A Guide to Summer Reading

Upper School 2011

In building this list of suggested books, we have sought to make our selections diverse and eclectic. Faculty members have contributed books they have loved, books that inspired them to read and keep reading. We hope you will browse through our brochure and talk to your friends, your parents, and to us about books. Perhaps most of all, we hope you will enter and enjoy the wide world of reading.

(Needless to say, you may not choose to re-read selections you chose last summer. What fun would that be?)

In preparation for English class:

Rising ninth graders are required to read The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger and one other book from our brochure of suggested titles.

Rising tenth graders are required to read The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald and one other book from our brochure of suggested titles.

Rising eleventh and twelfth graders are required to read one book from our brochure of suggested titles; they are also required to read one book specific to their junior-senior elective assignment. (This title will come in a summer mailing.)

In addition, this summer there is a required book for history class:

Students enrolling in Modern World History (9th Grade)

Read the following: (specific chapters to be assigned later)

A Little History of the World by Ernst Gombrich's

"Eine kurze Weltgeschichte fur junge Leser "was published in Vienna to immediate success, and is now available in seventeen languages across the world.Toward the end of his long life, Gombrich embarked upon a revision and, at last, an English translation. "A Little History of the World "presents his lively and involving history to English-language readers for the first time. Superbly designed and freshly illustrated, this is a book to be savored and collected.In forty concise chapters, Gombrich tells the story of man from the stone age to the atomic bomb. (Better world Books)

Students enrolling in Twentieth Century World History (10th grade) Choose ONE of the following texts:
**Hiroshima** by John Hersey

On August 6, 1945 Hiroshima was destroyed by the first atom bomb ever dropped on a city. This book, John Hersey’s journalistic masterpiece, tells what happened on that day. Told through the memories of survivors, this timeless, powerful and compassionate has become a classic that stirs the conscience of humanity.  (*New York Times*)

“One of the great classics of the war.” *The New Republic*

**One Day in the Ivan Denisovitch** by Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Signet Classics)

From the icy blast of reveille through the sweet release of sleep, Ivan Denisovitch endures. A common carpenter, he is one of millions viciously imprisoned for countless years on baseless charges, sentenced to the waking nightmares of the Soviet work camps in Siberia…This powerful novel of fact is a scathing indictment of Communist tyranny, and an eloquent affirmation of the human spirit. (from the book jacket)

“It’s a blow struck for human freedom all over the world… and it is gloriously readable.” *The Sunday Times*

**Students enrolling in United States History (11th grade)**

Read the following:

**George Washington: the Founding Father** by Paul Johnson

Writing for the *Eminent Lives* series of biographies, Johnson concisely describes Washington’s life from his youth in Virginia, through the American Revolution and his eight years as president.


**Students enrolling in AP United States History**;

Read the following: students will receive an assignment reviewing specific chapters.

**Founding Brothers** by Joseph Ellis
An illuminating study of the intertwined lives of the founders of the American republic--John Adams, Aaron Burr, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington. During the 1790s, which Ellis calls the most decisive decade in our nation's history, the greatest statesmen of their generation--and perhaps any--came together to define the new republic and direct its course for the coming centuries. Ellis focuses on six discrete moments that exemplify the most crucial issues facing the fragile new nation…

(from the book jacket)

“A splendid book -- humane, learned, written with flair and radiant with a calm intelligence and wit.” New York Times

FACULTY SUGGESTIONS FOR SUMMER READING

ENGLISH

Cindy Douglass

The Broken Cord by Michael Dorris
In The Broken Cord, Michael Dorris tells the true story of how, at the age of 26, a single graduate student and founder of the Native American Studies Department at Dartmouth College adopted a young Indian boy with developmental problems, hoping to cure him with love and care. What Dorris discovered was the devastation of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, a birth defect that plagued the troubled Native American culture in the 1980s. This is an account of a dedicated single father who struggled to raise his child alone and to understand the reality of a disease that few knew much about at that time. Over the course of the story, Dorris, part Native American himself, learns to accept what love can and cannot do, and to better understand “his” people and himself. Winner of the 1989 National Book Critics Circle Award.

Peace Like a River by Leif Enger
The novel Peace Like a River by Minnesota writer Leif Enger reads like an old-fashioned romance of the American cowboy west. Its protagonist, an eleven-year old boy who believes in miracles, finds himself on a cross-country search for his outlaw brother who has been charged with murder. The prose style sometimes reminds you of beautiful poetry but it alternates with exciting chapters of adventures that involve an FBI agent and plenty of gun-play. The voice of the young narrator is as captivating as that of Huck Finn or Holden Caufield. This one that will haunt your imagination.

