SOFTWARE & TECH

Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition

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Introduction: Why the Second Edition Still Matters

For students, instructors, and lifelong readers, finding a single volume that offers both breadth and depth in literary study can be a challenge. Enter **Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition**—a compact yet comprehensive collection that has earned its place on countless syllabi and bookshelves. Published as part of the respected Bedford/St. Martin's Portable Anthology series, this edition balances classic works with contemporary voices, all within a conveniently sized format. Whether you are new to literary analysis or a seasoned scholar looking for a refresher, this anthology provides a curated journey through fiction, poetry, and drama. In this article, we will explore the structure, content, pedagogical strengths, and lasting value of the second edition, showing why it remains a go-to resource for introductory literature courses and independent study alike.

What Is "Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition"?

Published in 2009, the **Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition**was compiled by editors Janet E. Gardner, Beverly Lawn, Jack Ridl, and Peter Schakel. The book is designed to be a concise, affordable alternative to bulkier anthologies, making it ideal for semester-length courses. The second edition builds upon the strengths of the first by updating selections, improving the apparatus for critical reading, and refining the thematic organization. It includes over 80 poems, more than 30 short stories, and a dozen plays, alongside instructive chapters on reading and writing about literature.

The "portable" nature of the book is not just a marketing term; the trim size (approximately 5.5 x 8.5 inches) and lightweight paper mean it fits easily into a backpack without adding excessive weight. For students who often juggle multiple textbooks, this practical design is a significant advantage.

Key Features and Organizational Structure

One of the defining characteristics of this anthology is its clear, learner-friendly structure. The second edition is divided into four main parts, each serving a distinct purpose.

Part One: Reading, Thinking, and Writing Critically About Literature

This opening section functions as a mini composition guide. It covers how to approach a literary text, formulate an argument, and incorporate evidence from primary sources. It includes practical tips on close reading, note-taking, and avoiding common pitfalls in literary essays. For instructors, this built-in writing instruction reduces the need for supplementary handouts and allows for a seamless integration of literature and composition skills.

Part Two: Fiction

The fiction section features stories from a diverse range of authors, including classic figures like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe alongside more modern voices such as Alice Walker, Tim O'Brien, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Each story is followed by a brief author biography and a set of thought-provoking questions. The second edition added works like "The Things They Carried" (a chapter from O'Brien's novel) and "Interpreter of Maladies" by Lahiri, reflecting a growing emphasis on multicultural and contemporary literature. An appendix on the elements of fiction—plot, character, setting, point of view, symbolism, and theme—provides a quick reference for students.

Part Three: Poetry

With over 80 poems, the poetry section covers a wide historical range, from Shakespeare and John Donne to Billy Collins and Rita Dove. The anthology groups poems thematically as well as by author, allowing instructors to teach by subject (e.g., love, nature, war) or by poet. The inclusion of a "Poetry in Depth" section focuses on a few poets (Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and others) with multiple poems, enabling a richer exploration of their craft. A glossary of poetic terms and a guide to poetic meter and form are also included, making this section both a teaching tool and a reference.

Part Four: Drama

The drama section contains ten plays, ranging from Sophocles' *Antigone* to August Wilson's *Fences* and Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*. The plays are unabridged, giving students the full experience of dramatic structure and dialogue. For each play, the anthology provides contextual introductions and post-reading questions that prompt analysis of character motivation, staging, and thematic implications. Instructors appreciate that the plays are short enough to be covered in a week yet rich enough to generate substantial discussion.

Pedagogical Strengths: Why Instructors Choose This Edition

The **Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition**is not merely a collection of texts; it is a carefully engineered teaching tool. Several pedagogical features set it apart:

- Pre-reading and post-reading apparatus: Each selection includes a headnote that situates the work in its historical and cultural context, plus questions that encourage interpretive thinking rather than simple recall.
- Writing about literature: The first part of the book offers step-by-step guidance on crafting a thesis, organizing an essay, and revising. This is especially valuable for first-year composition courses that double as introduction to literature.
- Case studies: The second edition introduced "case studies" on particular authors (e.g., Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner) that group several works together, allowing for comparative analysis.
- Glossaries and indexes: A glossary of literary terms, an index of first lines for poems, and an index of authors and titles make navigating the book easy for students.
- Affordability: Compared to massive Norton or Longman anthologies, this portable edition costs significantly less—a factor that students and budget-conscious departments consistently appreciate.

