

## High School/Faculty

### Summer Reading List Saint Ann's 2005



**Baseball books** If you don't have season tickets or arrive at a game and find it's sold out, these books work just as well on the subway or in some dreamy field:

*Shoeless Joe* by W.P. Kinsella

C'mon, it's summer. Read this in an afternoon and you'll have that corny wonderful feeling you get from using those tiny perfectly-sharpened pencils to score a complete game.

*The Subway Series Reader* edited by Pete Hamill

There was a summer, was that really five years ago? We could be heading for another if Martinez and Johnson hold up in the dog days of August.

*Ball Four* by Jim Bouton

Every high schooler should read this book - it altered our perceptions of baseball, it altered our conception of celebrity, and it altered the cultural landscape. Plus, it's wicked funny. (Cathy Fuerst 9+)

Bergner, Daniel

**God of the Rodeo: The Search for Hope, Faith, and a Six-second Ride in Louisiana's Angola Prison**

Unforgettable visits inside a maximum security prison. It reads like a novel, with an inside-the-walls rodeo that draws crowds of "freemen," with a warden who asks for bribes, with life-term prisoners (convicted of brutal crimes) who are now looking for some reason to hope and some way to improve themselves. The author taught English at Saint Ann's recently. (Mike Roam 9+)

Brown, Dan

**Deception Point**

From the author of "The Da Vinci Code." It's not subtle literature, but its spies and gun action makes for a good read involving major forces who are fighting over NASA's role: secret technology edge for national security vs. free-market commercialism vs. protected public resource. (Mike Roam 9+)

Burroughs, Augusten

**Running With Scissors**

Burroughs describes his truly crazy childhood in an off-hand, deadpan voice. Funny and ghastly, this is a survivor tale if ever there was one. My guess is, writing saved him. (Gabe Howard 11+)

Caldwell, Ian & Dustin Thomason

**The Rule of Four**

An intriguing over-the-top action yarn set on Princeton's campus, following students who race criminal rivals to solve the mysteries possibly hidden within an actual multilingual book (Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*) published in 1527. (Mike Roam 10+)

Calvino, Italo

**Marcovaldo, or The Seasons in the City**

Subtle and charming short stories, reading like parables with magic and slapstick combined in the adventures of a poor but often optimistic man and his family in Italy. (Mike Roam 10+)

Carson, Anne

**Autobiography of Red**

Because everyone on faculty should have a book they put on this list every year. A cinematic prose-poem of Geryon, the red-winged monster, who falls in love with Herakles. (Sara Nolan 9+)

Carson, Anne

**Plainwater**

The poems that begin this book are a little too postmodern for my taste, but her series of essays which occupy the other half, *The Archaeology of Water*, put me to sobbing. She describes one woman's (her own?) stunning pilgrimage. It is not worth cheapening with my paltry descriptions. Read it-- you will be right there with her. (Sara Nolan 10+)

Chang, Jung

**Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China**

A classic account of social change in China as reflected in the lives of the writer's grandmother who had her feet bound and was married off to an elderly warlord; her mother, an idealistic Communist who barely survived the devastation of Mao's Cultural Revolution; and the writer herself, a modern woman and citizen of the world. Compassionate, brilliant, fascinating, heartbreaking and informative. (Nancy Fales Garrett 10+)

Chang, Lan Samantha

**Inheritance**

This is the story of the siblings of three generations of a Chinese family separated by their struggles with love and loyalty, tradition and modernism, and Nationalism and Communism. Set mostly during the period from the 1930's through the 1950's, with a kind of epilogue in the 1990's, some members of the family flee to Taiwan and ultimately to America, while others remain in mainland China. Politics, social history, and war are nicely intertwined in the drama of the lives of these siblings. (Coco Van Meerendonk 9+)

Chaon, Dan

**You Remind Me of Me**

This is so unbelievably good I stayed up late, ignored my children and made up transparent excuses to friends just so I could read without interruption. Chaon raises questions concerning adoption, abandonment, identity, fate, circumstance: Why do we become the people we become? Can we change the course of what seems inevitable? His short story collection, *Among the Missing*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. It's a mystery how *You Remind Me of Me* could slip by without greater fanfare. (Robin Olesen 10+)

Chen, Da

**Sounds of the River: A Young Man's University Days in Beijing**

A sequel to his autobiography "Colors of the Mountain" Chen writes about the difficulties he faced as a country boy traveling to university in a big city like Beijing and how he had trouble adjusting to living among the city folks. Chen realized that he needed to start from zero since he had trouble speaking English. As he did not come from either a political background or the city, he was constantly challenged by some of his teachers and fellow classmates. However, Chen managed to survive as he studied hard and was determined to succeed. Poetic, hilarious and heartbreaking. (Anne Bosworth 11+)

Coll, Steve

**Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to Sept 10, 2001.**

An action story, but (disturbingly) true: about the forces (including the CIA) fighting in and around

Afghanistan since the 1970's: reads as an unbelievable thriller, with betrayals, money, religion, and dynamics of superpowers with their wavering focus. (Mike Roam 10+)

Conrad, Mark T.

