The Forgotten Fundamentals

An Arts and Sciences Assessment of American College Students



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About Us

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AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI (ACTA)

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price.

Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over 1,300 colleges and universities, including over 23,000 current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over 15,000 readers.

For more information, visit <u>GoACTA.org</u>, or ACTA's official X account, @goACTA.

COLLEGE PULSE

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse offers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique American College Student Panel[™] that includes over 950,000 college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information, visit <u>collegepulse.com</u> or College Pulse's official X account, @CollegeInsights.

Methodology

Sampling Methodology

This survey was designed and conducted by College Pulse between April 1, 2025, and April 21, 2025. Surveys were completed by a sample of 3,215 undergraduate students in the United States. A similar civic literacy assessment was conducted in 2024 and can be viewed <u>here</u>.

The sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel[™] that includes over 950,000 verified students representing more than 1,500 different colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university organizations. To reduce the effects of any non-response bias, a post-stratification adjustment was applied based on demographic distributions of the undergraduate populations. These demographic distributions are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalanced the sample based on the following benchmarks: gender, race and ethnicity, voter registration, financial aid status, and class year. The sample weighting was accomplished using an adjustment process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

The margin of error for this survey ranges from +/- 2–9 percentage points. Margins of error are typically calculated on probability-based samples and are not technically correct for non-probability online samples. We supply them here to provide a general assessment of error ranges that may be associated with the data.

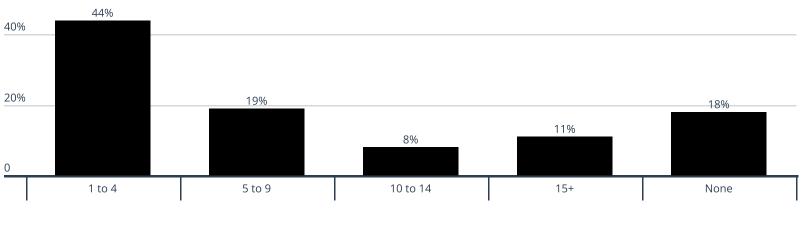
For more information about our methodology, <u>click here</u> or contact methodology@collegepulse.com.

Highlights

One in five students have not read a book outside of class in the last year.

- Just under half (44%) of students have read 1 to 4 books in the last year that were not assigned in class.
- Democrat students are more likely than Republican students to have read 5 to 9 books, while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to have read 1 to 4 books.





All Students (n=3,215)

In the past year, how many books have you finished reading (NOT audiobooks) that were NOT assigned in a class?

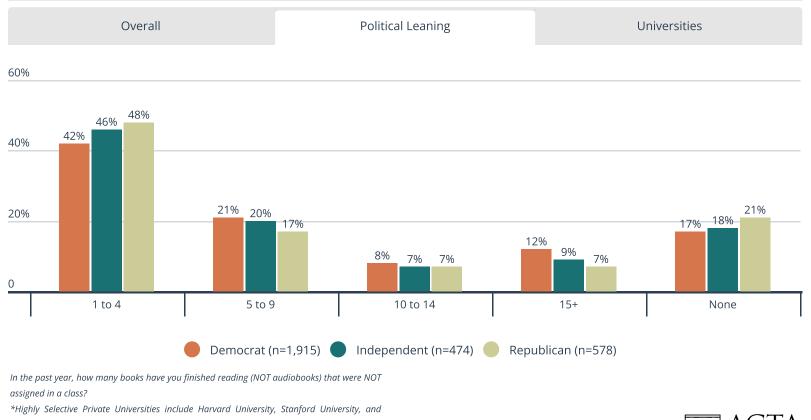
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*National Public Universities include Arizona State University, The Ohio State University, 5 University of Virginia, and University of Michigan - Ann Arbor



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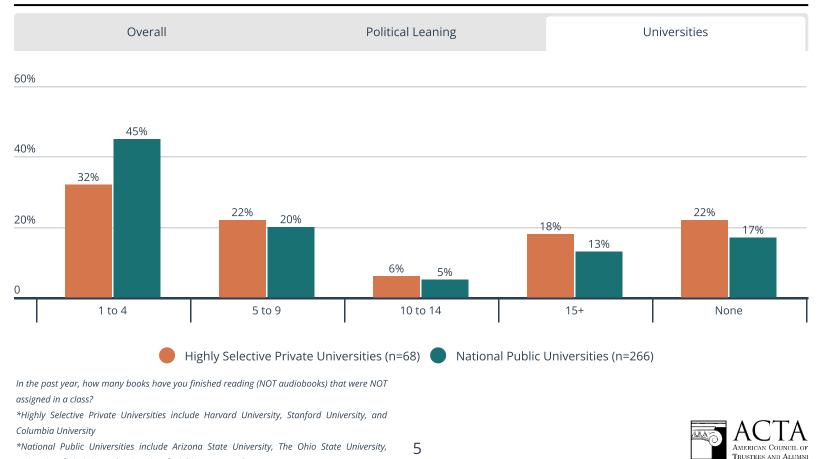


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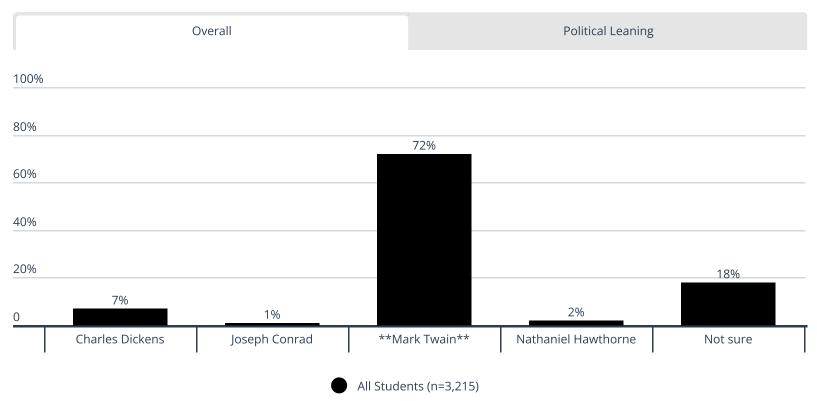
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University of Virginia, and University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

Three-quarters of students know that Mark Twain wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

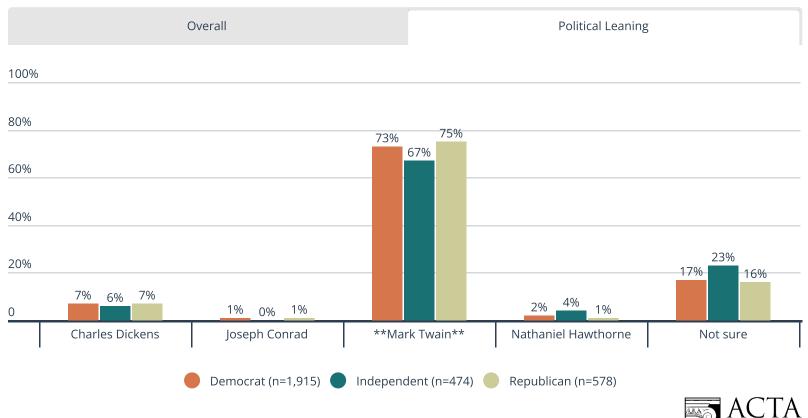
• Democrat students (73%) and Republican (75%) students are equally likely to say that Mark Twain wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, while Independent students (67%) are less likely to say that Mark Twain is the author.





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• Democrat students (73%) and Republican (75%) students are equally likely to say that Mark Twain wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, while Independent students (67%) are less likely to say that Mark Twain is the author.



