

## WESTOVER SCHOOL OFFICIAL SUMMER READING LIST – 2010

Students should choose a minimum of three books to read. You will be assigned to a reading group to discuss one book and to take a reading quiz. You are encouraged to choose at least one of the classics, which are marked with an asterisk (\*). Be sure that you do not choose a book that you have previously read for Summer Reading.

\*Adams, Henry

*Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres*

*Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* is a record not of a literal journey but of a meditative journey across time and space into the medieval imagination. Using the architecture, sculpture, and stained glass of the two locales as a starting point, Adams breathes life into what others might see merely as monuments of a past civilization. With daring and inventive conceits, Adams looks at the ordinary people, places, and events in the context of the social conventions and systems of thought and belief of the thirteenth century, turning the study of history into a kind of theater. (Excerpt taken from back cover of the Penguin Classics edition, 1986.)

Adichie, Chimanda Ngozi

*Purple Hibiscus*

First-person narrator Kambili Achike is a 15-year-old Nigerian girl growing up in sheltered privilege in a country ravaged by political strife and personal struggle. When she and her brother ... are unexpectedly allowed to visit their liberated and loving Aunty Ifeoma, a widowed university professor raising three children, family secrets and tensions bubble dangerously to the surface, setting in motion a chain of events that allow Kambili to slowly blossom as she begins to question the authority of the precepts and adults she once held sacred. (*Publishers Weekly*)

\*Agee, James

*A Death in the Family*

Published in 1957, two years after its author's death at the age of forty-five, *A Death in the Family* remains a near-perfect work of art, an autobiographical novel that contains one of the most evocative depictions of loss and grief ever written. As Jay Follet hurries back to his home in Knoxville, Tennessee, he is killed in a car accident – a tragedy that destroys not only a life, but also the domestic happiness and contentment of a young family. A novel of great courage, lyric force, and powerful emotion, *A Death in the Family* is a masterpiece of American literature. (barnesandnoble.com)

Atkinson, Kate

*Case Histories*

In this ambitious fourth novel from Whitbread winner Atkinson, private detective Jackson Brodie takes on three cases involving past crimes that occurred in and around London. The humility of the extraordinary, unabashed characters is skillfully revealed with humor and surprise. Atkinson contrasts the inevitable results of family dysfunction with random fate, gracefully weaving the three stories into a denouement that taps into collective wishful thinking and suggests that warmth and safety may be found in the aftermath of blood and abandonment. Atkinson's meaty, satisfying prose will attract many eager readers. (amazon.com)

Ba, Miriama

*So Long a Letter*

A moving and often painful expression of the female condition in mid-twentieth century African fiction, *So Long a Letter* is just that, a long letter written by the protagonist, Ramatoulaye, to her close friend, while she performs the mandatory 40 days of mourning for a dead husband. Both women are strong, intelligent, and courageous. The husbands of both have taken a second wife. Each, however, has chosen a different path, one to stay married, and one to emigrate to America. What emerges is a searing attack on marriage customs and women's rights in Ba's home country, Senegal. This book should be required reading for all women and all men.

\*Balzac, Honoré de

*Père Goriot*

*Le Père Goriot*, one of a series of novels Balzac named “The Human Comedy” (as opposed to Dante’s divine one) is the story of a man who has sacrificed all that he possesses, perhaps nobly, or perhaps foolishly, for the sake of his daughters. The story takes place in a boarding house in Paris, where “old man Goriot,” as his fellow boarders call him, lives with an assortment of characters including Rastignac, a law student full of energy and sometimes extreme ideas and notions, Vautrin, a mysterious political activist and schemer, and an assortment of other intriguing characters. What follows is a story of murder, political intrigue, and social climbing, the climax of which leaves us to contemplate the French expression “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.” Written nearly two hundred years ago, this could have been written yesterday.

Batuman, Elif

*The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books  
and the People Who Read Them*

Can the practice of literary scholarship and the art of literary criticism generate true tales of hilarity, pathos, and revelation? Yes, if you’re Batuman, a writer of extraordinary verve and acumen who braids together academic adventures, travelogues, biography, and autobiography to create scintillating essays. A self-described “six-foot-tall first-generation Turkish woman” who grew up in New Jersey, Batuman became enthralled by the great Russian writers, studied Russian, and, after some rough spots, embraced the study of literature as her life calling. Candid and reflective, mischievous and erudite, Batuman writes nimble and passionate essays celebrating the invaluable and pleasurable ways literature can “increase the sum total of human understanding.” (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

Beah, Ishmael

*A Long Way Gone*

This absorbing account by a young man who, as a boy of 12, gets swept up in Sierra Leone’s civil war goes beyond even the best journalistic efforts in revealing the life and mind of a child abducted into the horrors of warfare. Beah’s harrowing journey transforms him overnight from a child enthralled by American hip-hop music and dance to an internal refugee bereft of family. Beah finds himself forced into the army — in a drug-filled life of casual mass slaughter that lasts until he is 15, when he’s brought to a rehabilitation center in the capital. When the war finally engulfs the capital, it sends 17-year-old Beah fleeing again, this time to the U.S., where he now lives. (Beah graduated from Oberlin College in 2004.) Told in clear, accessible language by a young writer with a gifted literary voice, this memoir seems destined to become a classic firsthand account of war and the ongoing plight of child soldiers in conflicts worldwide. (*Starred Review, Publisher’s Weekly*)

Benioff, David

*City of Thieves*

Author and screenwriter Benioff follows up *The 25th Hour* with this hard-to-put-down novel based on his grandfather’s stories about surviving WWII in Russia. A wry and sympathetic observer of the devastation around him, (main character, 17 year old) Lev is an engaging and self-deprecating narrator who finds unexpected reserves of courage at the crucial moment and forms an unlikely friendship with Kolya, a flamboyant ladies’ man who is coolly reckless in the face of danger. Benioff blends tense adventure, a bittersweet coming-of-age and an oddly touching buddy narrative to craft a smart crowd-pleaser. (Amazon.com)

Bradley, Alan

*The Weed that Strings the Hangman’s Bag*

Flavia, the precocious, imaginative, and adorable 11-year-old sleuth, returns for her second adventure. This time she becomes involved with the members of a traveling puppet show that features the tale of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. When the puppetmaster is mysteriously electrocuted during the show, Flavia knows it can’t be an accident and eventually finds the murderer. The rest of Flavia’s family are also eccentric, to say the least, and add greatly to the overall fun. Thank goodness Bradley is not allowing Flavia to grow up too quickly; we need more sleuths whose primary mode of transportation is a bicycle. (*Booklist, Amazon.com*)

\*Bronte, Anne

*Agnes Gray*

Anne Bronte's first novel, the story of a young woman forced by her family's financial situation to find work as a governess, was published in 1847 together with her older sister Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. Does it deserve the relative obscurity into which it has fallen? Or is it, as a more recent novelist claimed, "the most perfect prose narrative in English literature?" Let's find out.

Brooks, Geraldine

*People of the Book: A Novel*

One of the earliest Jewish religious volumes to be illuminated with images, the Sarajevo Haggadah survived centuries of purges and wars thanks to people of all faiths who risked their lives to safeguard it. Geraldine Brooks, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *March*, has turned the intriguing but sparsely detailed history of this precious volume into an emotionally rich, thrilling fictionalization that retraces its turbulent journey. In the hands of Hanna Heath, an impassioned rare-book expert restoring the manuscript in 1996 Sarajevo, it yields clues to its guardians and whereabouts: an insect wing, a wine stain, salt crystals, and a white hair. A complex love story, thrilling mystery, vivid history lesson, and celebration of the enduring power of ideas. (Mari Malcolm, Amazon.com)

\*Brown, Dee

*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

The classic bestselling history *The New York Times* called 'Original, remarkable, and finally heartbreaking'...Impossible to put down, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* is Dee Brown's eloquent, fully documented account of the systematic destruction of the American Indian during the second half of the nineteenth century. (Follett's TitlePeek Summary)

Brown, Joe David

*Paper Moon*

Brown's 1971 novel was the basis for the hit film by director Peter Bogdanovich. Narrated by 11-year-old Addie Loggins, the story follows her adventures with Long Boy, who may or may not be her father, as they con suckers out of their money in the Depression-era South. Both kids and adults can have great fun with this book. (*Library Journal*)

Brown, Larry

*The Miracle of Catfish*

When Larry Brown died suddenly in 2004 at 53, he left a nearly finished sixth novel, *A Miracle of Catfish*, that revisits several of his favorite themes: fatherhood, alienation, and loneliness. Shannon Ravenel, Brown's Algonquin editor, had the daunting task of trimming the enormous manuscript to manageable size. Brown's prolix, rambling style is at times mesmerizing and at times – just rambling. Brown's notes at the end show us where the story might have gone, but it does not suffer for being unfinished. Larry Brown definitely knew where he was taking his reader, and Ravenel helped him along. Brown writes hell-bent-for-leather in a style uniquely his own which carries the reader along, into landscapes interior and exterior. (Amazon.com)

\*Byatt, A.S.