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini
This story spent more than 5 years on the New York Times Bestseller list and has been published in 42 different languages. Taking us from Afghanistan in the final days of the monarchy to the present, The Kite Runner is the unforgettable, beautifully told story of the friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan nonetheless grow up in different worlds: Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazara, member of a shunned
ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade and Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, Amir thinks that he has escaped his past. And yet he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him.

*The Kite Runner* is a novel about friendship, betrayal, and the price of loyalty. It is about the bonds between fathers and sons, and the power of their lies. Written against a history that has not been told in fiction before, *The Kite Runner* describes the rich culture and beauty of a land in the process of being destroyed. But with the devastation, Khaled Hosseini also gives us hope: through the novel's faith in the power of reading and storytelling, and in the possibilities he shows for redemption.

(from the author's website)

**Bean Trees** by Barbara Kingsolver
What would you do if someone dropped a baby off in your car at a rest stop and asked you to keep it? Well, Taylor Greer, a young woman on the road to independence and adventure, agrees and this is the story of how she and her new charge, “Turtle,” end up in Arizona taking care of each other. *Publisher's Weekly* called the book “a marvelous affirmation of risk-taking, commitment and everyday miracles.” *The Bean Trees* is a fun read, a beautiful tale of unconditional love in unusual circumstances.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie
1989, when Salman Rushdie published his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, he created controversy in the Muslim world. The Supreme Leader of Iran banned the book immediately and issued a *fatwa* against its author, a religious edict calling for his death. While Rushdie was in hiding, he responded to the attack as artists often do- with his pen. In 1991 he published *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*—political satire disguised as a children’s book. Like *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz* and all of Roald Dahl’s books, this tale of Haroun and his storytelling father is funny! But while you are laughing at the entertaining verbal humor, the plight of the depressed storyteller, “The Shah of Blah,” and of his fellow citizens, who belch with melancholy after eating “glumfish” from the “mournful sea,” you are actually reading a compelling defense of art, of freedom of expression and of stories, a powerful attack on those who seek to oppress or disparage the role of the storyteller in society. If you enjoyed Dahl’s hilarious *BFG*, you will enjoy this fantasy meant to be read with the heart of a child and the mind of an adult.

* Especially recommended for students signed up for Contemporary World Literature in the fall.

**Pete Follansbee**

*After Dark* by Haruki Murakami
This novel is a wonderful read, as Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami shepherds his reader through seven hours of a Tokyo night. Over these hours, we come to know and care about the lives of his odd and wonderfully human characters. The novel begins at a late-night Denny’s where we meet 19-year-old protagonist, Mari Asai, who is engaged in conversation by a twenty-
something musician, Tetsuya, who once had a crush on Mari’s beautiful older sister, Eri. Their friendship develops as we travel through Murakami’s city night and through its quiet mysteries that include a “love hotel,” a dark predator, and a fascinating limbo in which sister Eri seems imprisoned. We also meet peripheral characters that we come to know and care about. A quick read, this novel was my favorite of two summers ago. Pick it up! I think you’ll enjoy it.

**The Star Thrower** by Loren Eiseley
Naturalist and essayist Loren Eiseley is not a writer whose work should fall through the cracks to be lost to the past, and this collection of his best essays should help ensure that he and his work remains vital and alive. If you’re interested in science, nature, and speculation on our being and place in natural history and the cosmos, then Eiseley reads well and easily, his nonfiction narratives capturing the miracles and mysteries of man and the natural world.

**For The Time Being** by Annie Dillard
Few books have ever tossed me around through history, nature, and philosophy, yet left me so enlightened and oddly grounded than Dillard’s nonfiction meditation on just about everything under the sun. More specifically, Dillard titles her chapter sections, *Birth, Sand, China, Clouds, Numbers, Israel, Encounters, Thinker, Evil*, and *Now*, and in so doing, shows us places, events, statistics, philosophers, and philosophies that allow us to sense both the grandeur of existence and our own smallness. If you like history, religion, nature, and philosophy, and if you like thinking about where we fit into all this, then this narrative by Annie Dillard will toss you around, and then set you down—somehow delightfully changed. And this is what reading should do.

**The Sparrow** by Mary Doria Russell
This artfully written science fiction novel traces the journey and aftermath of a twenty-first century expedition to the distant planet of Rakhat. Upon hearing the proof of extraterrestrial life via a listening station in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, a varied group of “agnostics, true believers, and misfits” embarks on a journey to find the voices behind the singing that has traveled over light years of darkness and space. Through wonderful characters and masterful storytelling, the reader learns what we might find when we search for being beyond the boundaries of our own world and galaxy.