AMERICAN

Half of students correctly identify Nathaniel Hawthorne as the author of *The Scarlet Letter*.

• Female students (53%) are more likely than male students (45%) to know the author of *The Scarlet Letter*.

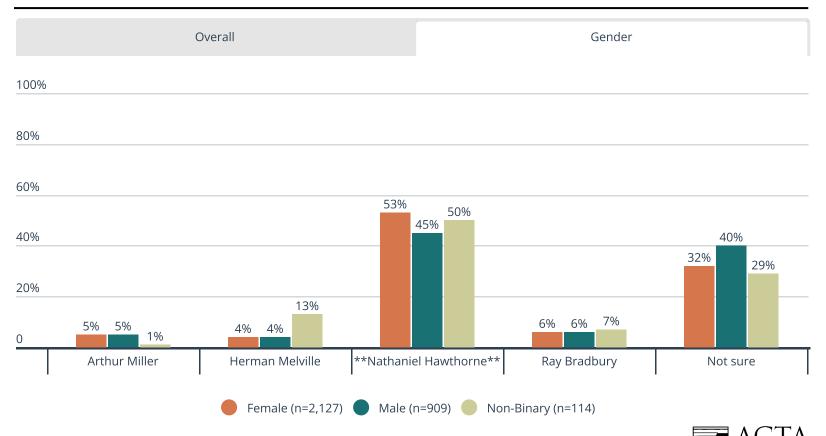
	Overall			Gender			
100%							
30%							
60%							
0%			49%		264		
0%					36%		
I	5%	4%		6%			
	Arthur Miller	Herman Melville	**Nathaniel Hawthorne**	Ray Bradbury	Not sure		





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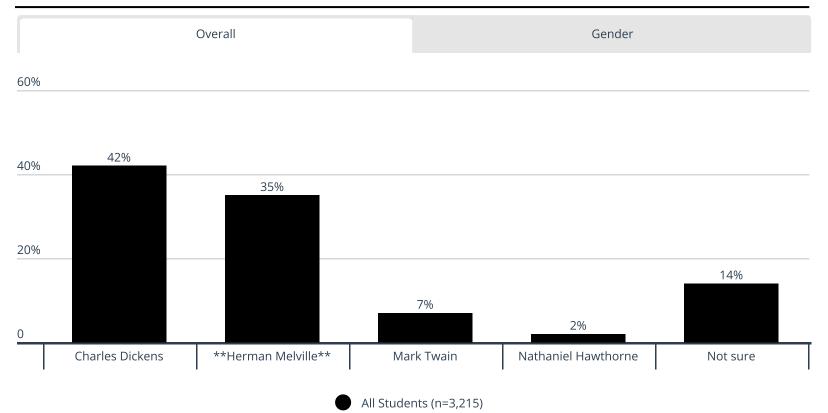
• Female students (53%) are more likely than male students (45%) to know the author of *The Scarlet Letter*.



American

Only one-third of students know that Herman Melville is the author of Moby-Dick.

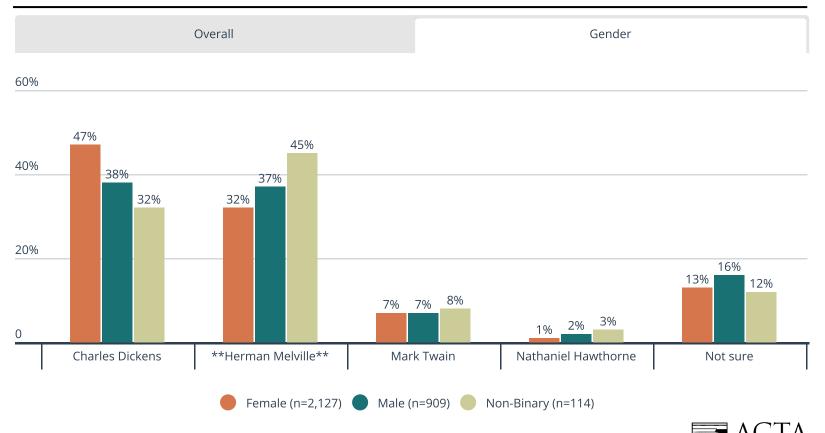
- Forty-two percent of students think that Charles Dickens is the author of *Moby-Dick*.
- Male students (37%) and non-binary students (45%) are more likely than female students (32%) to say that Herman Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*.





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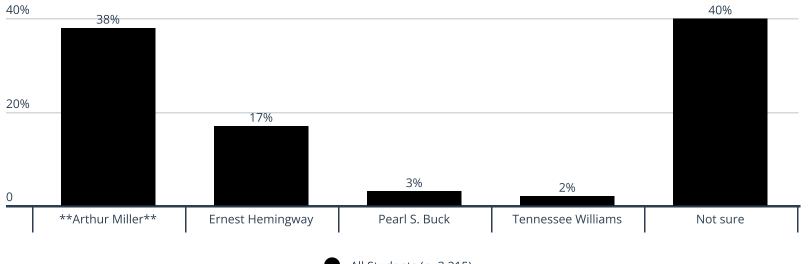


American Council

Just over one-third of students know that Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*.

• Democrat students (42%) are more likely than Republicans (30%) to say that Arthur Miller wrote The Crucible.



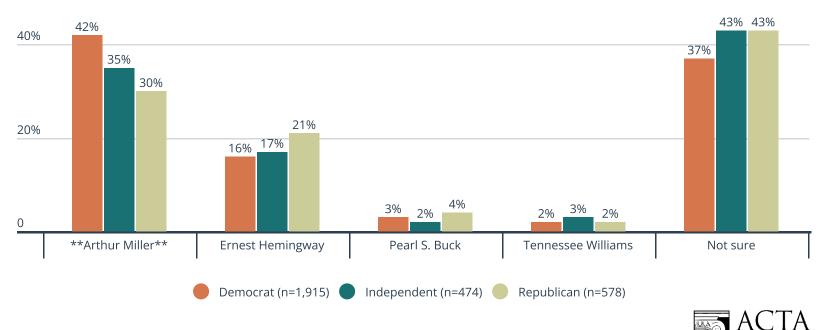


All Students (n=3,215)

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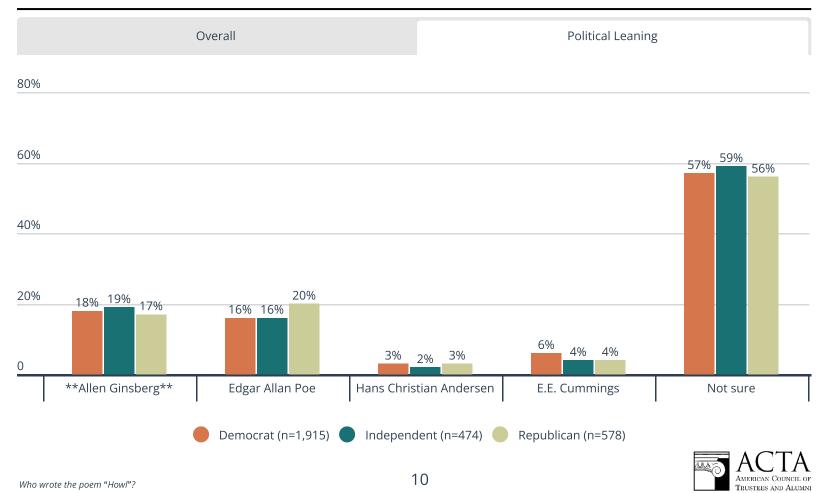
Less than one in five students know that Allen Ginsberg wrote the poem "Howl".

• Democrat (18%) and Republican (17%) students are equally likely to correctly identify Allen Ginsberg as the author.