*Possession*

A winner of England's Booker Prize (that country's highest literary prize) in 1990, this passionate novel is both an intellectual mystery and a witty romance. Two young literary scholars cross paths while researching the lives of two Victorian poets. Byatt's novel both celebrates and lampoons the world of modern literary scholarship, recreates the complex relationship of the pair of larger-than-life poets through letters, journals, and poetry, and somehow manages to create a gripping tale of suspense amid dusty libraries and the charming English countryside.

Card, Orson Scott

*Ender's Game*

Intense is the word for *Ender's Game*. Aliens have attacked Earth twice and almost destroyed the human species. To make sure humans win the next encounter, the world government has taken to breeding military geniuses – and then training them in the arts of war. The early training, not surprisingly, takes the form of 'games'. Ender Wiggin is a genius among geniuses; he wins all the games. He is smart enough to know that time is running out. But is he smart enough to save the planet? (Amazon.com)

\*Cather, Willa

*O Pioneers!*

*O Pioneers!* (1913) was Willa Cather's first great novel, and to many it remains her unchallenged masterpiece. No other work of fiction so faithfully conveys both the sharp physical realities and the mythic sweep of the transformation of the American frontier – and the transformation of the people who settled it. Cather's heroine is Alexandra Bergson, who arrives on the wind-blasted prairie of Hanover, Nebraska as a girl and grows up to make it a prosperous farm. But this archetypal success story is darkened by loss, and Alexandra's devotion to the land may come at the cost of love itself. At once a sophisticated pastoral and a prototype for later feminist novels, *O Pioneers!* is a work in which triumph is inextricably enmeshed with tragedy, a story of people who do not claim a land so much as they submit to it and, in the process, become greater than they were. (Random House Review)

\*Cather, Willa

*The Song of the Lark*

This great novel is something like a portrait of the artist as a young woman, in this case a musician. Heroine Thea Kronstadt pursues her dreams from her family home in rural Colorado to Chicago and experiences a great awakening in the American Southwest. Cather's theme is the tension between art and life and the great sacrifices required in the service of one's vision and talent. The story is enriched by Cather's gift for landscape and her usual cast of varied and interesting individual characters.

Chabon, Michael

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*

It's 1939 and Brooklynite Sammy Klayman dreams of making it big in the nascent world of comic books. Joseph Kavalier has never seen a comic book, but he is an accomplished artist versed in the "autoliberation" techniques of his hero, Harry Houdini. He effects a great (and surreal) escape from the Nazis, arrives in New York, and joins forces with Sammy. They rapidly create the Escapist, the first of many superheroes emblematic of their temperaments and predicaments, and attain phenomenal success... As Chabon whips up wildly imaginative escapades punctuated by schtick that rivals the best of Jewish comedians, he plumbs the depths of the human heart and celebrates the healing properties of escapism and the "genuine magic of art" with exuberance and wisdom. (*Booklist*)

Chiger, Krystyna and Paisner, Daniel

*The Girl in the Green Sweater*

In this puissant memoir, Holocaust survivor Chiger and co-author Paisner detail Chiger's early years, largely spent hiding from Nazi and Ukrainian persecution. In a tale told from a precocious child's point of view, Chiger chronicles long, dark hours spent in silence with her younger brother, Pawel, in makeshift bunkers and behind false walls while their parents worked menial jobs for meager rations. After the Chigers are forced into the underground sewer system, the family spends fourteen months in the most unsanitary conditions imaginable. Amid the sick and starving, young Chiger clings to hope through make believe games, trust in her parents, and the Catholic sewer worker who provides their only access to the outside world. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

Cleave, Chris

*Little Bee*

From the author of the international bestseller *Incendiary* comes a haunting novel about the tenuous friendship that blooms between two disparate strangers — one an illegal Nigerian refugee, the other a recent widow from suburban London.

Colegate, Isabel

*The Shooting Party*

Set on an estate in Oxfordshire in the autumn of 1913, this novel explores England's class system and traditional ways of living in the very last months before Europe was plunged into the devastation of the Great War and the world changed. With a sort of Chekhovian melancholy, the author provides a powerful and moving evocation of a period in English history and a passing way of life.

\*Collins, Wilkie

*The Moonstone*

Called “the first and greatest of English detective novels” by T.S. Eliot, *The Moonstone* is a masterpiece of suspense. A fabulous yellow diamond becomes the dangerous inheritance of Rachel Verinder. Outside her Yorkshire country house watch the Hindu priests who have waited for many years to reclaim their ancient talisman, looted from the holy city of Somnauth. When the Moonstone disappears the case looks simple, but in mid-Victorian England no one is what they seem, and nothing can be taken for granted. (Oxford UP cover copy)

\*Conrad, Joseph

*Under Western Eyes*

This story is set in Tzarist Russia, and it centers on the activities of two revolutionaries, one ardent and the other reluctant. When a chance event connects the two, the reluctant revolutionary must make some decisions that will alter the course of his future. Some vivid descriptions of St. Petersburg, psychological suspense and a set of intriguing characters make this novel a riveting read.

Currie, Jr., Ron

*Everything Matters!*

On the day that Junior Thibodeau is born, a mysterious voice tells him the exact moment when the world will end: 36 years, 168 days, 14 hours and 23 seconds into the future. Knowledge of the pending apocalypse colors Junior’s existence from day one and leaves him wondering: “Does anything I do matter?” The novel unfolds through the funny, poignant and tragic stories told by Junior and his family as well as the all knowing voice that pushes Junior to his destiny. (Amazon.com)

Danticat, Edwidge

*Brother, I’m Dying*

*Brother, I’m Dying* offers insight into a talented writer, her family history, and the injustices of the modern world. Edwidge Danticat’s father and uncle chose very different paths: the former struggled to make a new life for himself in America, while the latter remained in Haiti, the homeland he paradoxically loved. In following their lives and their impact on future generations, Danticat’s powerful family memoir explores how the private and the political, the past and the present, intersect. (Bookmarks Magazine)

Diamant, Anita

*The Red Tent*

Skillfully interweaving biblical tales with events and characters of her own invention, Diamant’s sweeping first novel re-creates the life of Dinah, daughter of Leah and Jacob, from her birth and happy childhood in Mesopotamia through her years in Canaan and death in Egypt. When Dinah reaches puberty and enters the Red Tent (the place women visit to give birth or have their monthly periods), her mother and Jacob’s three other wives initiate her into the religious and sexual practices of the tribe. Diamant has written a thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating portrait of a fascinating woman and the life she might have lived... (Amazon.com)

Díaz, Junot

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Things have never been easy for Oscar, a sweet but disastrously overweight, lovesick Dominican ghetto nerd. From his home in New Jersey, where he lives with his old-world mother and rebellious sister, Oscar dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien and, most of all, of finding love. But he may never get what he wants, thanks to the curse that has haunted Oscar’s family for generations, dooming them to prison, torture, tragic accidents, and, above all, ill-starred love. ... Díaz immerses us in the tumultuous life of Oscar and the history of the family at large, rendering with genuine warmth and dazzling energy, humor, and insight the Dominican-American experience, and, ultimately, the endless human capacity to persevere in the face of heartbreak and loss. (Amazon.com)

Durrell, Gerald

*My Family and Other Animals*

This is a delightful book. There's no other way to say it ... especially if you like animals and stories about kooky family members. This book is a remembrance of a summer when the author was ten years old, and he and his family rented a house on the beautiful island of Corfu in the Mediterranean. It is full of the tales of the exploits of a ten-year-old naturalist, who is intrigued by the miracle of the abundant life around him, and the challenges of living with a colorful family. It is laced with humor and a sense of wonder.