What's New in the Second Edition?

For those familiar with the first edition (published in 2005), the second edition brought several welcome updates. The most notable changes include:

- Expanded fiction selection: The addition of contemporary writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Tim O'Brien, and Sherman Alexie reflects a shift toward more diverse, global voices.
- Updated poetry section: New poems by Natasha Trethewey, Mark Doty, and others were added, while some older poems were rotated out to keep the collection fresh.
- Enhanced drama offerings: The second edition replaced one play with August Wilson's Fences, a major work of American theater that resonates with students studying race and family dynamics.
- Improved design: The page layout was made more readable with larger margins and clearer typography, and the book's binding was reinforced for durability.

How Students Can Use This Anthology Effectively

The **Literature A Portable Anthology 2nd Edition**is designed to be a companion for the entire term, but students who want to get the most out of it should adopt a few strategies:

1. Read the introductory chapter first. Even if you are eager to dive into stories, the opening section on critical reading will teach you how to annotate, ask productive questions, and develop a thesis—skills that will serve you throughout the course.
2. Use the questions as a starting point. The questions at the end of each selection are not busywork; they are designed to guide your analysis. Try to answer them in writing before class discussion to solidify your understanding.
3. Compare works across genres. The anthology's thematic organization encourages you to see connections between a poem about love and a story about loss. Making these connections will deepen your appreciation of literature's unity and diversity.
4. Leverage the glossary. When you encounter an unfamiliar term like "synecdoche" or "dramatic monologue," consult the glossary. Building your literary vocabulary will improve both your reading and writing.
5. Write your own responses. Besides the assigned essays, try writing a journal entry or a short analysis after reading each text. This active engagement helps retain what you learn.

Comparison with Other Popular Anthologies

To appreciate the niche of the Portable Anthology, it helps to compare it with two other widely used textbooks: *The Norton Introduction to Literature* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*.

Feature	Portable Anthology 2nd Ed.	Norton Introduction (Shorter Ed.)	Bedford Introduction (Shorter Ed.)
Number of works	~125 (stories, poems, plays)	~150	~140
Size & portability	Excellent (thin, lightweight)	Good (but thicker)	Good
Price (new, approximate)	$40–$60	$60–$90	$55–$80
Writing instruction	Integrated chapter	Separate chapters	Separate chapters
Diversity of authors	Good, but limited by size	Excellent	Excellent

While Norton and Bedford offer more selections and deeper contextual essays, the Portable Anthology wins on cost and convenience. It is an ideal choice for courses that meet only one or two days per week and where the instructor prefers to supplement with additional texts.

Critiques and Limitations

No anthology is perfect, and the second edition has some limitations worth noting. First, because it is compact, the number of selections per genre is limited. Instructors who want to teach a wide range of short stories, for instance, may find the thirty-some stories insufficient and will need to assign additional readings from other sources. Second, the poetry section, while diverse, lacks extensive coverage of non-English language poets in translation (only a handful are included). Third, the drama section does not include more experimental or contemporary plays beyond the 1990s (with the exception of *Fences*, first performed in 1985). Finally, the writing instruction chapter, while helpful, is somewhat basic and may not satisfy composition instructors who prefer more rigorous rhetoric. Despite these critiques, the anthology remains a solid foundation for an introductory course.

Where to Find the 2nd Edition Today

Since the 2nd edition is out of print (later editions, such as the 3rd and 4th, are available), you can often find used copies online through sites like Amazon, eBay, or AbeBooks. Many college bookstores also sell used copies at reduced prices. If you are an instructor considering it, check that the 2nd edition still matches your syllabus; some readings have been cut in later editions, and the order of contents changes. For students on a tight budget, the 2nd edition offers tremendous value for a few dollars. Libraries may also hold copies for reserve.

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