	Overall		Political Leaning	
0%				
0%				57%
)%				
18%	17%			
			F0/	
		3%	5%	
Allen Ginsberg	Edgar Allan Poe	Hans Christian Andersen	E.E. Cummings	Not sure
		All Students (n=3,215)		
an wrote the noem "How!"?		10		

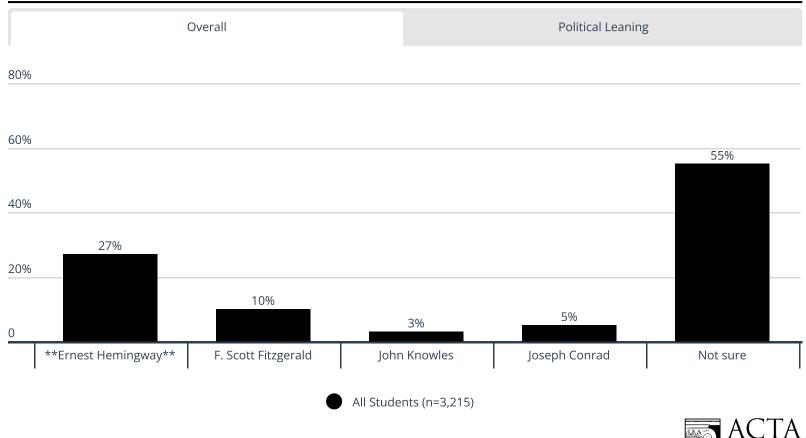
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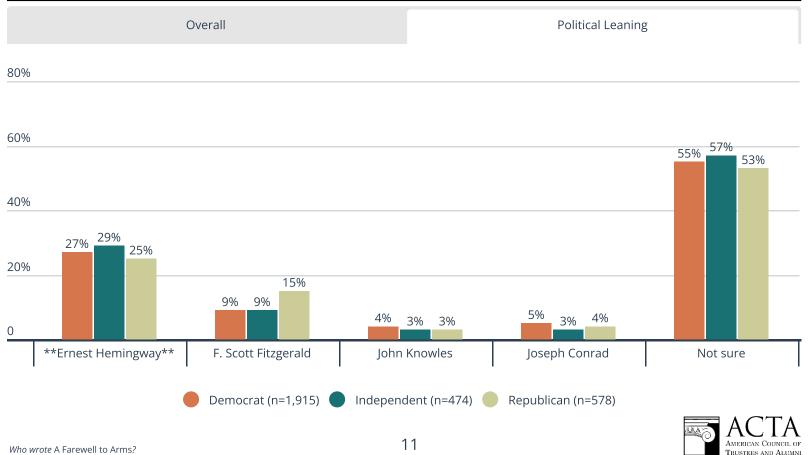
• More than half (55%) of students say they are not sure who wrote A Farewell to Arms.



American Council

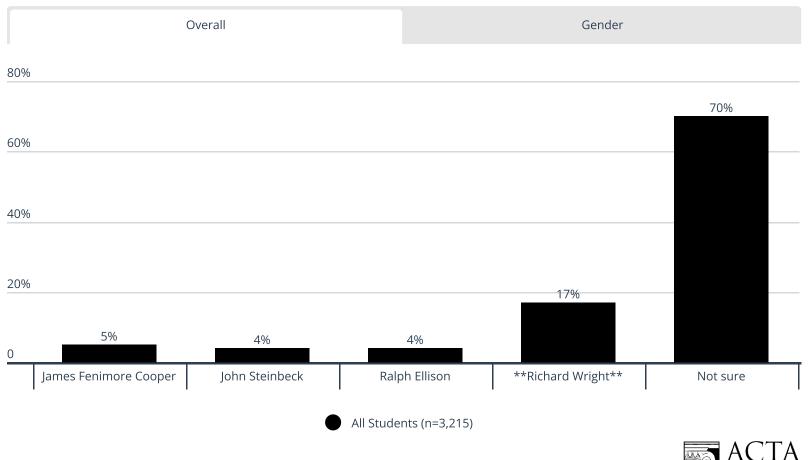
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Less than one in five students know Richard Wright wrote Native Son.

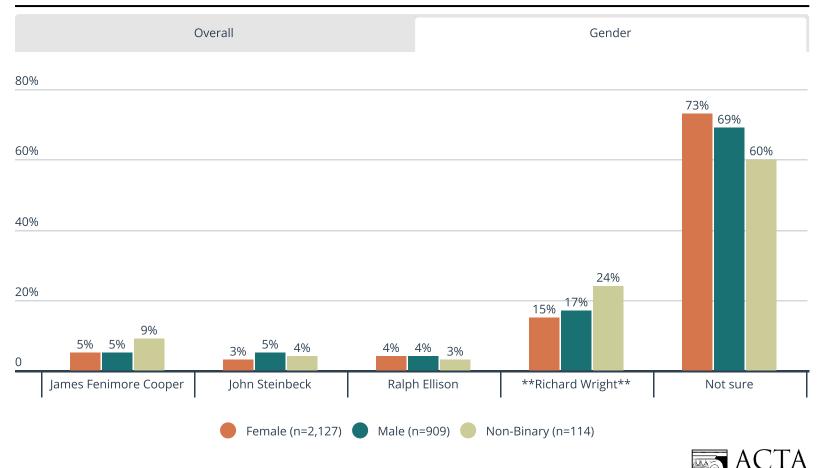
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American Council C

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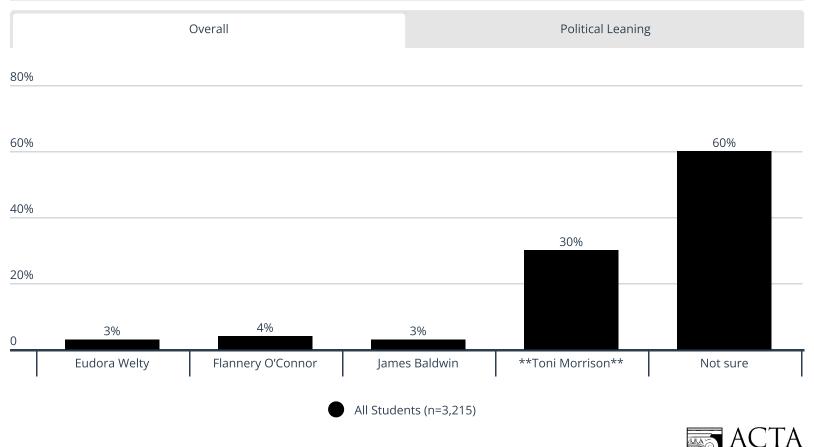
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American Council

Less than one-third of students know that Toni Morrison wrote *Beloved*.

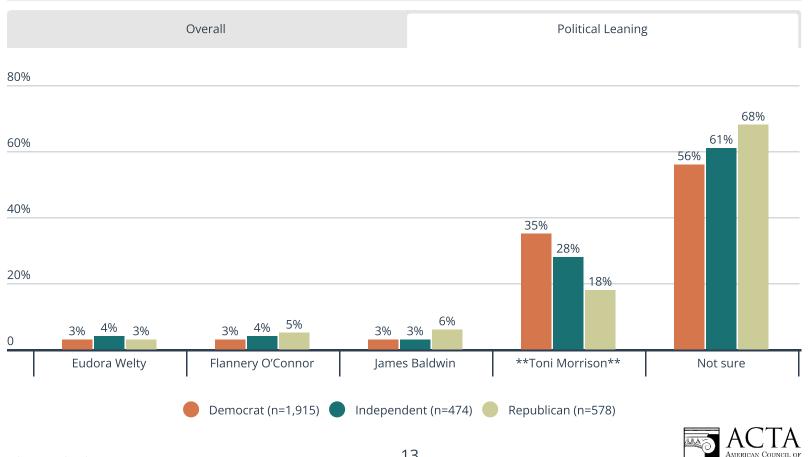
• Democrat students (35%) are more likely than Independent (28%) and Republican (18%) students to know that Toni Morrison is the author of *Beloved*.