Evans, Richard Paul

*The Walk - A Novel*

"Alan Christoffersen has it all – his own thriving boutique ad agency in Seattle, a McMansion, luxury cars and a beautiful wife, McKale, who's also his best friend from childhood. In mid-meeting Alan is notified that McKale has been injured in a fall from her horse. His partner Kyle promises to run things while Alan tends to McKale during her hospitalization and rehab. On his first day back at work he learns that Kyle stole his clients, and the agency is now teetering on the brink. When McKale dies from complications from a urinary tract infection, fate piles on. Alan's finances are in turmoil. The bank forecloses on the house; the cars are repossessed. With about \$20,000 left to his name, Alan decides to walk across the continental United States by the longest route – Seattle to Key West, Fla." (*Kirkus Review*)

Ford, Jamie

*Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*

Henry Lee is a Chinese-American in Seattle who, in 1986, has just lost his wife to cancer. After Henry hears that the belongings of Japanese immigrants interned during WWII have been found in the basement of the Panama Hotel, the narrative shuttles between 1986 and the 1940s in a predictable story that chronicles the losses of old age and the bewilderment of youth. Henry recalls the difficulties of life in America during WWII, when he and his Japanese-American school friend, Keiko, wandered through wartime Seattle. Keiko and her family are later interned in a camp, and Henry, horrified by America's anti-Japanese hysteria, is further conflicted because of his Chinese father's anti-Japanese sentiment. (*Publisher's Weekly*, from Amazon.com)

Forman, Gayle

*If I Stay*

In a single moment, everything changes. Seventeen-year-old Mia has no memory of the accident; she can only recall riding along the snow-wet Oregon road with her family. Then, in a blink, she finds herself watching as her own damaged body is taken from the wreck... A sophisticated, layered, and heartachingly beautiful story about the power of family and friends, the choices we all make — and the ultimate choice Mia commands.

Freeman Jr., Castle

*Go with Me and All That I Have*

*(these two books are to be read together and count as one)*

The Vermont hill country is the stark, vivid setting for this gripping and entertaining story of bold determination, *Go with Me*. The local villain, Blackway, is making life hellish for Lillian, a young woman from parts elsewhere. A pair of unlikely allies – Lester, a crafty old-timer, and Nate, a powerful but naive youth – join her cause. In this modern-day drama, a kind of Greek chorus – wry, witty, digressive; obsessively, amusingly reminiscent; skeptical, opinionated, and not always entirely sober – enriches the telling of this unforgettable tale as the reader follows the threesome's progress on their dangerous, suspenseful quest.

In *All That I Have*, a gripping, wise, and darkly funny tale of suspense, Sheriff Lucian Wing confronts a series of trials that test his work, his marriage, and the settled order of his life. Wing is an experienced, practical man who enforces the law in his corner of Vermont with a steady hand and a generous tolerance. Things are not as they should be, however. The outside world draws near, and threats multiply. The sheriff's response to these diverse challenges calls on all the personal resources he has cultivated during his working life: patience, tact, and (especially) humor.

Friedman, Thomas

*From Beirut to Jerusalem*

There have been any number of books that have worked hard at interpreting the melange called the Middle East. This one, however, makes a difference because it's so well written and captures the psychological mannerisms of the people of Lebanon and Israel – the first step to understanding some of the mysterious “why” that seems to elude the American public and government. Friedman's credentials are impressive: he spent six years of journalistic service for *The New York Times* in Beirut and Jerusalem, has won two Pulitzer prizes, and is now the *Times's* chief diplomatic correspondent. His writing is vastly descriptive, incredibly illuminating, very educational, and marvelously persuasive. (Amazon.com)

Gaines, Ernest J.

*A Lesson Before Dying*

The story of two African American men struggling to attain manhood in a prejudiced society, the tale is set in Bayonne, La. (the fictional community Gaines has used previously) in the late 1940s. It concerns Jefferson, a mentally slow, barely literate young man, who, though an innocent bystander to a shootout between a white store owner and two black robbers, is convicted of murder, and the sophisticated, educated man who comes to his aid. (Publisher's Weekly, Amazon.com)

Gao, Xingjian

*Soul Mountain*

In 1983, Gao, Chinese playwright, critic, fiction writer, and painter, was diagnosed with lung cancer and faced imminent death. But later, a second examination revealed there was no cancer – he had a reprieve from death. Faced with a repressive cultural environment and a threat of a spell in a prison farm, Gao fled Beijing and began a journey 15,000 km into the remote mountains and ancient forest of southwest China. The result of this epic voyage of discovery is *Soul Mountain*.

Gardam, Jane

*A Long Way from Verona*

The story of a thirteen-year-old girl in England during the second world war, this is a thoughtful and very amusing novel that considers what it is like to be an adolescent and an aspiring writer having some difficulty with certain members of the staff and faculty of an all girls school. The heroine, Jessica, marches to her own drum, often against the wishes of her adult supervisors, and in the process learns something about what constitutes true happiness in a difficult and challenging world.

\*Gaskell, Elizabeth

*North & South*

This novel examines the nature of social authority and obedience and provides an insightful description of the role of middle class women in nineteenth century society. Through the story of Margaret Hale, a southerner who moves to the northern industrial town of Milton, Gaskell skillfully explores issues of class and gender, as Margaret's sympathy for the town mill workers conflicts with her growing attraction to the mill owner, John Thornton. [from Oxford University Press's product description]

Genova, Lisa

*Still Alice*

*Still Alice* is a compelling debut novel about a 50-year-old woman's sudden descent into early onset Alzheimer's disease, written by first-time author Lisa Genova, who holds a Ph. D in neuroscience from Harvard University. Alice Howland is a celebrated Harvard professor at the height of her career when she notices a forgetfulness creeping into her life. As confusion starts to cloud her thinking and her memory begins to fail her, she receives a devastating diagnosis: early onset Alzheimer's disease. Fiercely independent, Alice struggles to maintain her lifestyle and live in the moment, even as her sense of self is being stripped away. In turns heartbreaking, inspiring and terrifying, *Still Alice* captures in remarkable detail what it's like to literally lose your mind. (product description, Amazon.com)

Gibbons, Kaye

*Ellen Foster*

In *Ellen Foster*, the title character is an 11-year-old orphan who refers to herself as “old Ellen,” an appellation that is disturbingly apt. Ellen is an old woman in a child’s body; her frail, unhappy mother dies, her abusive father alternately neglects her and makes advances on her, and she is shuttled from one uncaring relative’s home to another before she finally takes matters into her own hands and finds herself a place to belong. There is something almost Dickensian about Ellen’s tribulations; like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* or a host of other literary child heroes, Ellen is at the mercy of predatory adults, with only her own wit and courage – and the occasional kindness of others – to help her through. That she does, in fact, survive her childhood and even rise above it is the book’s bittersweet victory. (Amazon.com)

Godden, Rumer

*The River*

Harriet is between two worlds. Her sister is no longer a playmate, her brother is still a child. The comforting rhythm of her Indian childhood - the noise of the jute works, the colourful festivals that accompany each season and the eternal ebb and flow of the river on its journey to the Bay of Bengal - is about to be shattered. She must learn how to reconcile the jagged edges of beginnings and ends ...*The River* is Rumer Godden’s beautiful tribute to India and childhood. (adapted from *the Saturday Review*)

\*Golding, William

*Lord of the Flies*

A great modern classic, this novel is the frightening story of a group of English school boys marooned on a desert island. As they try to establish an ordered society dedicated to survival and to the task of seeking rescue, the rules and conventions of civilization gradually erode, and they slowly sink into savagery. Golding’s stated intent in writing the book was “to trace the defects in society back to the defects in human nature.” This book discovers and probes the darkness in the heart of man.

Goldman, William

*The Princess Bride*

Mr. Goldman feels *The Princess Bride* is a story that has everything: “Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Poison. True love. Hate. Revenge. Giants. Hunters. Bad men. Good men. Beautifullest ladies. Snakes. Spiders. Beasts of all natures and descriptions. Pain. Death. Brave men. Coward men. Strongest men. Chases. Escapes. Lies. Truths. Passion. Miracles.”