**Far From the Madding Crowd** by Thomas Hardy
In his novel, Thomas Hardy transports his reader *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and places him in the English countryside of shepherd Gabriel Oak and maid Bathsheba Everdene. But when Bathsheba inherits a farm of her own, Hardy’s pastoral world is turned upside down, as passion and power storm across the landscape of Hardy’s richly textured narrative.

**Roger Hailes**

**J.D. Salinger: A Life** by Kenneth Slawenski
In the year since his death, we've heard much more about J.D. Salinger's reclusiveness and eccentricities, both real and exaggerated, than we have about the writing that made him famous in the first place. Kenneth Slawenski's *Salinger: A Life* avoids such scandalmongering in order to
deliver a sensitive (but not fawning) portrait of Salinger the writer. Slawenski looks not only at Salinger's most famous works, but also finds a wealth of psychological insights in places like rejection letters and biographical statements. Not surprisingly, Salinger's life, and especially his service in World War II, provided much of the raw material for his stories. But Slawenski does much more than compare Salinger's biography to his literary output: he also shows how compromises, conflicts, and editorial intrigues shaped Salinger's works, even when he was at the peak of his career. The book has much less to say about Salinger's post-1960 retirement and self-seclusion, apart from the author's occasional foray into the public eye by way of a rare interview or court case. But Slawenski does this for good reason: *Salinger: A Life* seeks only to explain Salinger as most of us knew him, through his writing. As a result, both die-hard fans and those who last picked up *Catcher in the Rye* in high school will find it enlightening. --Darryl Campbell

*Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence

*Sons and Lovers*, by D. H. Lawrence, is set near Nottingham, England and concerns itself with the relationship between a boy and his mother. Later his world expands and he includes a young girl in a romantic relationship. This novel should be read first before tackling other Lawrence novels.

*As You Like It* by William Shakespeare

*As You Like It*, Shakespeare's romantic comedy, teaches young men the proper way to love. If you read just one romantic comedy, this is the one to read. The play includes a wonderful debate concerning the glory of country life versus the life at court.

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy’s *Mayor of Casterbridge* is the best and most suspenseful of Hardy's many novels. It’s a great comeback, or a feel-good, story. Hardy makes his readers really care about and understand his characters.

*Lewis Lawson*

*Martin Eden* by Jack London

This novel, on the surface a pseudo-love story, closely examines the values of social classes and that which is superficial. But what makes this book so powerful is the examination it gives to what makes good literature. Excitement, combined with insights into the subtleties of good writing, illuminate a wonderful read for those seeking something a little different from the typical Jack London nature story.

*McTeague* by Frank Norris

This naturalistic novel demonstrates how man is not always in control of his destiny, but is often a victim of it. The greed, jealousy, revenge and brutality make this a great work for younger readers to gain a glimpse into 19th century California and to envision the deterministic aspects of naturalism as a style of writing.

*Tobacco Road* by Erskine Caldwell
This work describes the squalid life of degradation lived by backcountry sharecroppers in Georgia. Deterministic in theme, it is powerful, raw, and somewhat prurient, but it gives an incredible view into the life of poor and oppressed people. Just as the land is worn out, so too is its hopeless hero. These hapless characters, both comical and degenerate, create a lasting impression on the reader. *Tobacco Road* is an important piece for those who wish to know more about the ‘ole’ South other than the life of chivalry depicted in works like *Gone with the Wind*.

*The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder
Wilder examines the question of whether man lives by plan or by accident through the studies of Brother Juniper, a Franciscan monk who seeks parallels into the lives of five people who fell to their death when a bridge collapses in 1714 in Lima, Peru. Through his examination of those people’s lives, Brother Juniper develops an interesting perspective on the age-old question of fate vs. free will. Although he and his book are burned at the stake for heresy, Wilder uses Brother Juniper’s one remaining copy that has survived to discover some fundamental truths about human relationships. This book is recommended for the mature, sensitive reader.

*Mil Norman-Risch*

*Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri
In the sparest of prose Lahiri writes stories that feel like poems. I don’t know how she does it. This book is a collection of stories about characters caught in the most ordinary moments where cultural identity and personal history suddenly clash. In her detailed renderings of isolated moments Lahiri brings the reader to some place where the absurd and the tragic meet quietly and intimately in the lives of Indian-Americans.

*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith
This book is like an audiotape. I could hear the inflections, accents, even pitch and tone of every line of dialogue as though these were real voices. Set in North London, the book presents families of mixed ethnicities and follows their stories from the 1970s through the mid-1990s. The wild assortment of characters, the fast-paced plot and prose, the carnivalesque irreverence provided me a lively, memorable way to think about globalism, terrorism, post-industrialization, post-colonialism, and the ever more fluid categories of identity, history, and culture. The book is funny, poignant, smart, ambitious, and sometimes mean.

