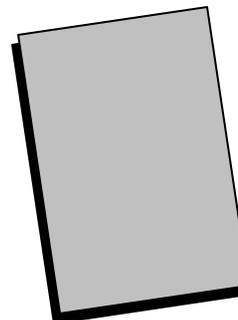


Michigan Humanities Council *presents*



The Great Michigan  
**READ**

2007-08:  
The Nick Adams Stories  
Reader's Guide



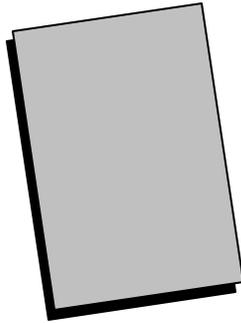
*His eye ached and he was hungry. He kept on hiking, putting the miles of track back of him.*

-Ernest Hemingway,  
"The Battler"  
*The Nick Adams Stories*

# What is *The Great Michigan Read*?

*Imagine everyone in Michigan reading the same book. At the same time.*

*The Great Michigan Read* is a community reading program for the entire state. With a statewide focus on a single literary masterpiece – Ernest Hemingway’s *Nick Adams Stories* – it encourages Michiganders to read or rediscover literature.



## Why The Nick Adams Stories?

*The Nick Adams Stories* is a literary masterpiece literally made in Michigan. The author, Ernest Hemingway, spent the majority of his first 22 summers in Northern Michigan. These experiences played an essential role in his development as one of the world’s most significant writers.

## What are *The Nick Adams Stories* about?

*The Nick Adams Stories* chronicle a young man’s coming of age in a series of linked short stories. As Nick matures, he grapples with the complexities of adulthood, including war, death, marriage, and family.

## How can I participate?

Get a copy of the book or audiobook at Meijer, Barnes & Noble, Borders, Schuler Books, your local library, online, or through other retail locations.

Read the book, utilize the reader’s guide and website, talk about it with your friends, family, or book club, and participate in *Great Michigan Read* events in your neighborhood.

Check [www.greatmichiganread.org](http://www.greatmichiganread.org) for details and a full list of events statewide.

*There was nothing but the pine plain ahead of him, until the far blue hills that marked the Lake Superior height of land.*

# Michigan Writers on Nick Adams



## Liesel Litzenburger

*The Widower*  
*Now You Love Me*

When I started writing, Nick Adams meant the world to me. To me, these stories are just beautiful - almost poetic. Not only do they capture the coming of age of one of literature’s most influential characters, they also depict the startling beauty of the Michigan landscape.

## Dean Bakopoulos

*Please Don’t Come Back from the Moon*

It is not hard to fall in love with Hemingway when you are young and at odds with the drabness of your world—the fishing, the woods, the women. When we read *The Nick Adams Stories ...* we were not just reading stories of adventure, we were reading what felt like a guide to surviving the jagged edges of life, the kind of knocks Hemingway would eventually refer to as “the broken places” we all have to endure.



*Nick looked back from the top of the hill by the schoolhouse. He saw the lights of Petoskey and, off across Little Traverse Bay, the lights of Harbor Springs.*

# Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born July 21, 1899 outside of Chicago, the second of six children by Clarence Edmonds and Grace Hall Hemingway. He grew up in middle-class Oak Park, where his father practiced medicine. Ernest developed an early affinity for both academic and physical pursuits, both of which would shape the rest of his life.



Hemingway spent the majority of his first 22 summers with his family in Northern Michigan, near Petoskey. Without the burden of school or work, he could roam the wilderness, hone his outdoor skills, and accumulate the friends and experiences that fostered his literary development.



He began writing at an early age; after graduating from high school in 1917, Hemingway joined *The Kansas City Star* as a reporter. In 1918, with the First World War raging, he volunteered for the Red Cross ambulance corps in Italy. He was wounded and recuperated in Milan before he returned to America.

Back in the states, Hemingway continued writing; he and his first wife, Hadley Richardson, married in Northern Michigan in 1921. Before he turned 30, his innovative short stories (including some featuring Nick Adams) and novels were widely published. By then, Hemingway was on the verge of literary superstardom and living in Paris with fellow expatriates Ezra

Pound, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and other modernists who would become known as the Lost Generation.

*The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* – along with his short stories, movie adaptations, and charismatic demeanor – catapulted Hemingway to fame. He became a father in 1923; a few years later he divorced, remarried, and relocated, moving to Key West, Florida in 1928. Hemingway fathered two more children with his second wife.