Is *The Princess Bride* a critique of classics like *Ivanhoe* and *The Three Musketeers*? A wry look at the differences between fairy tales and real life? Simply a funny, frenetic adventure? No matter how you read it, you’ll put it on your “keeper” shelf. (Please note: the book is significantly different from the movie of the same name!)

\*Gordimer, Nadine

*Selected Stories*

Through her thought provoking short stories Gordimer introduces her readers to the life and culture of South Africa during [the] apartheid. Taken from all walks of life, her characters face the tensions and moral decisions of a racially divided nation. Born in South Africa in 1923, Gordimer has been a prolific writer and activist throughout her life there. Among many awards, she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

Goudge, Elizabeth

*Rosemary Tree*

Set in the Devonshire of the 1950’s, this novel narrates what happens to Michael, just out of prison, who finds himself on a whim in Silverbridge, a quaint town with a young, somewhat unhappily married vicar whose wife is someone Michael once knew. The vicar’s family, including his elderly aunt and his three young girls; an old estate; and a private school (or two) all help Michael find the keys to redemption.

\*Hall, Donald

*String Too Short to be Saved*

Recollections of summers on a New England Farm, this collection of stories stems from the author's affection for the land and people of New England and his memories of his boyhood spent on his grandparent's farm.

\*Hardy, Thomas

*The Woodlanders*

Love and the erratic heart are at the center of Hardy's "woodland story" in which romantic entanglements, marital choice and class mobility become inextricably linked. (Amazon.com)

Harrison, Jim

*The Farmer's Daughter*

Three novellas as dark as they are exuberant. The first novella recounts the story of Sarah, who is dragged to rural Montana by her neglectful parents and learns to love dogs, horses, and revenge. The second and strongest novella features a recurring Harrison character, Brown Dog, a half-Indian free spirit. Brown Dog's dislike of modern institutions and psychological experts is underscored by his extraordinary affinity for the natural world. The final piece presents Samuel, who as a child traveling in Mexico contracted viruses that now cause werewolflike spells that render him a permanent stranger. (Amazon.com)

Haruf, Kent

*Plainsong*

*Plainsong*, according to Kent Haruf's epigraph, is "any simple and unadorned melody or air." It's a perfect description of this lovely, rough-edged book, set on the very edge of the Colorado plains. Tom Guthrie is a high school teacher whose wife can't – or won't – get out of bed; the McPherons are two bachelor brothers who know little about the world beyond their farm gate; Victoria Roubideaux is a pregnant 17-year-old with no place to turn. Their lives parallel each other in much the same way any small-town lives would – until Maggie Jones, another teacher, makes them intersect. (Amazon.com)

Hegi, Ursula

*Stones from the River*

Hegi's book has a distinctive, appealing flavor of its own. Stone's characters are off-center enough to hold your attention despite the inevitable dominance of the setting: There's Trudi's mother, who slowly goes insane; Trudi's best friend Georg, whose parents dress him as the girl they always wanted; and, of course, Trudi herself, doomed to long for an impossible normalcy. The reader's inevitable sympathy for Trudi, the dwarf, heightens the true grotesqueness of Nazi Germany. *Stones from the River* is a nightmare journey with an unforgettable guide. (Amazon.com)

Hornby, Nick

*A Long Way Down*

In his trademark warm and witty prose, Hornby follows four depressed people from their aborted suicide attempts on New Year's Eve through the surprising developments that occur over the following three months... The four meet while scoping out a tower rooftop looking for the best exit point. Inhibited by the idea of having an audience, they agree instead to form a support group of sorts. But rather than indulging in sappy therapy-speak, they frequently direct lacerating, biting funny comments at each other – and the bracing mix of complete candor and endless complaining seems to work as a kind of tonic. (Booklist)

\*Huxley, Aldous

*Brave New World*

Huxley's vision of the future -- a world of tomorrow in which capitalist civilization has been reconstituted through the most efficient scientific and psychological engineering. (Barnesandnoble.com)

Irving, John

*The Hotel New Hampshire*

"The first of my father's illusions was that bears could survive the life lived by human beings, and the second was that human beings could survive a life led in hotels." So says John Berry, son of a hapless dreamer, brother to a cadre of eccentric siblings, and chronicler of the lives lived, the loves experienced, the deaths met, and the myriad strange and wonderful times encountered by the family Berry. (Barnes and Noble Review)

Jackson, Shirley

*The Haunting of Hill House*

First published in 1959, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* has been hailed as a perfect work of unnerving terror. It is the story of four seekers who arrive at a notoriously unfriendly pile called Hill House: Dr. Montague, an occult scholar; Theodora, his lighthearted assistant; Eleanor, a friendless, fragile young woman well acquainted with poltergeists; and Luke, the future heir of Hill House. At first, their stay seems destined to be merely a spooky encounter with inexplicable phenomena. But Hill House is gathering its powers — and soon it will choose one of them to make its own. (Penguin cover copy)

Jerome, Jerome K.

*Three Men in a Boat*

"I had the general symptoms, the chief among them being a disinclination to work of any kind." So begin the hilarious misadventures of a merry, but scandalously lazy band of well-to-do young men - and a plucky and rather world-weary fox terrier named Montmorency - on an idyllic cruise along the River Thames. What they find is one hapless catastrophe after another. Soggy weather, humiliating dunkings, the irritating behavior of small boats and the "contrariness of teakettles" are just a few of the barbarisms our genteel heroes are forced to endure. First published in 1889, *Three Men in a Boat* was an instant success, and Jerome has been compared to comic master P.G. Wodehouse. (Amazon, product description)

\*Jhabvala, Ruth Praver

*Out of India*

Born in Germany, educated in England, and married to an Indian, Jhabvala has spent most of her adult life in India: "a country for which I was not born." She describes her relationship with India in an introduction that reveals Jhabvala's own ambivalence as a Westerner. Her fiction depicts Indian life, and often its effect on non-Indians, with sensitivity and wit. The 15 stories in *Out of India* were chosen by the author from her previous collections, published between 1964 and 1976. (*Library Journal*, Amazon.com)

Jones, Edward P.

*All Aunt Hagar's Children*

Returning to the city that inspired his first prize winning book, *Lost in the City*, Jones has filled this new collection with people who call Washington, D.C., home. Yet it is not the city's power brokers that most concern him but rather its ordinary citizens. *All Aunt Hagar's Children* turns an unflinching eye to the men, women, and children caught between the old ways of the South and the temptations that await them further north, people who in Jones's masterful hands emerge as fully human and morally complex. With the legacy of slavery just a stone's throw away and the future uncertain, Jones's cornucopia of characters will haunt readers for years to come. (nytimes.com)

Jones, Edward P.

*The Known World*

In one of the most acclaimed novels in recent memory, Edward P. Jones, two-time National Book Award finalist, tells the story of Henry Townsend, a black farmer and former slave who falls under the tutelage of William Robbins, the most powerful man in Manchester County, Virginia. Making certain he never circumvents the law, Townsend runs his affairs with unusual discipline. But when death takes him unexpectedly, his widow, Caldonia, can't uphold the estate's order and chaos ensues. In a daring and ambitious novel, Jones has woven a footnote of history into an epic that takes an unflinching look at slavery in all of its moral complexities. (www.nytimes.com)

Jordan, Robert

*The Eye of the World*

The peaceful villagers of Emond's Field pay little heed to rumors of war in the western lands until a savage attack by troll-like minions of the Dark One forces three young men to confront a destiny which has its origins in the time known as "The Breaking of the World". This richly detailed fantasy presents a fully realized, complex adventure which will appeal to fans of classic quests. Open religious and political conflicts add a gritty realism, while the cities and courts provide plenty of drama and splendor. *The Eye of the World* stands alone as a fantasy epic. (Amazon.com)

Kapuscinski, Ryszard

*Travels with Herodotus*

In 1955, just starting his career as a reporter, Kapuscinski wanted to travel just beyond the border of Poland. His editor sent him on assignment much farther afield, to China, Iran, and Africa, with a gift of Herodotus' *Histories*. Calling Herodotus the "first globalist," Kapuscinski uses his volume as comfort, solace, guide, and inspiration. He intersperses Herodotus' writings throughout his own musings at the modern world. As he reads about and dreads the war between the Greeks and Persians, he covers the war in the Congo. Kapuscinski's recollections are intimate and vibrant in his embrace of a broader world. (*Booklist*)

Kasischke, Laura

*In a Perfect World*

This is a suspenseful novel about a pandemic much more deadly than the recent H1N1 influenza. Told through the viewpoint of a rather naïve young woman, we witness the tragedy unfold as she and her family become increasingly isolated as civilization collapses. References to current popular culture and events render the story authentic and that much more chilling.