*Life of Pi* by Yann Martel
Reading this book with a narrator caught in a tight situation with a zebra, an orangutan, a hyena, and a 450-pound tiger kept me thinking a lot about large animals. While the book is slow-paced and often discursive, the plot actually involves literal life and death struggles and feats of survival. The scenery, characters and conflict hardly vary for most of the book, but rather than being bored by what might feel static, I found myself musing and reflecting. The book is easy to read, often suspenseful.

*Saturday* by Ian McEwan
Written by popular contemporary novelist Ian McEwan, Saturday is a fast-paced suspenseful novel that takes place in a single day. The main character, a neurosurgeon, has planned a day
culminating with a dinner to celebrate the arrival of his daughter who will be coming home from Paris. What happens to interrupt the ordinary weekend preparations of a London citizen against the backdrop of a mass demonstration against the Iraq war includes a chance encounter with an aggressive man who violates the day's equilibrium and threatens his entire family. The book is a fast read.

*The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai

Set in the 1980s in both New York City and in the Nepalese region of India at the foot of the Himalayas, this novel reminds us that the dynamics of globalism—mass consumerism, post-colonial displacement, reactionary unrest—are forces that no one escapes. Even what may seem mere quirks of personality—a retired judge’s pet names for his dog, or a middle-aged Indian woman’s fondness for Jane Austen—might be shaped entirely by history. Desai captures for her reader the pithy essence of place: the monsoon wetness of the Indian village, the subterranean anonymity of the New York City basement lodgings where Bijou and others live windowlessly, afraid of being seen, but also longing to be seen and known. With only the sparsest commentary, the novel speeds along from longing to loss as a rather quick, thick read devoid of device. Where the story ends is more like life than art: it’s complicated.

Linda Rouse

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou recounts in humorous and moving detail her early years growing up poor and black in Stamps, Arkansas. Whether she is writing about false teeth flying out of a preacher's mouth during a sermon or her efforts (successful) at getting fired by a nasty white woman, Angelou dazzles the reader with vivid stories recreating her childhood and teenage years. Since each chapter dramatizes a separate incident, you can read this delightful autobiography in installments.

*New Boy* by Julian Houston

*New Boy* is a semi-autobiographical novel by Richmond native Julian Houston. Houston, now a circuit court judge in Massachusetts, chronicles the experiences of Rob Garret, the first black student at Draper, a northern boarding school. Set in the late 1950s, Rob struggles with grades, sees prejudice at Draper, encounters black militants in Harlem, experiences Jim Crow racism, and struggles to change the world in which he lives. A fast, intriguing, enlightening read.

*China Boy* by Gus Lee

*China Boy* is the story of seven-year-old Kai Ting, the youngest child (but the only son) of Chinese immigrant parents. Set in the Panhandle District of San Francisco, Kai’s challenges include the death of his mother, his father’s remarriage to a white woman, and daily beatings by neighborhood bullies. Kai is funny and resilient. I found myself rooting for him.

*1984* by George Orwell.

Orwell’s *1984* offered a vision of a dystopian society completely controlled by the now-ubiquitous concept of Big Brother. Written nearly 60 years ago, some might think the novel lost currency once the title year passed; however, the novel’s topics still resonate today. The 1949
The novel depicts a society controlled by Big Brother and the “Inner Circle.” The novel’s narrator, Winston Smith, detests the government and longs to join the resistance. He meets and falls for a woman named Julia (a crime in the Oceanic society). The remainder of the novel addresses the possibility of rebellion in a society where individualism is a “thoughtcrime.” An excellent, thought-provoking read.

The Lotus Eaters by Tatjana Soli
Set during the Vietnam War, the Lotus Eaters tells the story of wartime photographers and how they manage to keep perspective on both the war and their lives. Consumed by the war and the country, the relationships developed between Helen (the first female wartime photographer), Darrow (the Pulitzer-Prize winning veteran photographer), and Linh (a deserter from the SVA after the death of his wife) are completely compelling and ever-fascinating as Soli creates the world of war and those who choose to document it. A lush, rich novel, The Lotus Eaters is an amazing debut novel.

Ted Shaffner

Into the Wild by John Krakauer
In 1992, Chris McCandless sold all his possessions and drove to Alaska where he walked into the wilderness north of Denali. He never returned. This book chronicles his journey, piecing together his diary and other clues gathered from the scene of his death. For some, McCandless was a fool, and for others, a modern-day Thoreau. In either case, it’s an absorbing and philosophical look into our relationship with the wild.