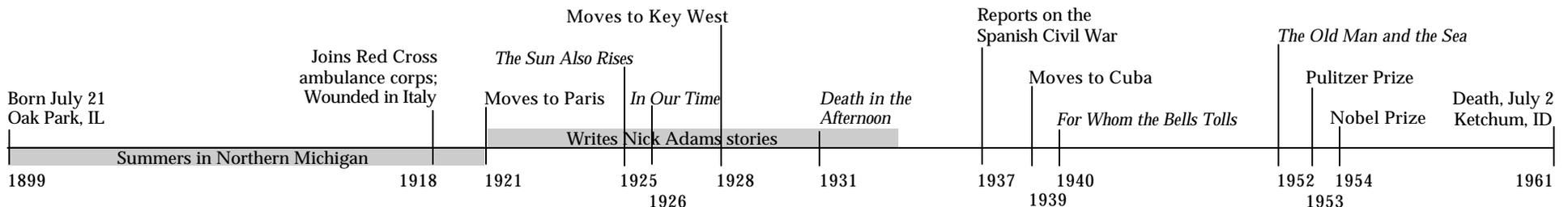
He moved to Cuba in 1939, but not before important excursions to Europe (to report on the Spanish Civil War) and Africa (for safari). The former heavily influenced one of his masterworks, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, published in 1940.

Hemingway continued to write both as a journalist and novelist. His tumultuous personal life continued as well; he was divorced and married twice more. In 1952, he published what many consider to be the defining work of his literary career, *The Old Man and the Sea*. It received the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and Hemingway won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.



Hemingway passed middle age and his medical problems – both physical and psychological – worsened. He moved to Ketchum, Idaho in 1960 and after a prior suicide attempt, he took his own life on July 2, 1961.

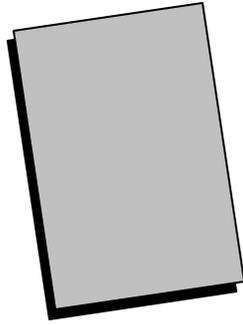
Hemingway's stature continued to grow even after his death, influencing countless writers. Many of Hemingway's works have been issued posthumously. *The Nick Adams Stories*, which included new and previously issued work featuring the character, was published in 1972.



# About the Book

Ernest Hemingway's *The Nick Adams Stories* chronicles a young man's coming of age in a series of linked short stories. The character – Nick Adams – is partly inspired by Hemingway's experiences, from his summers in Northern Michigan to his service in the Red Cross ambulance corps in World War I.

The stories may be read individually or as a whole. They are arranged chronologically, with the earliest showing Nick as a young child and the last depicting Nick as a father. The stories are also grouped according



# About the Publication

The original Nick Adams stories appeared years apart and in different publications. Most were written and published in the 1920s and 1930s. Along with his other short stories, they helped Hemingway establish himself as a preeminent crafter of the form. Later in his life, Hemingway revisited Nick, but these writings remained unpublished until after the author's death.

With some difficulty, readers could piece together a mosaic of Nick. But a complete picture of this compelling character was out of reach for nearly 40 years. In 1972, all of Hemingway's Nick Adams stories – and some unpublished work featuring the character – were collected, arranged to follow Nick's fictional age, and published in one edition, *The Nick Adams Stories*.

# A Note on Context

Some of the *The Nick Adams Stories* are not suitable for young readers. In addition, some contain cultural generalizations that are no longer acceptable. Ernest Hemingway wrote these works at various times in his life, mostly from 1921 to 1933. Commonly held views of women, Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other groups have changed since then.

In addition, the characters' use of generalizations, slurs, or other language may or may not reveal the beliefs of the author. Like all works of literature, readers should keep in mind the cultural and historical context of this work and the author who wrote it.

*I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body.*

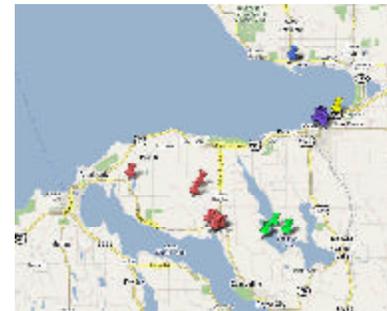
# Ernest Hemingway and Nick Adams in Michigan

The Hemingway family lived in Oak Park, Illinois, spending summers in Northern Michigan. Ernest Hemingway first visited the region when he was just a few months old. A year later, he took his first steps there. Hemingway would spend portions of his first 22 summers in Northern Michigan.



The Hemingway family's annual summer retreat to Northern Michigan was a rite of passage. They were summer people. The Hemingway family owned Windemere, a cottage on Walloon Lake, near Petoskey. Ernest often slept outside, in a tent; he spent his days exploring the wilderness, fishing, hunting, swimming, and reading. As a teenager, Ernest spent more time in Horton Bay with his peers, other teens who summered in Northern Michigan.

The Hemingways usually traveled by a combination of steamer and rail from Oak Park to Petoskey. When he was older, Ernest occasionally made this journey on foot. In 1917, Ernest, his parents, and his younger brother made the journey in the family's Model T.



