Why a required list?
Kelly Easton writes: “One wouldn’t become a painter without studying Degas and Picasso, or a cellist without knowing the canon of classical music and listening to Yo Yo Ma and other fine musicians. Language, like music, enters us through osmosis. Just as one needs to listen to understand music, to see in order to grow as a painter, one needs to read constantly and observantly in order to be a writer. Reading the best works possible, as the ones suggested on this list, will allow us to study craft consciously and will elevate our language and thought unconsciously. Reading the best work will allow us to write our best work.”

We believe that writers need a broad and deep knowledge of the field in which we work. In our case, that field includes literature and its historical and cultural contexts. In Eleanora Tate’s words, these books “offer today’s readers as well as today’s aspiring writers significant insights into the hero’s or heroine’s time periods and places, they represent excellence in craft, and they reveal much about both the various characters’ ethnic heritages and the realities of who these characters are in the American and global community.”

These books also give faculty and students a common language with which to discuss the literature as well as the craft of writing.

Why these books?
The original required reading list from 2007 included books that were nominated by faculty and appeared on multiple recommended and award-winning book lists. The selection committee chose books that had stood the test of time and that would serve as models of craft and good writing. Seminal books that signaled a shift—in publishing, in form and style, in the culture at large, in adults’ and children’s attitudes and interests—were an important part of the list.

In revising the list in 2009, faculty added a few new criteria to the original list: (1) to achieve a balance between classic and contemporary literature; (2) to increase the racial and cultural diversity of the books on the list; and (3) to strengthen the fantasy and nonfiction selections.

The 2013 committee was charged with two additional tasks: to make room on the list for books written by every current member of the MFAC and to include books on the craft of writing.

There are other changes: Nonfiction and poetry titles are no longer in a separate category; they have been integrated into the appropriate age-based category. Also, the categories Books for Young Readers and Books for Middle Grade readers are now a single category: Books for Younger/Elementary readers. And finally, the publication date of each title is included.

We encourage you to read, reflect, and examine. Carry on this discussion among yourselves. Let the books serve as guides for your own work as writers.
Books for the Very Young (Birth to Age 2)

1. *Goodnight Moon* (Margaret Wise Brown, 1947)
2. *Mr. Gumpy’s Outing* (John Burningham, 1971)
5. *Max and Ruby, Max’s New Suit, or Max’s First Word* or any Max book (Rosemary Wells, 1990s-present)

Picture Books (Ages 2 to 8)

1. *Madeline* (Ludwig Bemelmans, 1939)
2. *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* (Virginia Lee Burton, 1939)
3. *Big Bang! The tongue-tickling tale of a speck that became spectacular* (Carolyn Cinami DeCristofano, 2005)
4. *Millions of Cats* (Wanda Gág, 1928)
5. *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* (Kevin Henkes, 1996)
9. *The Story of Ferdinand* (Munro Leaf, 1936)
10. *Sam and the Tigers* (Julius Lester, 1996)
11. *Make Way for Ducklings* (Robert McCloskey, 1941)
12. *We are the Ship* (Kadir Nelson, 2008)
13. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Beatrix Potter, 1902)
14. *Curious George* (H.A. Rey, 1941)
15. *Tar Beach* (Faith Ringgold, 1991)
17. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (Jon Scieszka, 1989)
19. *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night* (Joyce Sidman, 2010)
22. *The House in the Night* (Susan Marie Swanson, 2008)

Books for Beginning Readers (Ages 5 to 7)

1. *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (Gwendolyn Brooks, 1956)
4. *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) or *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) (Dr. Seuss)
5. *Coral Reefs* (Seymour Simon, 2013)
6. *There is a Bird on Your Head* (Mo Willems, 2007)
Books for Younger/Elementary grade readers

2. *The Folk Keeper* (Franny Billingsley, 1999)
3. *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* (Judy Blume, 1970)
4. *The Secret Garden* (Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1911)
5. *Ramona the Pest* (Beverly Cleary, 1968)
8. *James and the Giant Peach* (Roald Dahl, 1961)
11. *Out of My Mind* (Sharon Draper, 2010)
12. *The Borrowers* (Mary Norton, 1952)
14. *Little House in the Big Woods* (Laura Ingalls Wilder, 1932)
15. *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart* (Vera B. Williams, 2001)
16. *One Crazy Summer* (Rita Williams-Garcia, 2010)
17. *Dragon Wings* (Laurence Yep, 1975)

Books for Older Readers (Ages 12 and up)

5. *Shipbreaker* (Paolo Bacigalupi, 2010)
6. *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler’s Shadow* (Susan Campbell Bartoletti, 2005)
7. *Hope Was Here* (Joan Bauer, 2000)
8. *Am I Blue* (Marion Dane Bauer, 1994)
18. *Code Name Verity* (Elizabeth Wein, 2012)

Craft Books

1. *In the Palm of Your Hand* (Steve Kowit)
3. *Writing Comics* (Scott McLeod)
4. *Writing Fiction* (Janet Burroway, any edition)
5. *Writing Picture Books* (Ann Whitford Paul)

Faculty Books

1. *Split* (Swati Avasthi)
2. *Up North at the Cabin* (Marsha Wilson Chall)
3. *The Outlandish Adventures of Liberty Aimes* (Kelly Easton)
4. *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* (Emily Jenkins)
5. *Newsgirl* (Liza Ketchum)
7. *Snowflake Bentley* (Jacqueline Briggs Martin)
8. *My Country Tis of Thee: How One Song Reveals the History of Civil Rights* (Claire Rudolf Murphy)
9. *Hometown* (Marsha Qualey)
10. *Big Mama Makes the World* (Phyllis Root)
11. *Bad Apple* (Laura Ruby)
12. *Okay for Now* (Gary Schmidt)
13. *Celeste’s Harlem Renaissance* (Eleanora Tate)
14. *Behind the Mask* (Jane Resh Thomas)
15. *The Real Boy* (Anne Ursu)
16. *American Born Chinese* (Gene Yang)