As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner
This is a novel about the deep South. The members of the Bundren family have promised to take the body of their mother to the town where she wanted to be buried. The story is told from multiple points of view with some extraordinarily vivid characters. It’s a complex, funny, and emotional ride. Once you get the hang of it, you’ll find this a truly rewarding book to read.

A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail by Bill Bryson
In 1998, Bryson and his old college buddy set out to hike the Appalachian Trail. The characters he meets (including “Chicken John,” who is legendary for always being lost on the trail) provide most of the comedy, but the book also benefits from Bryson’s deep introspection about a vanishing part of American culture. This is a good book for those who love the outdoors and also like a good laugh.

The Boilerplate Rhino: Nature in the Eye of the Beholder by David Quammen
With the gifts of an expert storyteller, Quammen writes 26 essays (originally published in Outside Magazine) on such diverse topics as “Bumblebee Economics,” the terminal velocity of cats in free-fall, a passion for snakes (and rattlesnakes in particular), as well as ruminations on Thoreau and Robert Penn Warren. Quammen has a gift for making even the history of American lawns so intriguing that it’s hard to put this book down.
The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* by Alan Watts
What if everything you’ve based your life on is an illusion? What if who you think you are isn’t who you are at all? When I first read this book, I felt like Wylie Coyote running off a cliff and realizing there is nothing under his feet. If you like eastern philosophy and aren’t afraid to rediscover the underpinnings of your life, it’s time for you to read The Book.

Vlastik Svab

*Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier
*Cold Mountain* is the story of Inman, a deserter from the Confederate Army, and his long and arduous journey from the front lines of the Civil War back to his home in the Blue Ridge of western North Carolina. His motivation is Ada, a former Charleston belle who is trying to survive the war by managing her father’s farm. While their love is young and tender, Inman’s desire to see Cold Mountain again helps him triumph over epic battles (including the infamous “crater” of Petersburg), thieves, Union soldiers, and other unsettling characters he meets along the way. Frazier’s narrative contains many tales of fascinating characters, re-creating the Carolinas during the Civil War and the trials those people faced.

*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac
Originally type-written over a period of three weeks on a 120-foot-long scroll of paper, *On the Road* is the seminal work of the Beat Generation. The novel details several cross-country trips made by the narrator, Sal Paradise, in the company of his speed-loving, girl-chasing, adventure-seeking effusive pal Dean Moriarty. Based on several road trips made by Kerouac and friends in the early 1950’s, the novel uses stream-of-consciousness writing to expand on the restlessness of the Beats. The novel, which Bob Dylan claims changed his life, is one of the most influential American works of the 20th century.

*Cat’s Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut
Kurt Vonnegut is a master of irony, satire, and wit. His novels highlight the idiocies of the events of the 20th century, including World War II and the development of nuclear weapons. *Cat’s Cradle* is a work of science fiction, of sorts, that follows the children of Felix Hoenikker, a fictitious Nobel-prize winning physicist who has created ice-nine—a molecular alternative to liquid water. The scientific, religious, and political battles that ensue over this monumental invention result in catastrophe. Vonnegut’s unique misanthropy contributes to an amusing and frightening read.

Z. Bart Thornton

*The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster
*The New York Trilogy* is a series of three short stories—“City of Glass,” “Ghosts,” and “The Locked Room.” Post-modern detective fiction. Mysteries about mystery. Meditations on identity and reality. Auster draws on the conventions of traditional detective stories while experimenting with irony and fragmentation. *The Trilogy* is a page-turner that will have you trying to assemble
pieces of Auster’s intricate narrative puzzle until the last page—and perhaps even after you’ve closed the book.

**Brideshead Revisited** by Evelyn Waugh
In this classic tale of British life between the World Wars, Waugh examines the affairs of the heart. Charles Ryder finds himself stationed at Brideshead, the family seat of Lord and Lady Marchmain. Exhausted by the war, he takes refuge in recalling his time spent with the heirs to the estate before the war--years spent enthralled by the beautiful but dissolute Sebastian and later in a more conventional relationship with Sebastian's sister Julia. Ryder portrays a family divided by an uncertain investment in religion and by their confusion over where the elite fit in the modern world.

**The Closed Circle** by Jonathan Coe
A follow-up to *The Rotters’ Club* -- Coe’s brilliant, ambitious, and uproarious study of young Britons growing up in the factory town of Birmingham in the 1970s – this novel unfolds against the “backdrop of Britain’s ongoing racial and social tensions” in the last years of the 20th century. While it helps to have read *The Rotters’ Club* first, it’s not essential; Coe helpfully includes a synopsis of what happens in that “prequel.”