American Council

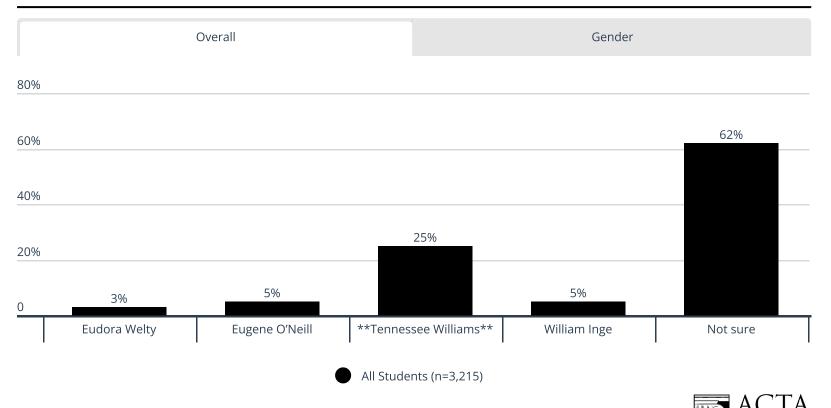
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Just 25% of students know that Tennessee Williams wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

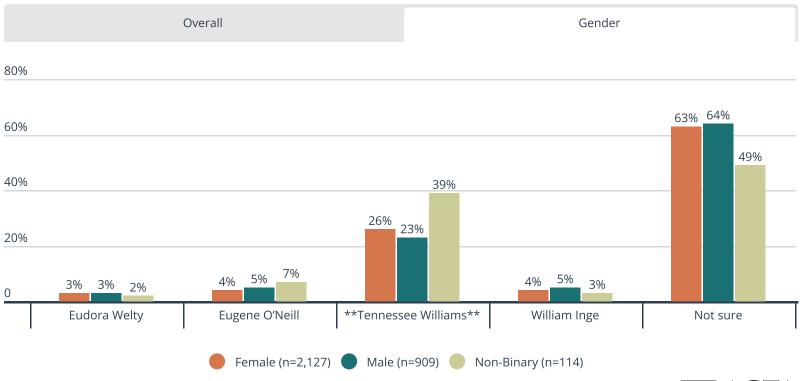
- Non-binary students (39%) are almost twice as likely as male (23%) and female (26%) students to know that Tennessee Williams is the author.
- Male (64%) and female (63%) students are equally likely to say that they are not sure who wrote A Streetcar Named Desire.



American

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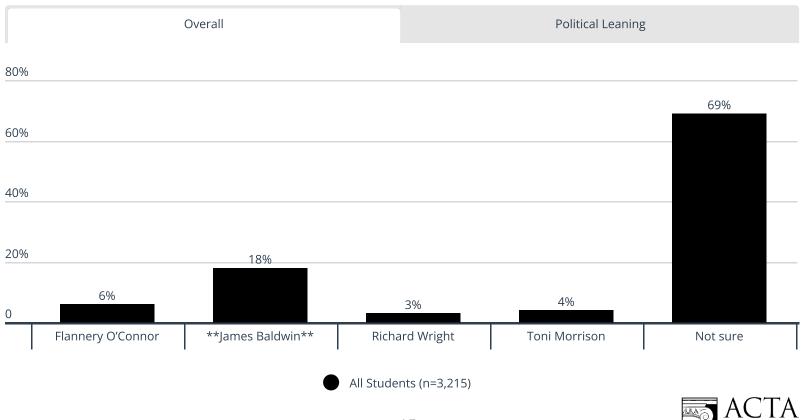




Less than one in five students know that James Baldwin wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

• Democrat (19%) and Independent (20%) students are equally likely to say that James Baldwin wrote Go Tell It on the Mountain.

• Republican students (15%) are the least likely to say that James Baldwin wrote Go Tell It on the Mountain.

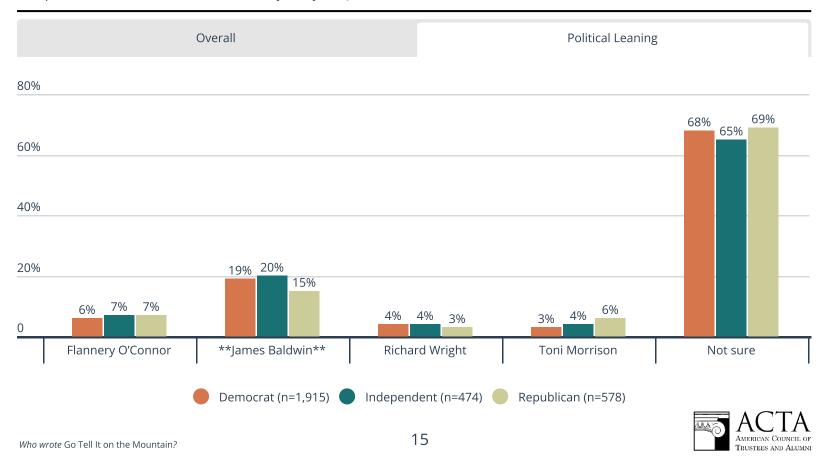


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Only one-third of students know that Thomas Edison invented the phonograph.

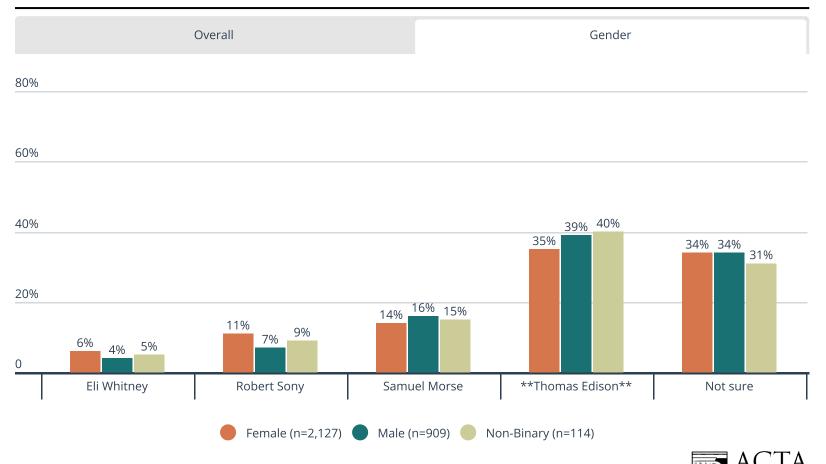
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	Overall			Gender			
80%							
60%							
40%					37%		
20%					5776		34%
0	5%	9%		15%			
	Eli Whitney	Robert Sony	Samı	uel Morse	**Thomas Ed	ison**	Not sure
			All Stude	nts (n=3,215)			ACTA