**Dark as Night**

Conrad's *noir* thriller turns up the seamier side of Philadelphia in a tightly plotted story in which stereotypical bad guys play against each other and an unlikely hero, an upwardly-mobile chef. So there's a lot of attention to eating and drinking as well as mayhem and sex. It's fun: a perfect book for a day at the beach. (Marty Skoble 10+)

Davies, Peter Ho

**Equal Love (Stories)**

I chose this collection based on a blurb on the back cover, "Davies stories stand out for their clarity, wisdom and compassion. They are filled with intelligence and generosity of temperament."—Charles Baxter. The stories are small, but end up resonating in a not unpleasantly uncomfortable way. (Daphne Klein 9+)

Dean, Zoey

**The A-List**

I devoured all four *A-List* novels and I'm only a little ashamed to admit it. Dean tells the story of the naive and virginal Anna, who arrives in LA for an extended visit with her estranged father and finds herself thrown into a crowd that includes the coolest kids in LA, sons and daughters of the film industry's...well, A-List. The writing is putrid, the characters are one dimensional, the plot(s) are laughable. Yet I kept going back for more. (Melissa Kantor 9+)

Didion, Joan.

**Miami**

Even if you're not especially interested in Miami's Cuban-exile community (and I'm not), Didion's portrait of it is a fascinating and disturbing piece of journalism. As she explores the relationship between this population and its local (and our federal) government, Didion helps you to understand how a small and (initially) disenfranchised political community came to be major players in the country's politics and why the rest of America should understand how this small group of Americans thinks. (Melissa Kantor 12+)

Didion, Joan.

**Political Fictions**

How did Bill Clinton get elected? What was the relationship between the President, Monica Lewinsky and Ken Starr? Who's running the country and why are they running it? Didion's demanding prose (and it *is* demanding—I find myself circling back to the beginnings of sentences as I try to understand the relationship between her subjects, verbs, modifiers, etc.) is a pleasure to struggle through, not only because her research is so extensive and her insights so illuminating, but also because she's the only writer in America who's writing about the things she's writing about. She's hard, but she's worth it. (Melissa Kantor 12+)

Doerr, Anthony

**About Grace**

David Winkler, the hero, and he really is a hero, of Anthony Doerr's absorbing novel can see into the future. Sometimes it's a relatively insignificant event, sometime it's cataclysmic. Doerr's prose is beautiful and his themes mythic. His capacity to describe the natural world is simply amazing. I also highly recommend his first book *The Shell Collector*. (Gabe Howard 10+)

Eco, Umberto

**The Name Of The Rose**

This is a magnificent novel, exciting, rewarding and subtle. A murder investigation in the Middle Ages is set

inside a monastery and its labyrinth library. Intricate and passionate arguments flare up about faith, reason, and power; characters toy with poison and sneak through hallways while armies mass nearby. (Mike Roam 9+)

Feynman, Richard P.

**Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher**

For anyone interested in physics, this makes a dynamic and eccentric journey through the forces that shape the universe. Feynman is jumping with energy, excited about the things you should know to make sense of the answers (and mysteries) that have been found so far. (Mike Roam 9+)

Fowler, Karen Joy

**The Jane Austen Book Club**

Fowler renders life and love in Southern California with the same wry and insightful wit that Austen herself applies to her English gentry. This wonderful romance of manners is ingeniously constructed: airy, digestible, fun. And if you haven't read the works of Austen, fret not; Fowler provides a nifty appendix. (Marty Skoble 10+)

French, Howard

**A Continent for the Taking: The Tragedy and Hope of Africa**

I think this is an important and powerful book. Howard French is a *New York Times* reporter who spent much of the 80's and 90's living in and reporting from various parts of West and Central Africa. His love and respect for the people and places he visits is quite apparent in his writing, as well as his admiration of Africa's majestic past before its fateful encounter with the West. In heartbreaking and shocking detail, the author tells of the horrific "tableau of terrible bleakness" which he encounters everywhere- the Ebola plague in eastern Congo, the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, the self-destruction of Liberia, the ever-present scourge of AIDS and malaria. French also shows convincingly how Western "meddling" (as well as apathy) has contributed to Africa's late twentieth century "spiral of bloody trauma and chronic disorder." But the author is not without hope, as his subtitle implies, and he tries to show how Africa's cultural strengths, and the historically cohesive bonds of its social fabric, could ultimately help the continent rise above so much "mayhem and decay" to a future of promise. (Christine Dunnigan 10+)

Furst, Alan

**The Polish Officer**

Fantastic, enthralling: stories of inadvertent inexperienced spies in World War II, fictional but based on journals and accounts of people who were there. Beautifully written with sympathetic characters, real "heart-pounding" suspense, mistrust, love, despair, and even comedy. Death-defying couriers, patriots, opportunists, sometimes pursued by NKVD (predecessor of KGB) or other secret police. After reading one of his books, on the recommendation of several literate friends, I had to read the rest, and I recommend them all: *Night Soldiers*, *Dark Star*, *Kingdom of Shadows*, *Red Gold*, *Dark Voyage*, and *Blood of Victory* are set all over Europe in the 1930's and 40's. (Mike Roam 9+)