**The Names** by Don DeLillo
Some of you know DeLillo for his National Book Award-winning *White Noise*, a dark comedy about the travails of an eccentric family upended by a natural disaster. *The Names* is a lyrical novel about American expatriates – artists, spies, and entrepreneurs – living in Greece in the 1980s. A gorgeous rumination on classical landscapes, imaginary realities, and postmodern terrorism, this novel is alternately comic and tragic; it’s unforgettable.

**Wonder Boys** by Michael Chabon
Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys* tells the story of a slightly confused adventure that takes place over the course of only a few days. Involving a burnt out college professor, his pregnant mistress, a compulsive liar from his fiction class, a dead dog, a tuba, a drag queen, an antique Joe DiMaggio jersey, and a dented Ford Galaxie, this story is a hilarious and entertaining look at academia and the complicated twists and turns our lives take.

**LIBRARY**

Melanie Barker

**Parable of the Sower** by Octavia Butler
Lauren Olamina, an empath who can feel the pain of others like it was her own, is forced to flee her protected community in the Los Angeles suburbs when a violent band of scavengers attacks in the night. Armed with minimal supplies and a few survivors from her former walled community, Olamina leads this vulnerable pack northward in hopes of finding a new life and new faith in a land devoid of humanity.
**A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius** by Dave Eggers
By the time Dave Eggers is 22, both of his parents have died from unrelated cancers within weeks of each other and Eggers is now the unofficial guardian for his eight-year-old brother Christopher. At a time when most 22-year-olds are attending their last college parties and making their post-college plans, Eggers finds himself playing the role of “single mom” while trying to make a name for himself in the media world through the founding of the now defunct *Might Magazine* and the successful literary magazine *McSweeney's* ([http://www.mcsweeneys.net](http://www.mcsweeneys.net)). A powerful and refreshingly original memoir!

**As Simple As Snow** by Gregory Galloway
Anna Cayne is a mystery. She dresses all black, spends her time composing the obituaries of everyone in her small town, litters her bedroom floor with biographies of Ambrose Bierce and Houdini, and works by Plath, Lovecraft, and Camus, and directs her attention and all the affection a Goth girl can muster toward the unnamed narrator of this book. When Anna disappears with barely a trace (her black dress is found by a hole in the frozen lake) everyone assumes she’s dead—except her boyfriend. Full of secret codes and characters with questionable pasts, this novel is guaranteed to haunt you long after you’ve turned the last page. For more on *As Simple as Snow*, visit: [http://www.assimpleassnow.com/](http://www.assimpleassnow.com/).

**Liars and Saints** by Maile Meloy
Meloy’s novel, which chronicles five generations of the Santerre family, begins with the marriage of Teddy, an American fighter pilot during World War II, and Yvette, a French-Canadian woman with a strict Catholic upbringing and an unforgettable over-the-shoulder smile. Years later when their sixteen-year-old daughter Margot gives birth to a baby boy in a French convent, Yvette decides to pass the child off as her own. *Liars and Saints* documents in economical yet vivid prose how decisions of one generation can affect others that follow.

**Black Swan Green** by David Mitchell
Thirteen-year-old Jason Taylor lives in Black Swan Green, the most boring village in all of England. In this town, he publishes poems under the pseudonym Eliot Bolivar in the local paper, watches as tensions mount between his mother and father, and struggles to gain rank in his school’s social hierarchy, an impossible feat for a kid with a stammering problem. This coming-of-age novel relays the hardships of growing up socially awkward, virtually friendless, and helpless in a world where adults make all the rules.

**Allen Chamberlain**

**Mister Pip** by Lloyd Jones
In 1991, thirteen-year-old Matilda's Pacific island home is caught in the violence of a civil war. After all the teachers are evacuated, Mr. Watts, the only white man left on the island, brings the children back to school with his reading aloud of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Although the children know nothing of Victorian London, Dickens captivates them. The final confrontation between the villagers and the rebels is heartbreaking (so be prepared). In the midst of this terror and deprivation, Matilda finds that survival can depend on the power of storytelling and the strength of imagination.
**Persepolis** by Marjane Satrapi  
In her autobiography, Satrapi tells of her life growing up during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War. A spirited girl with Iron Maiden and Kim Wilde posters in her room, she rebels against the fundamentalism invading her life; she weeps as playmates are killed by bombs and beloved Uncle Anoosh is imprisoned and executed by the Islamic regime. In nuanced black and white drawings, Satrapi not only sweeps the reader into the tumult of Iranian history but also into the life of an extraordinary girl and her family.