Hemingway's experiences in Northern Michigan play a prominent role in his writing. The most obvious examples are in his Nick Adams stories; 14 of them are set in Northern Michigan, in places like Walloon Lake, Seney, and Mancelona. The most iconic Nick Adams tale is "Big Two-Hearted River," which many argue captures the essence of the Michigan outdoors experience.

Like many fictional characters, Nick Adams resembles his creator. Their family structures (and relationships) were similar; some of Nick's exploits were directly inspired by Hemingway's. While literary characters often provide an inner glimpse into the life of their creator, it is important to remember that Nick is fictional.

*They were walking on the brown forest floor now and it was springy and cool under their feet.*

# Discussion Themes



## Coming of Age

*The Nick Adams Stories* traces the path of Nick Adams from young man to adult. Generally speaking, it depicts his coming of age, or one's passage into adulthood.

Coming-of-age experiences evolve over time and vary from culture to culture and from person to person. They are often marked by rites of passage. Examples include one's first kiss, first job, first breakup, combat experience, high school graduation, earning a driver's license, etc.

Nick's coming of age experiences are peppered throughout *The Nick Adams Stories*. Many (if not most) of the stories focus on Nick's response to a particular rite of passage. For Nick, these events are often uncomfortable, trying experiences that are not easily resolved. In this sense, Nick is like all of us.

### Discussion Questions

What rites of passage does Nick experience as he comes of age? If you have trouble finding examples, refer to "Indian Camp" or "The Battler."

How do you define coming of age? In your community, what are common rites of passages?

How do Nick's experiences compare with your coming of age experiences?

At the end of stories like "Cross-Country Snow," "In Another Country," or "Big Two-Hearted River," do you feel like you know what's going to happen to Nick after the story ends? Is this frustrating? Why would the author write using this technique? Keep in mind that these stories were meant to stand on their own.



## War

For many, combat is a defining moment in their lives. This was true for both Ernest Hemingway and his Nick Adams character.

All wars have their share of carnage. World War I was shocking in this regard. Chemical weapons, trench warfare, aerial bombardment, long-term stalemate, mass soldier and civilian casualties – it set a new standard in horror.

Nick's role in the war likely mimics the author's own service in the Red Cross ambulance corps and Italian infantry. Both Hemingway and Nick volunteered to serve at young ages, aware of the war's shocking casualties. Both were seriously wounded on the Italian front.

*None of it was important now. The wind blew it out of his head.*

### Discussion Questions

Why do you think Nick volunteered to serve in the war? How does this compare to why men and women currently volunteer for the armed forces?

While traveling to Europe to join the war effort in "Night Before Landing," Nick says that "other people can get killed, but not me." Why do you think he has this attitude?

What is Nick's state of mind as he recovers from his combat injury?

"Big Two-Hearted River" contains the first glimpse of Nick after the war. How does this fishing expedition contrast with his combat experience?

In the section "A Soldier Home," what challenges does Nick face as he tries to fit in with his Hortons Bay friends after the war? How does this compare to the challenges current combat veterans face when they return home after serving in Iraq or Afghanistan?



## Relationships

Nick's relationship with his family and friends is a puzzle. At first, Nick appears well adjusted; his family situation appears "normal." A closer reading reveals otherwise. At one point, Nick is hiding in the woodshed with a shotgun ready to cut his father down.

For years, readers have attempted to decipher Nick's relationship with his family, friends, and lovers. Though not without controversy, some believe that Nick is really a stand-in for the author. In any case, like all of us, Nick's family plays an essential role in creating the adult Nick Adams.

### Discussion Questions:

When does Nick realize that his father is not invincible? When did you realize the same thing about your parents? Why is this important?

Describe the relationship between Nick's mother and father in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife." What role does Nick's mother play in the other stories? What does this tell us about his relationship with her?

Nick runs away with his sister in "The Last Good Country." How does their respective maturity affect their views about their relationship?

Consider Nick's role as a son in "Indian Camp" and as a father in "Fathers and Sons." As Nick matures, he finds himself facing the same obligations as his father. How does this affect Nick's view of his parents?

Critics point to many similarities between Ernest Hemingway and Nick Adams' familial relationships. How does a writer's life influence his work?

*They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills.*

# Stories For Young Readers

Some of *The Nick Adams Stories* deal with adult themes that may not be appropriate for young readers (below high school). Fortunately, each Nick Adams story was written to stand on its own. Teachers, parents, and librarians are encouraged to select appropriate stories for younger readers interested in these timeless tales. Some suggestions are below.

## “Three Shots”

Nick is a young boy. He, his father, and his uncle are camping in the woods. At night, his father and uncle go fishing on a nearby lake. Nick stays behind, alone in the wilderness. He is instructed to fire three shots should he encounter any emergency. Will Nick lose his nerve and sound the alarm?

