



# Iowa City

## UNESCO city of Literature



Given its size, Iowa City must be the most literary city on earth. Often called the “Athens of the Midwest,” it boasts a unique set of influential literary institutions that explore new ways to teach and support writers. This ever-evolving mix of writers and the institutions that support them has created a history and an identity in which the people of Iowa City take enormous pride, prizing their role in celebrating and honoring writers and good writing.

### Fast facts

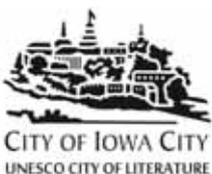
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- Though Iowa City is only the sixth-largest city in Iowa, with a population of 63,000, it is well known throughout the U.S. and the world as a literary center.
- Since 1955 graduates and faculty of the University of Iowa have won more than 25 Pulitzer Prizes in literature. Authors who have lived, taught and studied in the city include Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Robert Penn Warren, Robert Lowell, Flannery O’Connor, Rita Dove, Jane Smiley, Robert Hass, and John Irving.

### A Literary Capital

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- **Acclaimed Writing Programs**  
As the home of the highly acclaimed Iowa Writers’ Workshop -- the world’s first Master of Fine Arts degree program in creative writing -- Iowa City and the University of Iowa have played a substantial role in how literature, first in America and then around the world, has come to be taught and written. The MFA degree workshop concept has spread to more than 300 American universities and to universities in numerous other countries. Other important programs





at the University include the Translation Workshop; the Playwrights Workshop; the Nonfiction Writing Program; the Summer Writing Festival (composed of dozens of workshops for the general public); and the Young Writers' Studio, a summer program for high-school students.

- **International Authors**

More than 1,200 emerging and established writers from more than 120 countries have been in residence at the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, which has enjoyed long-standing support from the U.S. Department of State. Writers have included such luminaries as Bessie Head, Bei Dao, Luisa Valenzuela, John Banville and Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk. Each fall these writers participate in dozens of public events, including readings and panel discussions.

- **Publishing**

Iowa City is home to 11 literary presses, including one devoted to translation; two publishers devoted to language and literacy materials; and a range of print and online journals, as well as several literary blogs. The highly respected Center for the Book preserves and extends the art of bookmaking.

## **For the Public**

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- **Readings through the media**

Among the valuable local institutions is Prairie Lights Books, the 'destination' independent bookstore that hosts three or more live readings every week. 'Live From Prairie Lights' has been the only ongoing series of live-broadcast literary readings on American radio, and the tradition is now entering a new era through different media.

- **City Libraries**

In 2006, for a population of 63,027, there were 63,713 public library patrons; borrowers as a percentage of population reached 101 percent. (The figure includes residents of neighboring areas arrogating borrowing privileges for their work in Iowa City.) The university's research library is the 18th largest of its kind in the country; its holdings include special literary collections and hundreds of thousands of rare books; and it is the location of many literature-related exhibitions.

- **Literary events**

The various literary institutions sponsor more than

180 literary events a year, and the UI Nonfiction Writing Program hosts a biennial NonfictionNow Conference, which draws participants from around the world.

- **Literary Walk**

A series of commissioned bronze artworks are embedded in the sidewalks downtown, each highlighting the words of an Iowa City writer.



## A Creative Economy

- **Creativity and Growth**

Johnson County, home to Iowa City, possesses a healthy creative economy, with 30 percent of the county's employees working in creative industries. A new study by a University of Iowa economics professor confirms that this creative-economy foundation gives the county strong prospects for economic growth in the future.

- **A Circle of Spending**

Of the \$16.9 billion earned each year by Iowa's creative workers, \$8.6 billion is spent on Iowa-produced goods and services, which in total supports \$13.1 billion in total industrial output, \$4.7 billion in total labor income in all other industries, and 195,464 additional jobs.