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF

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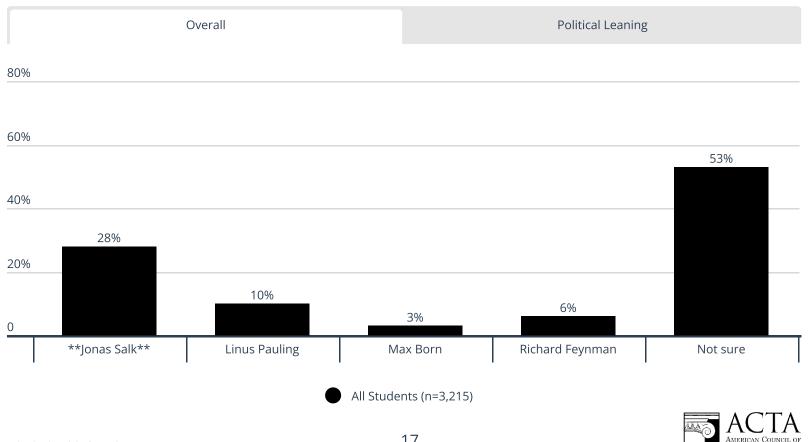
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AMERICAN

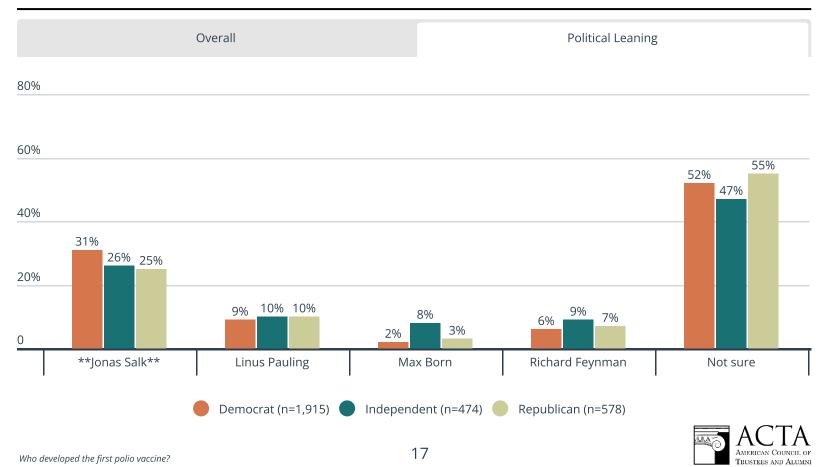
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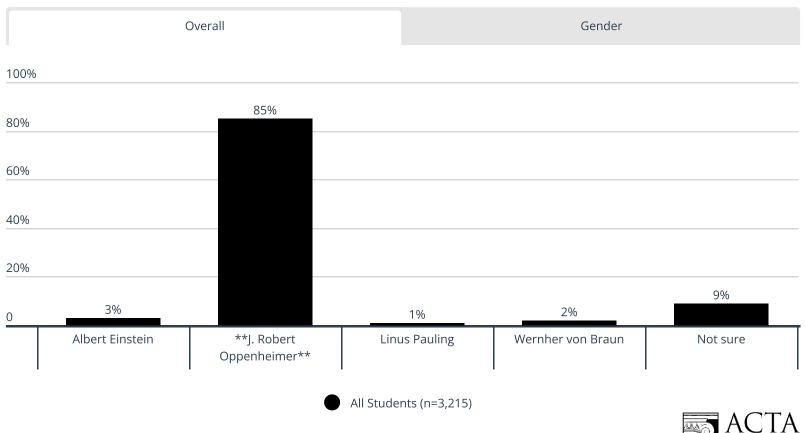
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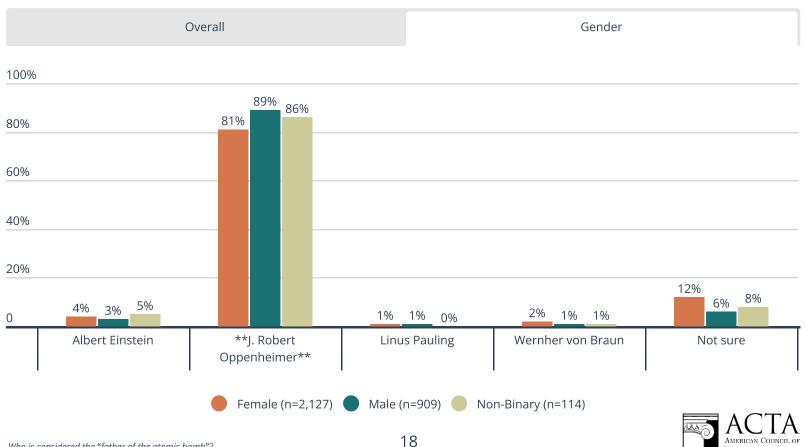
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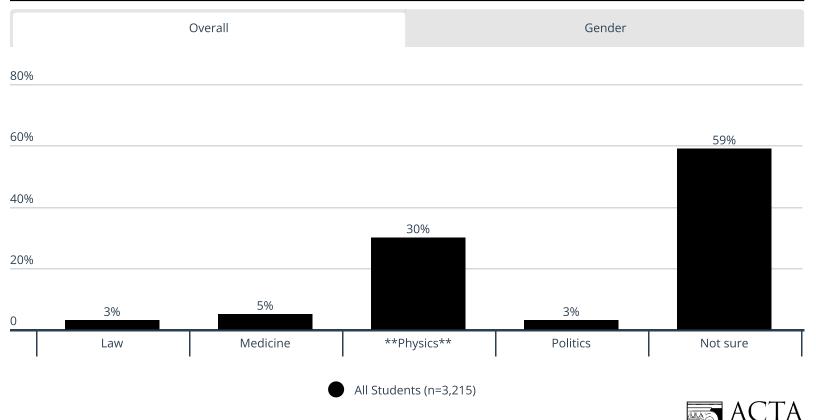
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About one-third of students know that Richard Feynman made his reputation in the field of physics.

• More than half (59%) of students are not sure in which field Richard Feynman made his reputation.

• Males (36%) are more likely than females (25%) to say that Richard Feynman made his reputation in physics.

