

Topic Page: [Hemingway, Ernest, 1899-1961](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/hemingway_ernest_1899_1961)

Definition: **Hemingway, Ernest Miller** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

US writer. After serving as an ambulance driver in World War 1, Hemingway became a journalist, first in Paris and later as a war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War and World War 2. The novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), published in the UK as *Fiesta* (1927), chronicled the Lost Generation and established his reputation. Later works include a non-fiction work about bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and the novella *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). Hemingway was also an acclaimed short-story writer. He received the 1954 Nobel Prize in literature.

Summary Article: **Hemingway, Ernest**

From *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois, on July 21, 1899. As one of the writers of the “lost generation,” he gave a voice to the uncertainty of the American experience in the post—World War I world, addressing the moral void left by the first mechanized war. Hemingway had an enormous influence on twentieth-century American literary style, refining the craft of the short story and changing the way in which fictional characters spoke. His work tells us specifically about Americans in the twentieth century, home and abroad, as well as showing us that concerns of love, honor, and bravery are universal and will endure. Hemingway was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953 for his novella, *The Old Man and the Sea* and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

Like many of his peers, Hemingway honed his craft in Paris, developing under the tutelage of Gertrude Stein, who focused his attention on language. In Paris he also socialized with other key writers and artists of the day, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Archibald McLeish, Pablo Picasso, and Ezra Pound. Hemingway's cultural significance lies in his role as a constructed celebrity. Throughout his career Hemingway managed to create a public persona for himself—fisherman, big game hunter, womanizer, pugilist—the personification of machismo. His inability to be as heroic as his characters, however, often resulted in personal unhappiness and depression. As Michael Reynolds has written, “Hemingway told us that pursuit was happiness, and that any story followed far enough would end badly. He lived constantly on the edge of the American experience and constantly in the public eye.”

Hemingway's literary importance is rooted in his stylistic innovations. The advice that he received as a fledging reporter at the *Kansas City Star*—to cut out all unnecessary words and to concentrate on active verbs—led to plain, succinct prose that has proved easy to parody, but very hard to emulate. Hemingway recalled this training later in life saying, “Those were the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing. I've never forgotten them.”

Hemingway served as an ambulance driver in World War I, later turning to this experience in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). His postwar experiences as a writer in Paris were the theme of *The Sun Also Rises* (1930); the Spanish Civil War was the focus of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Hemingway often wrote of a character called Nick Adams, a surrogate for himself, and used this persona to reflect on his upbringing and experiences as a young man in the Michigan woods of his youth. *In Our Time* (1925), his first full-length work of fiction after he abandoned the idea of being a poet at the advice of Ezra Pound, contrasted Adams's pastoral upbringing with the reality of modern warfare. In 1932 Hemingway published *Death in the Afternoon*, a nonfiction book about bullfighting. In his depiction of the stoic hero

facing huge odds and great danger, Hemingway began to construct the persona he would admire and try to achieve in his own life. His heroes display grace under pressure. The following year, returning to fiction, he published *Winner Take Nothing*, a collection of short stories that include "A Clean Well-Lighted Place," a story that James Joyce called "one of the best stories ever written." Also in 1933, Hemingway went on safari in Africa, a trip that would fuel more nonfiction writing (*The Green Hills of Africa*), and some of his best-known short stories. Hemingway used his nonfiction as a forum for his strong views on other writers and the literary scene and was often harshest on those who were crucial influences on him, especially Gertrude Stein and Ford Madox Ford.

The 1940s and 1950s were generally disappointing for Hemingway as a writer. Hemingway had avoided most of World War II until he traveled to Europe and joined the forces pressing into France after D-Day in 1944. Hemingway entered a liberated Paris and set up shop at the bar of the Ritz Hotel for about a week. In 1946, after returning to the United States, Hemingway worked on *Across the River and Into the Trees*, which he hoped would be seen as the great novel of World War II. It appeared in 1950 to a lukewarm reception.

Two plane crashes on a 1954 trip to Africa, the second being the more severe, cost Hemingway his health and prevented him from traveling to Sweden to receive the Nobel Prize in person. He slipped into severe depression, exacerbated by heavy drinking, and underwent treatment, including electroshock therapy, at a variety of clinics. After a lifetime of traveling, and spells of living in Havana, Cuba, and Key West, Florida, (a location that still celebrates his presence with an annual festival), Hemingway and his fourth wife, Mary, settled in Ketchum, Idaho. Unable to write successfully anymore, and with his memory failing him, Ernest Hemingway took his own life on July 2, 1961 by means of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head.



Ernest Hemingway skiing, Switzerland. 1927. Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.



Ernest Hemingway (far right) on safari in Tanganyika. 1934. Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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