\*Kincaid, Jamaica

*Annie John and Lucy*

(these two books are to be read together and count as one)

This pair of short novels is by a talented woman, born in Antigua and now living in Vermont, who writes dazzling stories of young women coming of age. *Annie John*, written in 1985, offers us a window into a girl's family life from age 10 to 17 in Antigua, and *Lucy*, written in 1990, is about a 19-year-old who comes to New York to work as an au pair. *The New York Times Book Review* said *Annie John* was "so touching and familiar it could be happening to any of us ... and that's exactly the book's strength, its wisdom, its truth."

Kingsolver, Barbara

*The Bean Trees*

Clear-eyed and spirited, Taylor Greer grew up poor in rural Kentucky with the goals of avoiding pregnancy and getting away. But when she heads west with high hopes and a barely functional car, she meets the human condition head-on. By the time Taylor arrives in Tucson, Arizona, she has acquired a completely unexpected child, a three-year-old American Indian girl named Turtle, and must somehow come to terms with both motherhood and the necessity of putting down roots. Hers is a story about love and friendship, abandonment and belonging, and the discovery of surprising resources in apparently empty places. (BarnesandNoble.com)

\*Kipling, Rudyard

*The Jungle Book*

When little Mowgli's parents are run out of their camp by a formidable Bengal tiger, the toddler scampers to safety alone in the cave of a Seeonee wolf pack. Thereafter forest animals succor Mowgli and through his wits and their kindness, he reaches adulthood. Saved from the jaws of the evil tiger Shere Khan, young Mowgli is adopted by the wolf pack and taught the law of the jungle by lovable old Baloo the bear and Bhageera the panther. The adventures of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, the snake-fighting mongoose, little Toomai and the elephant's secret dance, and Kotick the white seal are all part of Mowgli's extraordinary journey with his animal friends. (please note: don't think that you can pass the book quiz/discussion by watching the Disney movie!) (Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble)

Koestler, Arthur

*The Sleepwalkers*

First of all, *The Sleepwalkers* is a history of astronomy. Second, it is a revealing study of human nature. Anyone who wants a good introduction to astronomy and, for that matter, to physics, cannot hope for a better one than Koestler affords. Those whose interest is in the history and not the math of astronomy will be well satisfied with the author's humanistic approach to the sciences. But a reader with a background more technical and mathematical will be served just as well by the balance the author achieves between strict scientific reasoning and a more humanistic view of science in a cultural context. Though not required for the fall astronomy course, this book will qualify not only as summer reading, but also as a very strong foundation for the topics of *Solar System Astronomy*.

Kristof, Nicholas and WuDunn, Sheryl *Half the Sky*

*New York Times* columnist Kristof and his wife, WuDunn, a former *Times* reporter, make a brilliantly argued case for investing in the health and autonomy of women worldwide. More girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century, they write, detailing the rampant gendercide in the developing world, particularly in India and Pakistan. Far from merely making moral appeals, the authors posit that it is impossible for countries to climb out of poverty if only a fraction of women (9% in Pakistan, for example) participate in the labor force. China's meteoric rise was due to women's economic empowerment: 80% of the factory workers in the Guangdong province are female; six of the 10 richest self-made women in the world are Chinese. The authors reveal local women to be the most effective change agents.  
(Amazon.com)

Lamb, Wally

*The Hour I First Believed*

When high school teacher Caelum Quirk and his wife, Maureen, a school nurse, move to Littleton, Colorado, they both get jobs at Columbine High School. In April 1999, Caelum returns home to Connecticut, to be with his aunt who has just had a stroke, while Maureen finds herself in the school library at Columbine, cowering in a cabinet as two students go on a murderous rampage. Maureen survives, but she is unable to recover from the trauma. The two return to the Quirk family farm in Connecticut in an attempt to recover from the tragedy. While Maureen fights to regain her sanity, Caelum discovers old diaries, letters and newspaper clippings that reveal the story of the Quirk family going back five generations. Through these pages, Caelum is able to reconstruct the lives of the women and men whose legacy he bears.  
(Amazon.com)

Lamott, Ann

*Imperfect Birds*

It is sobering to think that Rosie Ferguson is your typical teenage girl. On one hand, she's in the throes of her senior year in high school: concerned with body image, boyfriends, BFFs and boredom, and the daily trauma of living with parents who are so hopeless. On the other hand, she is an adept addict who's never met a substance she wouldn't abuse or a male she wouldn't seduce. Juggling these two worlds demands bigger and more frequent scores, and more facile lies, while her parents are reluctant to enforce even the lamest disciplinary rules for fear of losing Rosie's love – until one night when her world comes crashing down, and her parents have no choice but to send Rosie to a wilderness rehab program... Lamott intuitively taps into the teenage drug culture to create a vivid, unsettling portrait of a family in crisis.  
(Booklist)

Larbalestier, Justine

*Liar*

Micah Wilkins is a senior at a New York City private school, an extraordinarily talented runner, and a compulsive liar. She's masqueraded as a boy, invented family members, and

hidden her relationship with handsome fellow student Zach Rubin. When Zach dies under mysterious and horrific circumstances, Micah's history of lying brings her under suspicion... Larbalestier effortlessly and realistically shows the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of Micah's world. (*Booklist*, September 1, 2009)

\*Larkin, Philip

*A Girl in Winter*

This 1947 novel from the late Larkin, who was one of England's most distinguished poets, tells the story of a fateful winter day in the life of a European woman who has fled to England during WW II. (Amazon.com)

\*Larsen, Nella

*Passing*

This powerful novel was written in 1929 by one of the leading writers of the Harlem Renaissance. It is the story of Clare Kendry, an African-American who is so pale that she can pass for being white ... and does. She marries a successful white businessman who does not know that she is black, and she is able to bypass all concerns of racism and live an elegant life. Until, that is, she meets a childhood friend, and she is forced to confront who she really is.

Larsson, Stieg

*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*

The exhilarating conclusion to bestseller Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy (after *The Girl Who Played with Fire*) finds Lisbeth Salander, the brilliant computer hacker who was shot in the head in the final pages of *Fire*, alive, though still the prime suspect in three murders in Stockholm. While she convalesces under armed guard, journalist Mikael Blomkvist works to unravel the decades-old coverup surrounding the man who shot Salander: her father, Alexander Zalachenko, a Soviet intelligence defector and longtime secret asset to Säpo, Sweden's security police. Though Larsson (1954-2004) tends toward narrative excess, his was an undeniably powerful voice in crime fiction that will be sorely missed. (*Publisher's Weekly*, Amazon.com)

Larsson, Stieg

*The Girl Who Played with Fire*

Stieg Larsson's seething heroine, Lisbeth Salander, once again finds herself paired with journalist Mikael Blomkvist on the trail of a sinister criminal enterprise. Only this time, Lisbeth must return to the darkness of her own past (more specifically, an event coldly known as "All the Evil") if she is to stay one step ahead – and alive. *The Girl Who Played with Fire* is a break-out-in-a-cold-sweat thriller that crackles with stunning twists and dismisses any talk of a sophomore slump. Fans of Larsson's prior work will find even more to love here, and readers who do not find their hearts racing within the first five pages may want to confirm they still have a pulse. (Amazon.com)

\*Lawrence, D.H.

*Women in Love*

A sequel to the banned novel, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love* follows the tumultuous lives of the Brangwen sisters, Gudrun and Ursula. Turning his keen eye on the nature of love, commitment, passion, and marriage, Lawrence gives us the stories of two intelligent, incisive, and observant women, whose temperamental differences spark an ongoing debate regarding their society and their inner lives. The two very different sisters pursue thrilling, torrid affairs; but their quest for more mature emotional relationships uncovers some startling information about their lovers and themselves. (Barnes and Noble Review)

Lee, Janice Y.K.