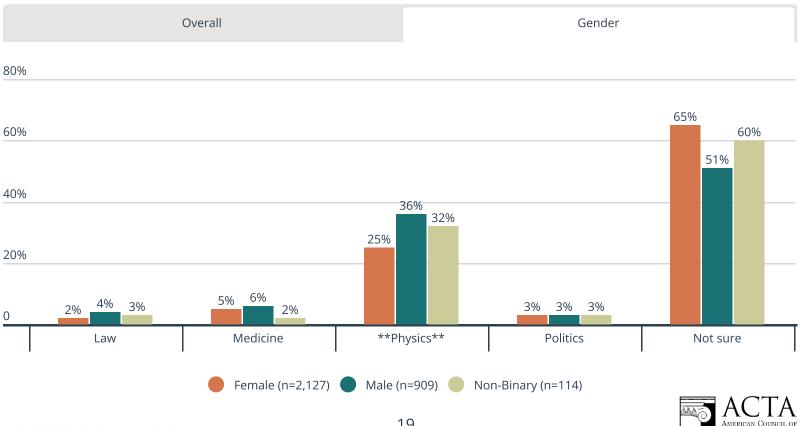


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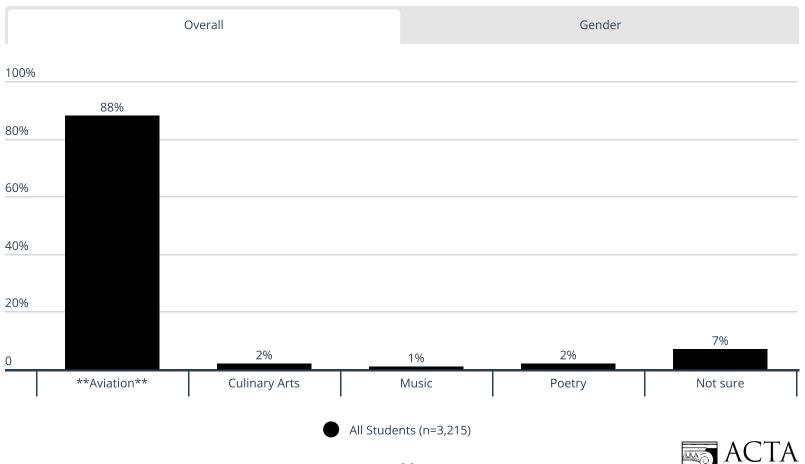
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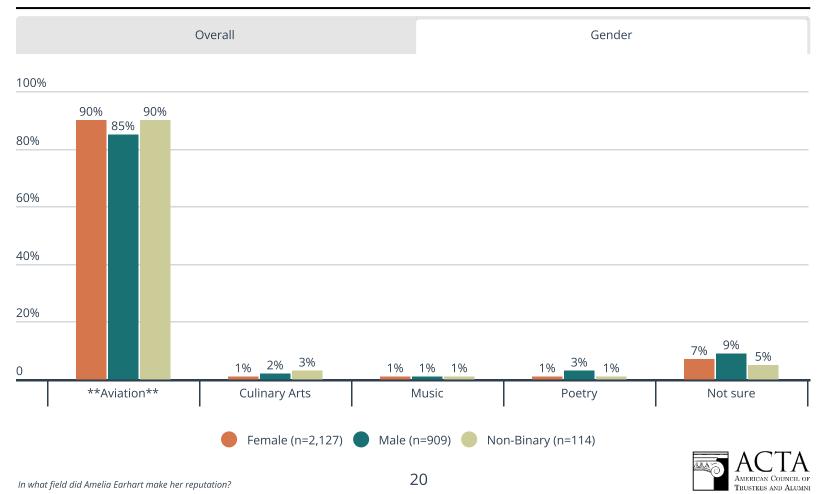
• Females (90%) are more likely than males (85%) to say that Amelia Earhart made her reputation in the field of aviation.



American Council

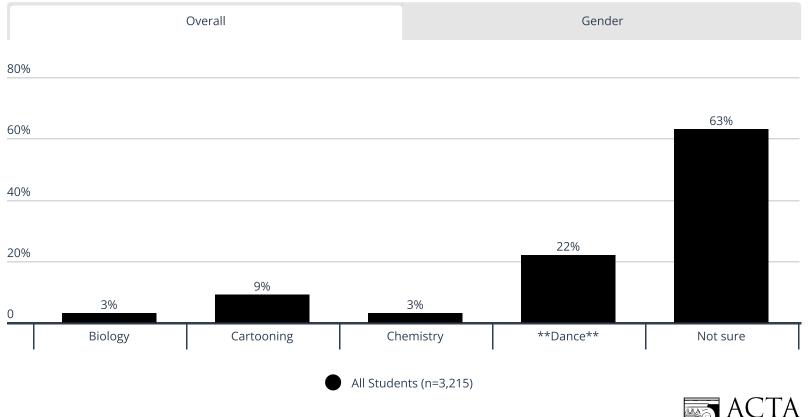
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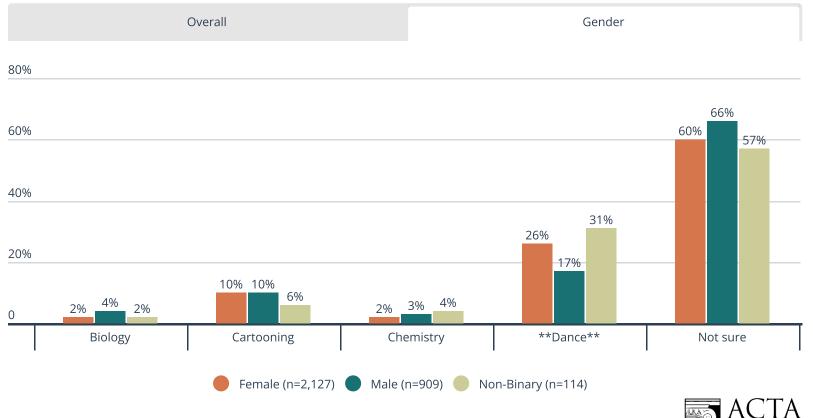
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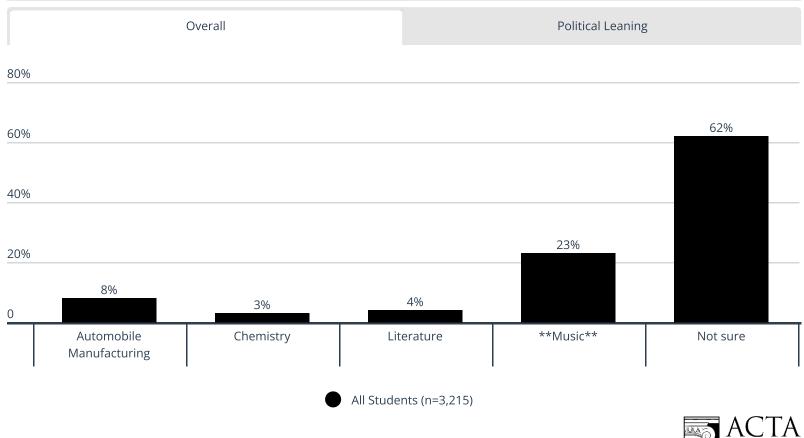
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AMERICAN

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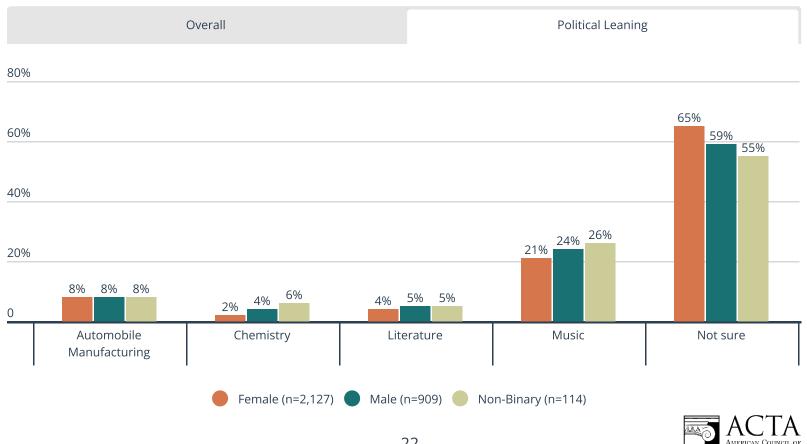
• Female (21%) and male (24%) students are equally likely to know that Stephen Foster and George Gershwin were musicians.



American Coun

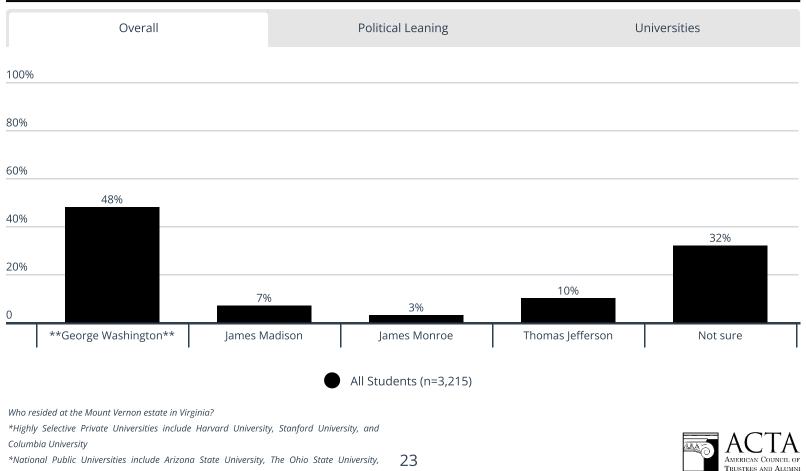
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Less than half of students know that George Washington resided at Mount Vernon.

