



Twilight

by Stephenie Meyer

In a Nutshell

Twilight, [Stephenie Meyer's](#) debut novel, tells the story of Isabella "Bella" Swan, a normal seventeen-year-old girl who falls in love with a vampire, Edward Cullen. Though Edward loves Bella deeply in return, he also battles his natural instinct to kill her. As a vampire he is, after all, hardwired to think of Bella and all other humans as his prey.

Meyer got her idea for the book from a dream she had about an average girl and her vampire lover having a conversation while sitting in a woody meadow. Meyer recalls,

I was so intrigued by the nameless couple's story that I hated the idea of forgetting it [...] (Also, the vampire was just so darned good-looking, that I didn't want to lose the mental image.) [...] [I] put everything that I possibly could on the back burner and sat down at the computer to write - something I hadn't done in so long that I wondered why I was bothering. ([source](#))

Published in 2005, *Twilight* won tons of praise. The novel was selected as an "Editor's Choice" by the [New York Times](#) and a "book of the year" by [Publisher's Weekly](#). *Twilight* is also ranked in the [American Library Association's](#) top ten "Books for Young Adults," and is one of Amazon's "Best Books of the Decade So Far." After three sequels and a movie, *Twilight* has followed in *Harry Potter's* footsteps to become a full-fledged cultural phenomenon on which everybody has an opinion.

Despite its clear popularity, the question remains: is *Twilight* great literature? You shouldn't be afraid to ask this question. In fact, you should ask the same about every book covered by Shmoop. When asked if her books have a message about love, Stephenie Meyer said, "I never write messages. I always write things that entertain me" ([source](#)). So is *Twilight* simply entertainment, or is it great literature?

Why Should I Care?

Whether or not you're a fan, you can't deny that *Twilight* has struck a chord in our society. In 2008, Stephenie Meyer sold 22 million books - more than any other author that year. Her four books in the *Twilight* saga stood as the top four best-selling books of 2008, according to *USA Today's* list of top 100 titles of 2008 ([source](#)). *Twilight* has a huge contingent of fans, from teen girls across the country to the online group [TwilightMoms.com](#).

A big question remains: what makes *Twilight* so popular?

We think part of the answer lies in its universal themes.

Beneath the specifics of the *Twilight* plot, the novel contains some recurring motifs that have been popular in storytelling over time, including "forbidden love" and "Beauty and the Beast."

You've seen similar stories before.

Forbidden love forms the basis of many famous tales, including Shakespeare's [*Romeo and Juliet*](#), Arthurian legend's Guinevere and Lancelot, Nathaniel Hawthorne's [*The Scarlet Letter*](#), Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, and even Disney's [*The Little Mermaid*](#). Similarly, we've repeatedly seen tales of women falling in love and "taming" beastly or monstrous men.

The most obvious example is the fairy tale of "Beauty and the Beast," but elements of this story line also appear in Charlotte Brontë's [*Jane Eyre*](#), and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, among others. For one reason or another, these types of plots allure us as readers, and *Twilight* taps into these time-honored motifs.

Check out our "Character Analyses" of [Edward](#) and [Bella](#) for some detailed connections between these *Twilight* characters and famous heroes and heroines of literature.

Additionally, *Twilight* combines aspects of our modern day world with the mythological. Bella goes to a normal, modern high school, she uses the internet and listens to CDs, and her parents are divorced (a common experience for teens today).

Yet, she also has a vampire for a boyfriend.

Twilight may, in part, be compelling because it takes everyday life and spices it up with a bit of mystery, mythology, and danger.

Why do you think that *Twilight* has struck such a chord with so many people today? And do you think it will stand the "test of time" like the literary classics mentioned above?