*The Piano Teacher*

This cinematic tale of two love affairs in mid-century Hong Kong shows colonial pretensions tainted by wartime truths. Will Truesdale, a rootless, handsome Briton, arrives in the colony in 1941, and is swept up by Trudy Liang, the blithe and glamorous daughter of a Shanghai millionaire

and a Portuguese beauty. They quickly become inseparable, but when the Japanese invade, Will is interned and Trudy resorts to increasingly Faustian methods to survive. After the war, Claire Pendleton, the naive wife of a British civil servant, arrives. She begins giving piano lessons to the daughter of a rich Chinese couple, and falls in love with their wounded and inscrutable driver: Will. Lee unfolds each story with the brisk grace and discretion of the society she describes, a world in which horrors are adumbrated but seldom told. (*The New Yorker*, Amazon.com)

\*Lermontov, Mikhail

*A Hero of Our Time*

The only novel by one of Russia's greatest 19th century poets, this book consists of five separate stories relating episodes in the life of the hero, a man with a poet's soul and a strong capacity for feeling who is at odds with the world. Much of the action of this psychological novel is set in the Caucasus at a time when Russia was trying to subdue the restless and rebellious tribes of that mountainous region and bring them within the domains of the empire.

Lewis, C.S.

*Till We Have Faces*

The writer of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and other children's fables, C.S. Lewis also wrote fables for adults. *Till We Have Faces* is the best known of these fascinating and profound novels. This is Lewis's retelling of the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche, with much attention given to Psyche's unattractive sister Orual. Orual eventually learns the importance of knowing oneself, of truly having a face. In the *New York Times* review of this book, it was said that this novel "exerts far beyond most novels, that combination of awfulness, wonder and attraction, which is what the word 'fascination', in its Latin form, really meant."

Linden, Eugene

*The Winds of Change*

This book is a must read for anyone interested in whether the period of climate change we are now facing is unique or has happened before in our earth's history. Linden has woven together the history and science of global warming in a compelling way. "*The Winds of Change* is fascinating – a tour de force. Linden has accumulated a greater comprehension of paleoclimatic and oceanographic issues than all but a very few scientists., I have nothing but admiration for this book, which is just what we need right now." George Woodwell, founder of the Woods Hole Research Center

Llywelyn, Morgan

1916

A novel set in Ireland at the time of the Easter Rebellion. Llywelyn tells the tale of 15-year-old Ned Halloran, a young *Titanic* survivor who lost both of his parents in that disaster. The headmaster of his school is a renowned scholar and also a rebel and patriot for the Irish cause. Ned acts as a courier for the rebels, becoming more and more supportive of their struggle. The young man's coming-of-age is complicated by his feelings of nationalism, the love of several women, and his rescue of a young orphan during a street battle. Ned tries to save his comrades and fights side by side with the woman he loves. (Amazon.com)

\*Malamud, Bernard

*The Fixer*

Set in Kiev in 1911 during a period of heightened anti-Semitism, the novel tells the story of Yakov Bok, a Jewish handyman blamed for the brutal murder of a young Russian boy. Bok leaves his village to try his luck in Kiev and, after denying his Jewish identity, finds himself working for a member of the anti-Semitic "Black Hundreds Society". When the boy is found nearly drained of blood in a cave, the Black Hundreds accuse the Jews of ritual murder. Arrested and imprisoned, Bok refuses to confess to a crime that he did not commit. (Barnesandnoble.com)

Malouf, David

*Ransom*

Drawn from Homer's *The Iliad*, Malouf retells the tale of the vengeful killing of Hector by the enraged Greek hero, Achilles, outside the walls of Troy. Hector's father, the Trojan king Priam, then tries to ransom Hector's desecrated body. The author explores how these two enemies come

to terms with their individual grief, hatred, and anger in the midst of a long and harrowing war. Quoting from a review in *Publishers Weekly*: "Though Malouf's sparingly deployed details, vigorous language, and sly wit humanize these tragic heroes, the story is unmistakably epic and certainly the stuff of legend."

\*Markham, Beryl

*West with the Night*

Born in England in 1902, Markham was taken by her father to East Africa in 1906. She spent her childhood playing with native Maruni children and apprenticing with her father as a trainer and breeder of racehorses. In the 1930s, she became an African bush pilot, and in September 1936, became the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic from east to west.

"Did you read Beryl Markham's book, *West with the Night*? I knew her fairly well in Africa and never would have suspected that she could and would put pen to paper except to write in her flyer's log book. As it is, she has written so well, and marvelously well, that I was completely ashamed of myself as a writer." Ernest Hemingway (Amazon.com)

Martel, Yann

*Life of Pi*

Pi Patel spends a beguiling boyhood in Pondicherry, India, as the son of a zookeeper. Growing up beside the wild beasts, Pi gathers an encyclopedic knowledge of the animal world. In his 16th year, Pi sets sail with his family and some of their menagerie to start a new life in Canada. Halfway to Midway Island, the ship sinks into the Pacific, leaving Pi stranded on a life raft with a hyena, an orangutan, an injured zebra and a 450-pound Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. After the beast dispatches the others, Pi is left to survive for 227 days with his large feline companion on the 26-foot-long raft, using all his knowledge, wits and faith to keep himself alive.

McCann, Colum

*Let the Great World Spin*

Colum McCann has worked some exquisite magic with *Let the Great World Spin*, conjuring a novel of electromagnetic force that defies gravity. It's August of 1974, a summer "hot and serious and full of death and betrayal". A stunned hush pauses the cacophonous universe of New York City as a man on a cable walks (repeatedly) between World Trade Center towers. This extraordinary, real-life feat by French funambulist Philippe Petit becomes the touchstone for stories that briefly submerge you in ten varied and intense lives — when they coalesce in the final pages, the moment hums with such grace that its memory might tighten your throat weeks later. (Amazon.com)

McEwan, Ian

*Saturday*

In the predawn sky on a Saturday morning, London neurosurgeon Henry Perowne sees a plane with a wing afire streaking toward Heathrow. His first thought is terrorism – especially since this is the day of a public demonstration against the pending Iraq war. Eventually, danger to Perowne and his family will come from another source, but the plane turns out to be a harbinger of a world forever changed. It is during [a family reunion], at the end of the day, that the ominous pall that has hovered over the narrative explodes into violence, and Perowne's sense that the world has become "a community of anxiety" plays out in suspense, delusion, heroism and reconciliation. If this novel is not as complex a work as McEwan's bestselling *Atonement*, it is nonetheless a wise and poignant portrait of the way we live now. (adapted from *Publisher's Weekly*, Amazon.com)

\*Mosher, Howard Frank

*Disappearances*

*Disappearances* is the story of two men, Wild Bill Bonhomme and his father, the unforgettable "Quebec Bill." The two embark on a trip through Vermont's northern reaches, at that time essentially wilderness, to keep their farm afloat in the 1930s, a very hard time to keep any business solvent. Their idea is to embark on a journey in search of whiskey to sell to Vermonters suffering the twin agonies of the bitterly cold and snowy winter of 1932, and the equally painful imposition of Prohibition. This classic adventure story introduces us to a cast of unforgettable characters and epic feats of violence, of bravery and of sheer craziness.

O'Brien, Stacey

*Wesley the Owl*

Owls permeate literature and mythology, an ancient animal ("some 97 million years" old) that has fascinated for centuries; still, few people have had as intimate an encounter with the mysterious night birds as biologist O'Brien. As a student researcher at Caltech, she fell in love with an injured four-day-old barn owl and seized the opportunity to adopt him permanently. She named him Wesley, and for 19 years kept, cared for and studied him, forging a tremendous relationship with the still-wild animal, as well as a vast understanding of his abilities, instincts and habits. This memoir will captivate animal lovers and, though not necessarily for kids, should hold special appeal for Harry Potter fans who've always envied the boy wizard his Hedwig. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

O'Nan, Stewart

*Songs for the Missing*

A popular 18-year-old girl fails to show up at her summer job; it is as if she has vanished from the face of the earth. In this "fine, absorbing book," as the *New York Times Book Review* called it, O'Nan examines the impact on the girl's family, friends and community. "It's easy to imagine that O'Nan is on a kind of mission to restore a simple, true sense of humanity to the novel," the *Times* reviewer wrote.