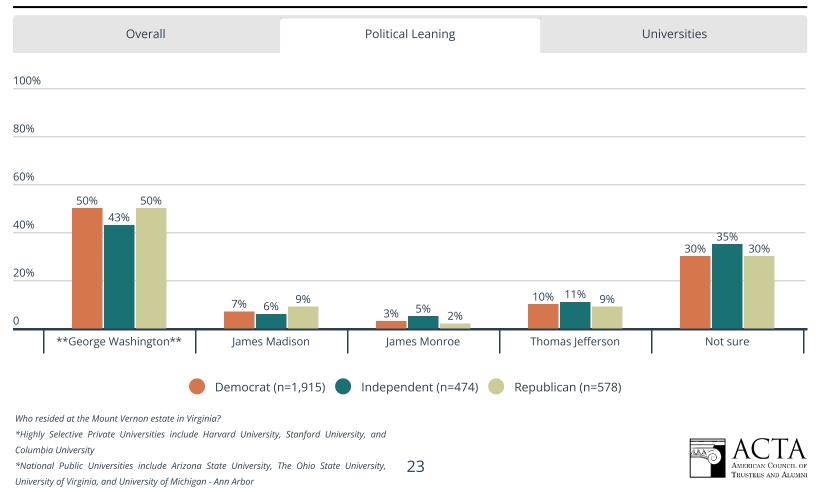
• Republicans (50%) and Democrats (50%) are equally likely to know that George Washington lived at Mount Vernon, while Independent students are the least likely to know (43%).



University of Virginia, and University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

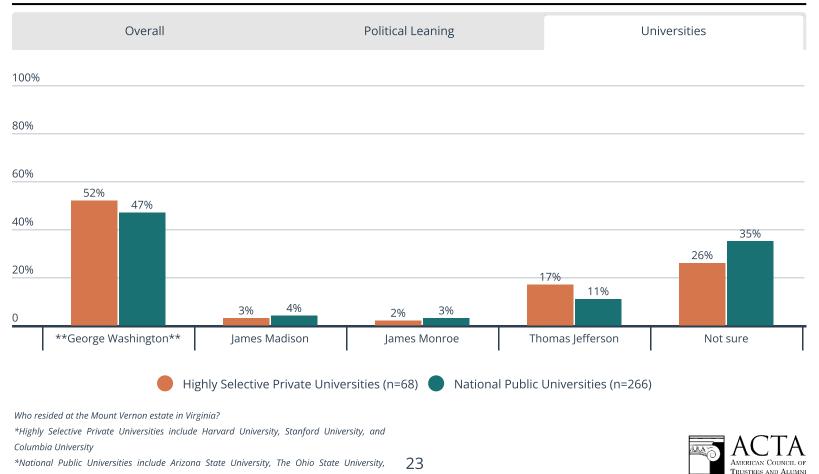
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Just 36% of students know that Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello.

- Students (51%) at highly selective private universities are more likely than students at national public universities to know that Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello.
- Democrats (39%) are equally likely as Republicans (35%) and more likely than Independents (32%) to know that Thomas Jefferson designed Monticello.

Overall			Political Leaning		Universities				
100%									
80%									
60%									
40%				36%	49%				
20%									
0	3%	3%	9%						
	George Washington	I. M. Pei	Mies van der Rohe	**Thomas Jefferson**	Not sure				
All Students (n=3,215)									
*Highly S Columbia	ned Monticello? elective Private Universities include F University Dublic Universities include Arizona				ACTA				

American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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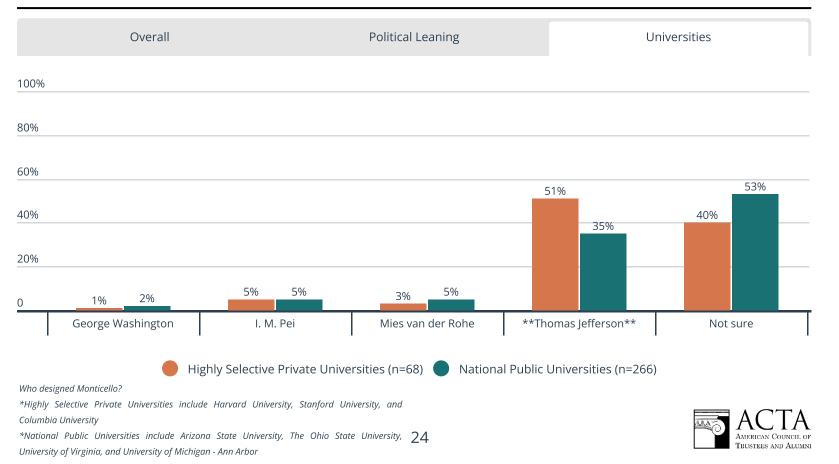
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80%									
60%						52%			
40% 20% 0 2% 5% 3%	3% 3%	3%	9% 8% 12%	3	9% 32% 35%	47% 47%			
0 2% Skington	I. M. Pe		Mies van der Rohe	**TI	nomas Jefferson**	Not sure			
Democrat (n=1,915) Independent (n=474) Republican (n=578) Who designed Monticello? *Highly Selective Private Universities include Harvard University, Stanford University, and Columbia University									
*National Public Universities include Ari. University of Virginia, and University of Mich	AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI								

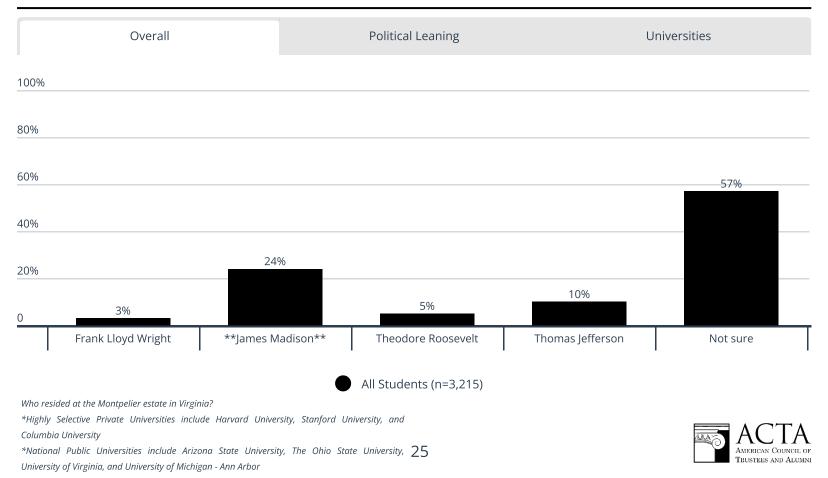
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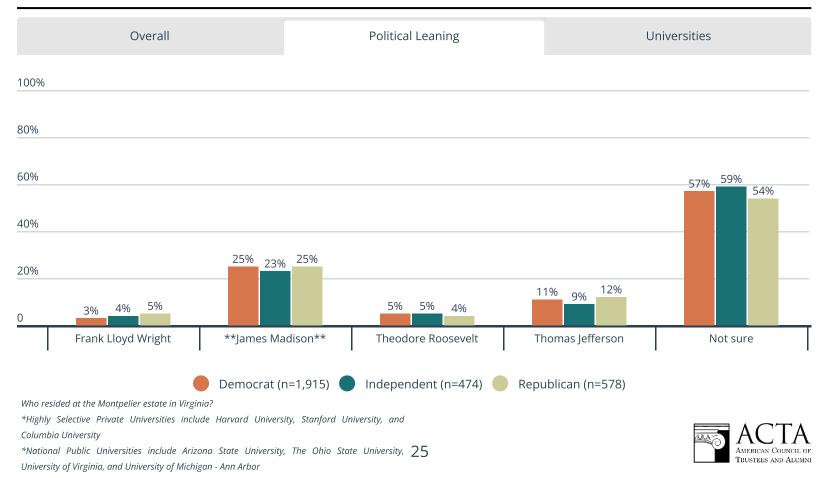
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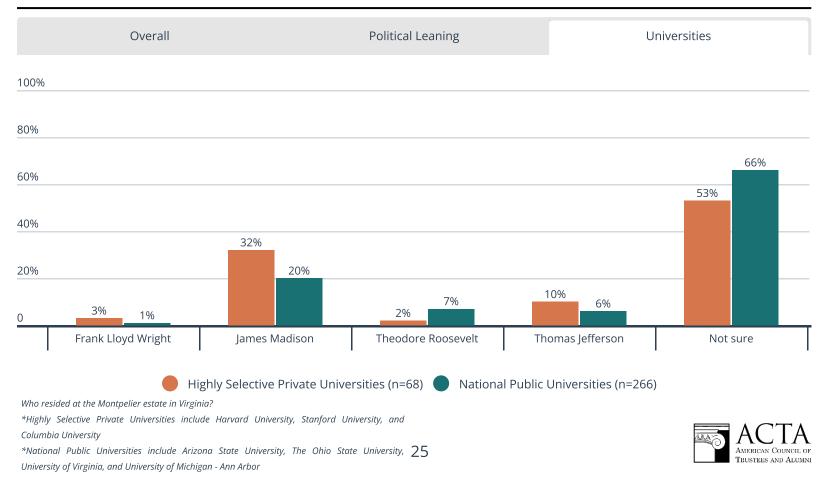
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Survey Topline

