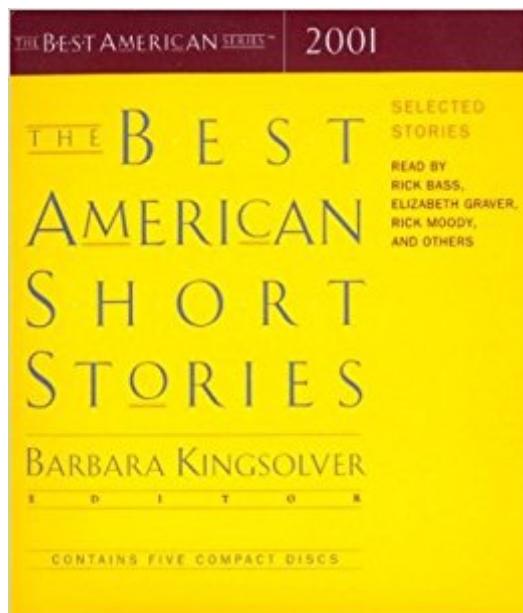


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# The Best American Short Stories 2001



## Synopsis

This year's Best American Short Stories is edited by the critically acclaimed and best-selling author Barbara Kingsolver, whose latest book is *Prodigal Summer*. Kingsolver's selections for The Best American Short Stories 2001 showcase a wide variety of new voices and masters, such as Alice Munro, Rick Moody, Dorothy West, and John Updike. "Reading these stories was both a distraction from and an anchor to the complexities of my life; my pleasure, my companionship, my salvation. I hope they will be yours." Barbara Kingsolver

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If the 20 stories in this year's collection have any one thing in common, it is their substance and seriousness of purpose. This is mostly a good thing entries by veteran writers like Alice Munro, John Updike and Annette Sanford, and by relative newcomers like Andrea Barrett, Barbara Klein Moss and Peter Orner are intellectually stimulating and satisfying but the inclusion of a few lighter selections might have leavened the mix. Munro is her usual magical self in "Post and Beam," in which a young Vancouver wife comes to terms with the immutability of married life. Ha Jin, in "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town," tells of the impact an American fast food franchise in China has on both employees and customers, imparting a number of reasons why East and West will never see eye to eye. "Servants of the Map," the extraordinary novella-length story by Barrett, tells the tale of an English mapmaker in 1860s India struggling with his demanding job, loneliness and, most

of all, his unquenchable desire to be a botanist. In Orner's brief tale, "The Raft," a grandfather ushers his grandson into a closet to tell him an old WWII story in a new way. Sanford's contribution short, too tells how a 16-year-old girl seemingly doing nothing for the summer is preparing for adult life. The careful character development, subtle drama and pristine prose of these selections should once again thoroughly satisfy fans of quality short fiction. \$200,000 marketing campaign; sweepstakes promotion. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In his introduction to Prize Stories 2001, editor Dark notes an increase in the number of longer stories, or novellas, being published in literary journals. To reflect this trend, Dark chose to publish three longer pieces, bringing the total number of stories in this year's volume to 17 rather than the usual 20. One of these, Mary Swan's "The Deep," an absorbing account of twin sisters in the World War I era, was chosen as the best story of the year. Runners up were Dan Chaon's "Big Me" and Alice Munro's "Floating Bridge." Munro also receives a special citation for her continued notable work in the short story form. Dark writes that he was torn between Munro's above-mentioned story and her equally fine "Post and Beam;" happily, the latter appears in Best American Short Stories 2001. Kingsolver narrowed her selections by opting for only those that "tell me something I don't already know." So we get funny and intriguing views of other cultures, such as Ha Jin's "After Cowboy Chicken Came to Town," which is about the workers in an American fast-food restaurant in China; Katherine Shonk's "My Mother's Garden," set near post-disaster Chernobyl; and Trevanian's sly Basque fable, "The Apple Tree." Two well-deserving stories, Elizabeth Graver's "The Mourning Door" and Andrea Barrett's "Servants of the Map," appear in both volumes. Both volumes are valuable additions to academic and larger public libraries. Christine DeZelar-Tiedman, Univ. of Minnesota Libs., Minneapolis Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I love this series, and this 2001 is still my favorite. I lost our original so I bought it again. "The Apple Tree" is probably my favorite short story I've read. "Boys" is a short, fast roller-coaster of emotion and impact--breathtaking.. "Cowboy Chicken" is excellent. If you like short stories--get it!