### Discussion Questions

On page 14, why does Nick suddenly realize that he is afraid of dying?

Why doesn't Nick tell his father the real reason he fired the shots?

## “Now I Lay Me”

Nick is serving in the Italian army during World War I, where he is injured in combat. At night, while lying with other soldiers, he is fighting the urge to sleep. He fears that his soul will leave his body and never return. Note: Nick is referred to as “Signor Tenente” (“Mister Lieutenant” in Italian).

### Discussion Questions

How is the title of the story, “Now I Lay Me,” a clue to Nick's mood?

How have Nick's combat experiences and injuries affected his state of mind?



## “Big Two-Hearted River”

Nick is back in Northern Michigan for the first time since his service and injury in World War I. He has taken the train to Seney, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where he makes camp and fly fishes for trout.

### Discussion Questions

Is this story a simple tale about Nick's appreciation of nature's beauty, or is there greater meaning? Why?

Consider Hemingway's use of short sentences in this story, especially when Nick is setting up camp (top of page 184). Why do you think the author uses this style? Is it too simple? Does it work? Why or why not?

*Hunting this country for quail as his father had taught him, Nicholas Adams started thinking about his father. When he first thought about him it was always the eyes.*

# Resources

## **The Great Michigan Read**

[www.greatmichiganread.org](http://www.greatmichiganread.org)

## **Michigan Hemingway Society**

[www.northquest.com/hemingway/](http://www.northquest.com/hemingway/)

## **Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University**

[www.clarke.cmich.edu/hemingway/index.htm](http://www.clarke.cmich.edu/hemingway/index.htm)

## **Michigan eLibrary (MeL)**

[www.mel.org](http://www.mel.org)

## **Hemingway's Life**

### **Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story**

Baker, Carlos. 1969.

### **Along with Youth: Hemingway, the Early Years**

Griffin, Peter. 1985.

### **Hemingway**

Lynn, Kenneth Schuyler. 2006.

### **Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences**

Mellow, James R. 1993.

### **Hemingway: A Biography**

Meyers, Jeffrey. 1999.

### **Michael Palin's Hemingway Adventure**

Palin, Michael. 1999.

[www.pbs.org/hemingwayadventure](http://www.pbs.org/hemingwayadventure)

### **The Young Hemingway**

Reynolds, Michael S. 1998.

### **At the Hemingways**

Sanford, Marcelline Hemingway. 1999.

## **Hemingway in Michigan**

### **“Dad, Are We There Yet?”**

Buske, Morris. *Michigan History Magazine*. March/April 1999.

### **“Up North with the Hemingways”**

Federspiel, Michael. *Michigan History Magazine*. Forthcoming.

### **“Gone Fishin’”**

Jobst, Jack. *Michigan History Magazine*. Nov/Dec 1995.

### **“Hemingway in Seney”**

Jobst, Jack. *Michigan History Magazine*. Nov/Dec 1990.

### **Ernie: Hemingway's Sister “Sunny” Remembers**

Miller, Madelaine Hemingway. 1999.

## **Hemingway in Michigan**

Montgomery, Constance Cappel. 1999.

## **Hemingway: Up in Michigan Perspectives**

Svoboda, Frederic and Waldmeir, Joe (eds). 1995.

## **Hemingway's Other Michigan Work**

### **“Up in Michigan” (1923)**

### **The Torrents of Spring (1926)**

## **Nick Adams on Film**

### **The Killers (1946)**

### **The World of Nick Adams (1957)**

### **Ubiytsy (Russian, The Killers) (1958)**

### **Hemingway's Adventures as a Young Man (1962)**

### **The Killers (1964)**

## **Hemingway's Contemporaries**

### **Winesburg, Ohio**

Anderson, Sherwood. 1919.

### **U.S.A.**

Dos Passos, John. 1930, 1932, 1936.

### **The Waste Land**

Eliot, T.S. 1922.

### **The Great Gatsby**

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. 1925.

### **The Good Soldier**

Ford, Ford Madox. 1915.

### **Ulysses**

Joyce, James. 1922.

### **The Cantos.**

Pound, Ezra. Various.

### **The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas**

Stein, Gertrude. 1933.

## **Additional Web Resources**

### **Hemingway's Michigan**

[www.detroitphotographic.org/Hem268/](http://www.detroitphotographic.org/Hem268/)

### **Little Traverse History Museum**

[www.petoskeymuseum.org](http://www.petoskeymuseum.org)

### **Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park**

[www.ehfp.org](http://www.ehfp.org)

### **International Hemingway Society**

[hemingwaysociety.org](http://hemingwaysociety.org)

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# The Great Michigan READ

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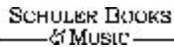
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