**Autobiography of a Face** by Lucy Grealy  
At the age of nine, Lucy is diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a virulent cancer with only a five percent survival rate. Her memoir recounts years of chemotherapy and countless operations to remove the cancer and reconstruct her jaw, but the book is more than medical details. It is a meditation on the tyranny of beauty, loneliness, and pain and how Lucy finds resilience in her imagination and writing. You will find yourself handing this book to friends and saying two words: Read it!

**Never Let Me Go** by Kazuo Ishiguro  
*My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years.*  
The opening sentence of the novel introduces us to our narrator and to her mysterious profession. Kathy and her friends Tommy and Ruth are human clones raised to be organ donors when their bodies mature; however, each must care for other donors before completing their own donations ending in death. The book is deeply disturbing (in the best sense) and raises stunning questions: What does it mean to be human? Do clones have souls?

*Carolyn LaMontagne*

**Room: A Novel** by Emma Donaghue  
*Room* is narrated by 5-year-old Jack, a boy who was born and has lived his entire life in the single 11 x 11-foot room where he and his mother are held captive by a sinister man. Jack's quirky voice; his mother's amazing courage and efforts to protect his innocence; and the unexpected consequences of attaining freedom all make this a novel that will grab you and hold you long after you have finished the last page.

**The Road** by Cormac McCarthy  
Years after nuclear war has devastated the country (and possibly the planet), a father and his young son are making their way south, in the hopes of finding food, warmer weather, and community. The landscape is burned and bleak. All of the homes have been scavenged multiple times, and every found can of food is a banquet. The sun is blocked by ash and no plants can grow. Few people have survived, and many of those who have rove the land in vicious gangs. Yet, in the midst of this violence and despair is a father who would do anything to keep his son alive, and a boy who has somehow kept his innocence and humanity. A powerful, finely crafted look at a dark future.

**A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters** by Julian Barnes
With a touch of postmodern flair, Barnes gives us a series of tenuously related stories, beginning with a scathing critique of Noah from the perspective of a woodworm on the Ark, continuing with such gems as the story of a terrorist attack on a cruise ship, an analysis of Gericault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa*, and a short treatise on the nature of love, and ending with a glimpse of heaven. This is a witty, brilliant, and sometimes odd assortment of stories, ideal for the reader looking for something unconventional.

**Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close** by Jonathan Safran Foer
Nine-year-old Oskar Schell, the quirky, precocious, and inventive narrator of this novel, comes across a mysterious key in his father’s belongings a year after his father’s death in the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. The novel follows his journey throughout New York, searching for the lock that the key will open and encountering a motley cast of characters along the way, as well as his internal struggle with the loss of his father. This is a story with humor and grief in equal measure; Oskar will make you laugh and will almost certainly break your heart.

**In Cold Blood** by Truman Capote
On Nov. 15, 1959, in rural Kansas, Dick Hickock and Perry Smith murdered the four members of the Clutter family: a mother, father, and two teenage children. Author Truman Capote, a successful novelist, became obsessed with the story and spent years interviewing the investigators and the killers, gaining their trust and access to their thoughts. This work, the culmination of his research and obsession, reads like a novel. He goes beyond reporting the facts of the crime, and delves into the lives and minds of the two killers. A fascinating nonfiction read for those interested in crime, psychology, or journalism.

**Barbara Anderson**

**Cassandra** by Christa Wolf
Wolf, a scholar of classical Greek, and, next to Gunter Grass, the greatest contemporary German writer, reweaves Homer's Iliad from Troy's prophetess' point of view. As the Greeks beleaguer the great city and slaughter its inhabitants, Cassandra remains the unflinching seer of two worlds and two worldviews: that of the victors and that of "the others," the victims. The former constructed the histories and philosophies of all subsequent "great civilizations" the latter may be reemerging in current feminist consciousness and its "Cassandran" labors of clearing up the falseness of linear historical thinking and one-dimensional consciousness. A mind-blowing read!

**Twelve Years: An American Boyhood in East Germany** by Joel Agee
This is the coming-of-age-story of a young American boy who lived with his family in East Germany as the communist German Democratic Republic was constructed by idealistic anti-fascists, committed Marxists, and ordinary people who had survived total war and destruction. Agee goes to school (when he feels like it), makes friends, and enjoys a remarkably carefree
adolescence, while his parents' marriage disintegrates and his stepfather's vision of a more just world is increasingly hemmed-in and stifled.

Neil Weiser

_Last Days of the Sioux Nation_ by Robert Utley
This book is a scholarly yet very readable analysis of the conditions and forces leading to the Battle of Wounded Knee, December 29, 1890, an event that marked the end of native American military resistance and which symbolized the final subjugation of the American Indian. Included is a full description of the Ghost Dance Religion and its chief apostle, Wovoka, and a full analysis of the events at Wounded Knee resulting in the deaths of 400 Miniconjou Sioux and their chief, Big Foot.