\*Orwell, George

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Among the seminal texts of the 20th century, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a rare work that grows more haunting as its futuristic purgatory becomes more real. Published in 1949, the book offers political satirist George Orwell's nightmare vision of a totalitarian, bureaucratic world and one poor stiff's attempt to find individuality. The brilliance of the novel is Orwell's prescience of modern life — the ubiquity of television, the distortion of the language — and his ability to construct such a thorough version of hell. Required reading for students since it was published, it ranks among the most terrifying novels ever written. (Amazon.com)

Pamuk, Orhan and V. Holbrook

*The White Castle*

The tale of a young Italian scholar captured by pirates between Venice and Naples. He is put up for auction at the Istanbul slave market and bought by a Turkish savant eager to learn about scientific and intellectual advances in the West. But as they bond over each other's sins and secrets, and their relationship grows increasingly complex, master and slave find themselves part of the Sultan's army and on a journey that will lead them, ultimately, to the White Castle.

Perez, Joseph

*The Spanish Inquisition: A History*

This is the story of 350 years of terror. Established by papal bull in 1478, the first task of the Spanish Inquisition was to question Jewish converts to Christianity and to expose and execute those found guilty of reversion. Authorities then turned on Spanish Jews in general, sending 300,000 into exile. Next in line were humanists and Lutherans. No rank was exempt. Children informed on their parents, merchants on their rivals, and priests upon their bishops. Those denounced were guilty unless they could prove their innocence. Nearly 32,000 people were publicly burned at the stake; the "fortunate" ones were flogged, fined, or imprisoned. Joseph Pérez tells the history of the Spanish Inquisition from its medieval beginnings to its nineteenth-century ending. (Amazon, product description)

Picoult, Jodi

*Handle with Care*

Things break all the time. Glass, and dishes, and fingernails. You can break a record, a horse, a dollar. There are coffee breaks and lunch breaks and prison breaks. Day breaks, waves break, voices break. Charlotte and Sean O'Keefe's daughter, Willow, was born with brittle-bone disease, suffering 68 broken bones in her short lifetime. After a lawyer convinces Charlotte to file a wrongful-birth lawsuit, the family must deal with a series of "what ifs". What if things could have been different,

what if Willow had been born healthy, what if Willow had never been born at all? To do Willow justice, Charlotte must ask herself one more question, as well. What constitutes a valuable life? (Amazon.com)

Picoult, Jodi

*House Rules*

Jacob Hunt is a teenager with Asperger's syndrome and a morbid fascination with forensic science. He can recite all the intricacies of fingerprint analysis and recall the episode and number of his favorite TV crime show, but he can't feel your pain or emotions. For emotional intelligence Jacob has a tutor — until the tutor is found murdered. When Jacob is questioned, the same hall-mark signs of his Asperger's that made him quirky also make him look very guilty — even to those who love him. (*Library Journal*)

\*Pirsig, Robert

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

In his now classic *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig brings us a literary chautauqua, a novel that is meant to both entertain and edify. It scores high on both counts. Our narrator takes a present-tense cross-country motorcycle trip with his son during which the maintenance of the motorcycle becomes an illustration of how we can unify the cold, rational realm of technology with the warm, imaginative realm of artistry. As in *Zen*, the trick is to become one with the activity, to engage in it fully, to see and appreciate all details — be it hiking in the woods, penning an essay, or tightening the chain on a motorcycle. (Amazon.com)

Prose, Francine

*Goldengrove*

In the summer after her beautiful older sister Margaret's accidental death, 13-year-old Nico finds herself drawn to Margaret's boyfriend as they try to come to terms with their loss. The novel is a perceptive, unsentimental exploration of "that hushed border zone where we live alongside the dead." (*The New York Times Book Review*)

Rivers, Francine

*A Voice in the Wind*

"The city was silently bloating in the hot sun, rotting like the thousands of bodies that lay where they had fallen in street battles." With this opening sentence, *A Voice in the Wind* transports readers back to Jerusalem during the first Jewish-Roman War, some seventy years after the death of Christ. Following the prides and passions of a group of Jews, Romans and Barbarians living at the time of the siege, the narrative is centered on an ill-fated romance between a steadfast slave girl, Hadassah, and Marcus, the brother of her owner and a handsome aristocrat. After surviving the massacre of her family and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, Hadassah is captured and sold to a well-to-do merchant's family. Brought to Rome, she is pressed into service as a personal slave to hedonistic Julia Valerian. (<http://www.francinerivers.com>)

Robinson, Marilynne

*Home: A Novel*

Robinson's beautiful novel, a companion piece to her Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gilead*, is an elegant variation on the parable of the prodigal son's return. The son is Jack Boughton, one of the eight children of Robert Boughton, the former Gilead, Iowa, pastor, who now, in 1957, is a widowed and dying man. Jack returns home shortly after his sister, 38-year-old Glory, moves in to nurse their father, and it is through Glory's eyes that we see Jack's drama unfold. In giving an ancient drama of grace and perdition such a strong domestic setup, Robinson stakes a fierce claim to a divine recognition behind the rituals of home. (Amazon.com)

Russo, Richard

*Bridge of Sighs*

Louis Charles "Lucy" Lynch has spent his whole life in Thomaston, a small town in upstate New York. He's married to Sarah, the girl he fell in love with in high school and is perfectly content with his well-established routines and the familiar rhythms of Thomaston. At the age of sixty, as he and Sarah plan their first-ever trip away from home, he looks back on his life. As Lucy reminisces, his

thoughts inevitably turn to Bobby Marconi, his oldest friend. But Bobby had troubles that no amount of friendship could solve, and at eighteen he fled Thomaston forever. He's changed his name to Robert Noonan and is now a world-renowned artist living in Venice. Sarah and Lucy are planning to visit him on their trip. For all three, there are not only ties to rebind, but also questions to resolve.

\*Salinger, J.D.

*Catcher in the Rye*

*Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951 and once required reading for any self-respecting, silently rebellious teen-ager, is still very much worth the read. Holden Caulfield, stubborn and confused, yet unsure of how or upon whom to focus these feelings, has just been expelled, and not for the first time, from a prep school not far from New York City. Angry and confused, especially at the "phonies" he has known, those who dishonestly pretend to be other than who they really are, he decides to spend some time in New York. His musings and encounters with a variety of memorable people begin to reveal to us, and perhaps also to Holden himself, some glimpses of who he really is. A classic tale of coming of age, any adolescent under the age of 80 will richly enjoy this book.

Skloot, Rebecca

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

In 1951, a poor, young black mother named Henrietta Lacks succumbed to cervical cancer. Before she died and without her knowledge, a doctor took samples of her tumor and put them in a petri dish in an attempt to try to keep human cells alive. Scientists had been trying to achieve this goal for years; Henrietta's were the first human cells to grow successfully in a laboratory. In the six decades since, they have been used – and continue to be used – in cancer research, have helped to develop drugs to treat a range of deadly diseases, and have been part of studies ranging from mosquito mating to the effects of working in sewers. Along the way, Henrietta's cells have made millions of dollars for research companies, but it took more than 20 years for her children to learn about their mother's vital role in sparking a medical revolution. As a *Booklist* review noted, "Skloot tells a truly astonishing story of racism and poverty, science and conscience, spirituality and family driven by a galvanizing inquiry into the sanctity of the body and the very nature of the life force."

\*Solzhenitsyn, Alexander

*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn first burst on to the literary scene in this harrowing autobiographical novel based on his own experiences as a prisoner on a Siberian gulag after World War II. It was published in 1962 with the personal authorization of Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev. Ironically, it was the last time Solzhenitsyn would enjoy such official sanction. Solzhenitsyn takes us through a typical day in the life of a typical prisoner. There is no torture or undue brutality, just back-breaking labor and no personal freedom. It's easy to see that Solzhenitsyn's message is as pertinent today as ever, especially in the aftermath of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. This is a book everyone should read at least once, whatever their ideology. (Amazon.com)

Spence, June

*Change Baby*

Award-winning author June Spence delivers a remarkable debut novel in *Change Baby* - and an unforgettable heroine in Avie Goss, a young woman who returns to the Southern home she abandoned years before to untangle a web of family relationships and astonishing secrets that reveal who she is and who she was, and to find her place within an unexpected ancestral legacy. (from the publisher, Riverhead Books)

Stein, Garth

*The Art of Racing in the Rain*

A heart-warming and inspirational tale in which Enzo, a loyal family dog, tells the story of his human family, how they nearly fell apart, and what he did to bring them back together. Enzo relates the story of his human family through his eyes, sharing the tragedies and triumphs of Denny and his wife and child. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations as a dog,

Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family. With humor, sharp observation, and a courageous heart, Enzo guides the reader to the bittersweet yet ultimately satisfying conclusion: there are no limitations to what we can achieve, if we truly know where we want to be.