This is a wonderful collection of short stories. Many of them are from small literary magazines, and I would have not encountered these stories and authors if Barbara Kingsolver had not assembled this great collection. In addition to some of my longtime favorite writers (John Updike, Alice Munro, Rick

Bass), I met some new favorites: Roy Parvin, Annette Sanford, Peter Orner. The geographic scope of this collection is amazing--stories set in China, Russia, the Himalayas, Wales, just to mention a few. The diversity in narrative styles is pretty impressive too. This is now one of my best-loved collections of short stories.

I feel as though the Best American Series is hit or miss, though I still collect them and have about twenty-five years' worth. This, however, is one of my very favorites. Even Kingsolver's intro is worth reading -- she is real and honest and has a lot to say about writing that's worth reading. A number of great stories in this volume, too, especially M. Silver's "What I Saw From Where I Stood." Worth adding to your collection.

great book with interesting authors and stories

The book was like new and the stories were top shelf. I'd like another book in the American Short Stories series that meet these high standards of quality .

So, in theory, you could call me a psycho. I actually run out and purchase the Best American Series for any given year the very day it comes out and I'm not ashamed. But, you know, I've noticed that of the reviews I've read so far from any year, half of the people who read the series are completely satisfied with it (or just lying) and the other half want to burn every single copy cover to cover. Well, this is what I think: this year wasn't half bad. In past years, I've put the book down half way through, sometimes skimmed through. But with the 2001 edition, I made a conscious effort to get through the entire thing, and I didn't do too terribly. For one thing, Barbara Kingsolver's introduction is well worth the read. I swear that in a few decades, the intro to every edition will become some sort of critical piece of literary criticism. It's interesting to hear what some so-called "in" authors have to say about the state of short fiction. But, more importantly, it gives you insight into who exactly picked what. Theoretically, this isn't necessarily the Best American Short Stories, but more like The Best American Short Stories According To Such-and-Such. Regardless, there are quite a few that deserve their slots. Among my favorites is "Brothers and Sisters Around the World", by Andrea Lee, a story set in Madagascar which explores the unique bonds between women of different cultures, and the relationship between Africans and African-American. Also up on my list is "What I Saw from Where I Stood" by Marisa Silver. I had read this story in the publication in which it had originally appeared and had put it down knowing it would be picked for the series. Other greats include "Boys"

by Rick Moody, "The Apple Tree" by Trevanian, "Betty Hutton" by Roy Parvin, and "The Mourning Door" by Elizabeth Graver. However, I admit that quite a few of the stories lacked for me. Of the twenty stories, I didn't bother to finish "Servants of the Map", "The Rug Weaver", or "Post and Beam". Not because they were necessarily bad stories, but because they didn't really keep me wanting to turn that next page. And the others that I have not mentioned, though well written, obviously didn't hold much weight in my mind as far as memory goes. In short, this is a collection just like the collections of the past years, chosen with a biased, but rich and diverse just the same. It is a collection for people interested in the current state of the short story, and people who want to open up to new forms, and ideas, and styles. I'm not guaranteeing you'll want to read every story to your friends, but it keeps you interested most of the way. Besides, "best" is a relative term, anyway. Nowhere on the book does it say that you have to ADORE every single piece in it.

I'm not a connoisseur of contemporary fiction, but when I saw that Barbara Kingsolver edited this year's edition of Best American Short Stories, I was eager to read the work of those writers whom one of my favorite writers most admires. I was not disappointed. Kingsolver has compiled a diverse selection of short stories that vary in depth and texture. Some, like Peter Ho Davies' "Think of England," with its collection of vivid characters and straightforward narrative, are easily digested. Others, like Nancy Reisman's "Illumination," will challenge even the most intelligent reader to find the "large truths delivered in tight spaces" to which Kingsolver refers in her introduction. (This, despite the book's most memorable opening line: "Lucia Mazzano is a loaf of bread." It immediately reminded me of the improvised line, "You're part eggplant," in True Romance with Christopher Walken and Dennis Hopper.) Highly recommended, especially for those wishing to explore contemporary fiction.

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