Q1. Have you completed a college course in American history? 59% Yes 41% No

Q2. Have you completed a college course in literature? 21% Yes

79% No

Q3. In the past year, how many books have you finished reading (NOT audiobooks) that were NOT assigned in a class?

11% 15+ 8% 10 to 14 19% 5 to 9 44% 1 to 4

18% None

Q4. Who wrote Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?

72% Mark Twain
1% Joseph Conrad
2% Nathaniel Hawthorne
7% Charles Dickens
18% Not sure

Q5. Who wrote The Scarlet Letter?

49% Nathaniel Hawthorne 5% Herman Melville 4% Arthur Miller 6% Ray Bradbury 36% Not sure

Q6. Who wrote Moby-Dick?

35% Herman Melville
2% Nathaniel Hawthorne
42% Charles Dickens
7% Mark Twain
14% Not sure

Q7. Who wrote The Crucible?

38% Arthur Miller
17% Ernest Hemingway
3% Pearl S. Buck
2% Tennessee Williams
40% Not sure

Q8. Who wrote the poem "Howl"?
18% Allen Ginsberg
18% Edgar Allan Poe
3% Hans Christian Andersen
4% E.E. Cummings
57% Not sure

Q9. Who wrote A Farewell to Arms?

27% Ernest Hemingway
10% F. Scott Fitzgerald
3% John Knowles
5% Joseph Conrad
55% Not sure

10. Which author is most closely associated with "The Jazz Age"?

3% Allen Ginsberg
50% F. Scott Fitzgerald
3% Jack Kerouac
3% Pearl S. Buck
41% Not sure

Q11. Who wrote The Good Earth?

3% Ernest Hemingway
10% John Steinbeck
3% Nathaniel Hawthorne
19% Pearl S. Buck
65% Not sure

Q12. Who wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin?

45% Harriet Beecher Stowe4% Margaret Atwood15% Mark Twain4% Ralph Ellison32% Not sure

Q13. Who wrote Native Son?

5% James Fenimore Cooper
4% John Steinbeck
4% Ralph Ellison
16% Richard Wright
71% Not sure

Q14. Who wrote Beloved?

3% Eudora Welty
4% Flannery O'Connor
3% James Baldwin
30% Toni Morrison
60% Not sure

Q15. Who wrote Angels in America?

3% Eugene O'Neill
5% Tennessee Williams
4% Toni Morrison
16% Tony Kushner
72% Not sure

Q16. Who wrote a *A Streetcar Named Desire*?3% Eudora Welty

5% Eugene O'Neill25% Tennessee Williams5% William Inge62% Not sure

Q17. Who wrote Go Tell it on the Mountain?

6% Flannery O'Connor
18% James Baldwin
3% Richard Wright
4% Toni Morrison
69% Not sure

Q18. Who wrote The Catcher in the Rye?

53% J.D. Salinger
4% James Baldwin
3% John Updike
7% Nathaniel Hawthorne
33% Not Sure

Q19. Who invented the telephone?

79% Alexander Graham Bell

3% Nikolai Tesla

2% Samuel Morse

8% Thomas Edison

8% Not sure

Q20. Who invented the lightning rod?

59% Benjamin Franklin2% Eli Whitney15% Nikola Tesla12% Thomas Edison12% Not sure

Q21. Who invented the phonograph?

5% Eli Whitney
9% Robert Sony
15% Samuel Morse
37% Thomas Edison
34% Not sure

Q22. Who developed the first polio vaccine?

28% Jonas Salk10% Linus Pauling3% Max Born6% Richard Feynman53% Not sure

Q23. Who is considered the "Father of the Atomic Bomb"?

- 3% Albert Einstein85% J. Robert Oppenheimer1% Linus Pauling2% Wernher von Braun
- 9% Not sure

Q24. In what field did Linus Pauling make his reputation?

6% Botany
27% Chemistry
3% Musicology
3% Theater
61% Not sure

Q25. In what field did Richard Feynman make his reputation?

3% Law

5% Medicine

30% Physics

3% Politics

59% Not sure

Q26. In what field did Amelia Earhart make her reputation?

88% Aviation

2% Culinary Arts

1% Music

2% Poetry

7% Not sure

Q27. In what field did Charles Ives make his reputation?

7% Biology

7% Literature

17% Music

5% Physics

64% Not sure

Q28. In what field did Alvin Ailey and Bob Fosse make their reputations?

3% Biology

- 9% Cartooning
- 3% Chemistry

22% Dance

63% Not sure

Q29. In what field did Langston Hughes make his reputation?

4% Engineering11% Music3% Physics45% Poetry37% Not sure

Q30. In what field did Charles Shultz and Garry Trudeau make their reputations?

2% Aviation

- 29% Cartooning
- 4% Music
- 8% Space Exploration
- 56% Not sure

Q31. In what field did Stephen Foster and George Gershwin make their reputation?

- 8% Automobile Manufacturing
- 3% Chemistry
- 4% Literature
- 23% Music
- 62% Not sure

Q32. In what field did Orson Welles make his reputation?

2% Chemistry

3% Culinary Arts

34% Filmmaking

5% Warfare

56% Not sure

Q33. Who resided at the Mount Vernon estate in Virginia?

48% George Washington

7% James Madison

3% James Monroe

10% Thomas Jefferson

32% Not sure

Q34. Who designed Monticello?

3% George Washington

3% I. M. Pei

9% Mies van der Rohe

36% Thomas Jefferson

49% Not sure

Q35. Who resided at the Montpelier estate in Virginia?

3% Frank Lloyd Wright
24% James Madison
5% Theodore Roosevelt
10% Thomas Jefferson
57% Not sure



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