\*Steinbeck, John

*Grapes of Wrath*

In stark and moving detail, John Steinbeck depicts the lives of ordinary people striving to preserve their humanity in the face of social and economic desperation. When the Joads lose their tenant farm in Oklahoma, they join thousands of others, traveling the narrow concrete highways toward California and the dream of a piece of land to call their own. A portrait of the bitter conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of a woman's quiet, stoical strength, *The Grapes of Wrath* is a landmark of American literature. (<http://www.edstephan.org/Steinbeck/grapes.html>)

\*Steinbeck, John

*Of Mice and Men*

This is the story of two lonely and alienated men who work as farm laborers, drifting from job to job in California. Lennie is a gentle giant, physically strong but mentally retarded. George guides and protects Lennie but also depends on him for companionship. Together, they have a dream to someday buy a little farm where they can grow crops and raise rabbits and live happily ever after. (Amazon.com)

Stephenson, Neal

*Snow Crash*

In California of the near future, when the U.S. is only a "Burbclave" (city-state), the Mafia is just another franchise chain, and there are no laws to speak of, Hiro Protagonist follows clues from the Bible, ancient Sumer, and high technology to help thwart an attempt to take control of civilization – such as it is. When he logs on to the Metaverse, an imaginary place entered via computer, Hiro encounters Snow Crash, a street drug named for computer failure. A breakneck-paced 21st-century novel, *Snow Crash* interweaves everything from Sumerian myth to visions of a postmodern civilization on the brink of collapse. (*Publisher's Weekly*, Amazon.com)

Strout, Elizabeth

*Olive Kitteridge*

Thirteen linked tales present a heart-wrenching, penetrating portrait of ordinary coastal Mainers living lives of quiet grief intermingled with flashes of human connection. The opening *Pharmacy* focuses on terse, dry junior high-school teacher Olive Kitteridge and her gregarious pharmacist husband, Henry. Their son, Christopher, takes center stage in *A Little Burst*, which describes his wedding in humorous, somewhat disturbing detail. None of the stories are more vivid or touching than *Incoming Tide*, where Olive chats with former student Kevin Coulson as they watch waitress Patty Howe by the seashore, all three struggling with their own misgivings about life. Like this story, the collection is easy to read and impossible to forget. (adapted from *Publishers Weekly*)

Tan, Amy

*The Bonesetter's Daughter*

LuLing Young is now in her eighties, and finally beginning to feel the effects of old age. Trying to hold on to the evaporating past, she begins to write down all that she can remember of her life as a girl in China. Meanwhile, her daughter Ruth is losing the ability to speak up for herself in front of the man she lives with. Ruth decides to move in with her ailing mother, and while tending to her discovers the story LuLing wrote in Chinese of her tumultuous life growing up in a remote mountain village known as Immortal Heart. With great warmth and humour, Amy Tan gives us a mesmerising story of a mother and daughter discovering together that what they share in their bones through history and heredity is priceless beyond measure. (Amazon.com)

\*Twain, Mark, edited by Charles Neider *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*

Mark Twain spent most of his life telling stories, but it wasn't until he was close to death that he started to write down his own story. Told with his trademark humor and filled with colorful

figures who sometimes found their way into his fiction, Twain's account of his experiences is an honest and insightful look into the life of a writer. Twain died in 1910, so this book is, like Westover, experiencing its Centennial this year.

Walker, Clarence E.

*Mongrel Nation*

Thomas Jefferson's heroic stature as an Enlightenment archetype, author of the Declaration of Independence, and the third president has always made his positions on race particularly troubling. Historian Walker uses the contradictions between Jefferson's writings on race and his 38-year relationship with his slave Sally Hemings as a prism through which to view the complexities of American race relations. ...Walker argues that Jefferson and Hemings are rightly the "founding parents" of the nation and maintains that unless the nation can fully recognize the Jefferson-Hemings relationship, it can never have a true sense of its identity. (*Booklist*, Amazon.com)

Walls, Jeannette

*The Glass Castle: a Memoir*

Jeannette and her brother and sisters had to fend for themselves, supporting one another as they weathered their parents' betrayals and, finally, found the resources and will to leave home. What is so astonishing about Jeannette Walls is not just that she had the guts and tenacity and intelligence to get out, but that she describes her parents with such deep affection and generosity. Hers is a story of triumph against all odds, but also a tender, moving tale of unconditional love in a family that despite its profound flaws gave her the fiery determination to carve out a successful life on her own terms. (Follett's *TitlePeek Summary*)

Walsh, William

*Isabella of Spain: the Last Crusader (1451-1504)*

Called by her people "Isabella la Catolica", she was by any standard one of the greatest women of all history. A saint in her own right, she married Ferdinand of Aragon, and they forged modern Spain, cast out the Moslems, discovered the New World by backing Columbus, and established a powerful central government in Spain. This story is so thrilling it reads like a novel and makes history really come alive. Highly readable and truly great in every respect!

\*Welty, Eudora

*Delta Wedding*

A vivid and charming portrait of a large southern family, the Fairchilds, who live on a plantation in the Mississippi delta. The story, set in 1923, is exquisitely woven from the ordinary events of family life, centered around the visit of a young relative, Laura McRaven, and the family's preparations for her cousin Dabney's wedding. (Barnes & Noble)

\*West, Nathanael

*Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust*

(these two books are to be read together and count as one)

Two powerful satires. *Miss Lonelyhearts* is probably West's most powerful work. A nameless man assigned to produce a newspaper advice column begins to break under the endless misery of those who write in and beg him for advice. Unable to find answers, and with his shaky Christianity ridiculed to razor-edged shards by his poisonous editor, he tumbles into alcoholism and a madness fueled by his own spiritual emptiness.

In *The Day of the Locust* the narrator, Tod Hackett, comes to California in the hope of a career as a painter for movie backdrops but soon joins the disenchanting second-rate actors, technicians, laborers and other characters living on the fringes of the movie industry. Ultimately, Tod finds work on a film called prophetically *The Burning of Los Angeles*, and the dark comic tale ends in an apocalyptic mob riot outside a Hollywood premiere as the system runs out of control. Set in Hollywood during the Depression. (adapted from Amazon.com)

Wouk, Herman

*Marjorie Morningstar*

This classic novel is the story of a young actress growing up in New York City who rebels against the values and expectations of her middle-class Jewish family in pursuit of her own career. It follows her from the Upper West Side to Paris through a tumultuous love affair and into a reassessment of her heritage. The story documents American values from the 1930s to the post-war years of the 1950s and offers a vivid supporting cast of fully realized characters.

\*Wright, Richard

*Native Son*

Bigger Thomas is doomed, trapped in a downward spiral that will lead to arrest, prison, or death, driven by despair, frustration, poverty, and incomprehension. Bigger is debased, aggressive, dangerous, and a violent criminal. As such, he has no claim upon our compassion or sympathy. And yet...A more compelling story than *Native Son* was not written in the 20th century by an American writer. That is not to say that Richard Wright created a novel free of flaws, but that he wrote the first novel that successfully told the most painful and unvarnished truth about American social and class relations. (Amazon.com)

\*Zola, Emile

*L'Assommoir*

*(this book is to be read in French)*

The seventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart cycle, *L'Assommoir* (1877) is the story of a woman's struggle for happiness in working-class Paris... *L'Assommoir* was a contemporary bestseller, outraged conservative critics, and launched a passionate debate about the legitimate scope of modern literature. (Amazon.com)

Zusak, Marcus

*I am the Messenger*

Nineteen-year-old cabbie Ed Kennedy has little in life to be proud of. But after he stops a bank robbery, Ed begins receiving anonymous messages marked in code on playing cards in the mail, and almost immediately his life begins to swerve off its beaten-down path. Usually the messages instruct him to be at a certain address at a certain time. So with nothing to lose, Ed embarks on a series of missions as random as a toss of dice: sometimes daredevil, sometimes heartwarmingly safe. Ed's search for meaning drives him to complete every task. But the true driving force behind the novel itself is the readers' knowledge that behind every turn looms the unknown presence - either good or evil - of the person or persons sending the messages. (Amazon.com)