_Manhunt: The Twelve-Day Chase of Lincoln's Killer_ by James L. Swanson
_Manhunt_ chronicles the events from the assassination of Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater on Good Friday, April 14, 1865, through the death and postmortem investigation of John Wilkes Booth. It provides detailed accounts of the actions of Booth, David Herold, George Atzerodt, Mary Surratt, and others involved in the plot against Lincoln, as well as those of the host of investigators, military officials, and political leaders in pursuit of the conspirators. Well researched and well written, the book reads like a contemporary mystery, yet conveys its findings in the best traditions of fine historical writing.

Jim Bledsoe

_The River Why_ by David James Duncan
This quirky, funny, novel presents a young man’s search for the meaning of life along an Oregon river. In his quest to achieve fly-fishing nirvana, our hero, Gus, meets and is influenced by a series of unlikely teachers. He uncovers personal truths about death, religion, philosophy, love, and living in harmony with nature. You don’t have to be a fisherman to be hooked by this one.

_Ishmael_ by Daniel Quinn
Are you a Leaver or a Taker? A newspaper ad “Teacher seeks pupil, must have an earnest desire to save the world” brings the novel’s narrator together with Ishmael, a telepathic gorilla. During the course of the dialog, Ishmael recounts the rise of human civilization, the “Taker” culture and the “Leaver” culture, and the role of mankind in the environment. Ishmael challenges us all to consider our relationship to the environment and presents a philosophy for approaching global problems.

Ben Greenbaum: _Pompeii_ by Robert Harris
This novel traces the natural events preceding the eruption, as well as various fictitious events involving historical and fictitious characters impacted by the eruption. It’s an interesting and riveting read from all vantage points.
Rebecca Hottman: **Basin and Range** by John McPhee
In this first book of the series on North American geology *Annals of a Former World*, John McPhee, a noted journalist and author, travels with geologist Kenneth S. Deffeyes through the breathtaking and inspiring topography of the Basin and Range province of the western United States. Along the way, McPhee expounds on the theory of plate tectonics that revolutionized modern geology in the twentieth century and on the nature of scientific inquiry in general. The prose abounds with imagery of the natural world and insight into the minds of the scientists that bring the geologic past to light. An easy yet very interesting read, and one of my favorite nonfiction books ever.

Stacy Pfeifer:  
**Secret Life of Bees** by Sue Monk Kidd
Lily Owens has been living with her father, an unkind and unforgiving man since her mother was killed when she was only four. Her nanny Rosaleen, a stubborn and severe black woman, is the only friend and companion that Lily has. Rosaleen manages to insult a group of racists in town and is forced to leave. Lily chooses Tiburon, a town from the back of a picture left behind from her mother, and they flee together. *The Secret Life of Bees* is a story of strong women joining together to combine a life of joy and sorrow, love and loss, and guilt and forgiveness.

**Memoirs of a Geisha** by Arthur Golden
Nitta Sayuri tells the story of her life as a Geisha. She was taken from her home in 1929 when she was only nine years old and sold into slavery. Sayuri enters the Geisha world, working as a slave in the renowned Geisha household in Gion, the Geisha district of Kyoto. Sayuri is chosen to learn the ways of Geisha, mastering dance and music. *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a tale of a young and courageous woman who is forced to survive a life of servitude and then reinvent herself after the tumult of World War II.

Martha Nesmith: **The Grapes of Wrath** by John Steinbeck
One of my favorite books from high school was John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. I have never forgotten it, mostly because of the characters and earthiness. Set in the Great Depression it chronicles the life of the Joad family as they try to escape the Dust Bowls of Oklahoma and find work, migrating west to California. What they encounter is far from the "pot of gold" they thought they would find at journey's end. There are lots of issues touched on, like migrant labor, justice, what the role of government should be and capitalism. The ending is powerful but not easy reading.

Ben Rein: **Unbroken** by Laura Hillenbrand
*Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2010*: From Laura Hillenbrand, the bestselling author of *Seabiscuit*, comes *Unbroken*, the inspiring true story of a man who lived through a series of catastrophes almost too incredible to be believed. In evocative, immediate descriptions, Hillenbrand unfurls the story of Louie Zamperini—a juvenile delinquent-turned-Olympic runner-turned-Army hero. During a routine search mission over the Pacific, Louie’s plane crashed into the ocean, and what happened to him over the next three years of his life is a story that will keep you glued to the pages, eagerly awaiting the next turn in the story and fearing it at the same time.
You’ll cheer for the man who somehow maintained his selfhood and humanity despite the monumental degradations he suffered, and you’ll want to share this book with everyone you know. --Juliet Disparte