Garrels, Anne

**Naked in Baghdad: The Iraq War as Seen by NPR's Correspondent Anne Garrels**

I had heard her reporting on the radio before, during and after the troops going into Baghdad- but I had no idea what it took and what she had to go through to be able to supply those reports. Reading her book you get to see a totally different side of what it means to be a reporter. (Lena Tengberg 9+)

Greene, Graham

**The End of the Affair**

It's lovely and lyrical. For those who've ever been in love! (Tricia Reixach 11+)

Greenblatt, Stephen

**Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare**

This is what a critical study should be: factual, insightful, useful and funny. Completely different from *The Invention of the Human*, (even the title is pompous and ridiculous and, for the record, “rancid” is not generally regarded as a compliment. Harold!) Harold Bloom’s overrated and inflated and prize-winning tome of a couple of years ago. (Nancy Fales Garrett 10+)

Haddon, Mark

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time**

This engaging and fluent novel puts you in the mind of a teen with autism (or perhaps Asperger's syndrome), telling an exciting and funny story while almost incidentally leading to some understanding of how too much stimulus (noise, people, disruption of routine) could overwhelm an otherwise thoughtful and rational person. I love the way he describes people only by the shoes they're wearing: imagine walking through the world just looking down. (Mike Roam 9+)

Hiassen, Carl

**Skinny Dip**

An amusing tangle of criminals, real-estate developers, gangly dogs, ecologists, and goofballs in the Florida everglades. Ideal summer reading. If you enjoy this, his "Sick Puppy" is just as fun. (Mike Roam 9+)

Hill, Reginald

**Dialogues of the Dead**

Paranoia: a clinical obsession with words and word games, that’s what lies at the heart of this deftly constructed mystery by a master of misdirection. The Yorkshire local color works well too as counterpoint to the verbal fireworks. Intensely literary, acerbically witty, and gently romantic, Hill always provides a terrific read, and this one is especially surprising. You’ll want to read the sequel too (*Death’s Jest Book*) if you want justice as well as fun.(Marty Skoble 9+)

Hollinghurst, Alan

**The Line of Beauty**

This Booker-Prize winner is devastating. Beautifully observed and written, it is engrossing and ultimately heartbreaking. (Elise Meslow 9+)

Hornby, Nick

**High Fidelity**

Not the deepest literary adventure ever, but funny enough that I missed my train stop TWICE in Italy because I was so engrossed in the feeble efforts of the protagonist to get perspective on his shlumpy life and to renovate himself after he gets dumped. (Sara Nolan 9+)

Hosseini, Khaled

**The Kite Runner**

An unforgettable story of Afghanistan before the Russian invasion. It is Kabul in the mid-1970s. Amir, son of a wealthy businessman, has as his best and most loving friend, Hassan, the son of one of his father’s servants. They are both good kite runners, a pastime common in Afghanistan, and they enter a contest which Hassan helps Amir win. Horrific and sad events cause Amir to betray his friend. Hassan and his father leave and Amir eventually moves to America. He later receives news of Hassan and returns to Afghanistan to find him, seeking an opportunity to make amends. This is a beautifully written book about the customs of the time and about the internal conflict Amir suffers. It is easy for the reader to become emotionally involved in a final appraisal of the situation. (Anne Bosworth 10+)

A poignant, searing family story in which the protagonist transcends his guilt and acquires courage and all set against the rubble the Afghan landscape has become after the tragic history of that country's last thirty years. The best novel I have read this year—no actually, I re-read. (Nancy Fales-Garrett 9+)

Howard, Richard

**Trappings: New Poems**

Many of these marvelous poems are based on works of art or conversations (both real and imagined) with writers, artists, photographers, and their subjects/models. Thus they are wryly self-aware, playfully intelligent, and deeply entertaining. Howard works with a variety of forms and rhythms with great subtlety as he distills surprising truths. (Marty Skoble 11+)

Ivins, Molly

**Who Let The Dogs In? Incredible Political Animals I Have Known**

Molly Ivins is a terrific writer! She's witty, intelligent, pragmatic, and wise. This colorful collection of brief essays (mostly from her syndicated political columns) is filled with digestible facts that make her portraits of "political animals" meaningful and moving whether she is being scathing or tender. She is an astute commentator on what makes America what it is (and what it is perilously close to becoming). An optimist with a sense of humor despite the tenor of the times, Molly Ivins gives us clarity as well as hope. (Marty Skoble 9+)

Kapuscinski, Ryszard

**Shah of Shahs**

Don't let the author's last name scare you; this slim volume is an easy read, the fascinating story of the fall of the last Shah of Iran, a brutal dictator supported and financed in no small part by the United States. Want to know why Ayatollah Khomeini was such an appealing alternative to the secular Shah? Interested in an overview of Iranian history? All this (and more) can be found in the one hundred and fifty-two lucid, incisive pages that make up Kapuscinski's history. (Melissa Kantor 9+)

Kidder, Tracy.

**Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World**

I think this is a book the entire high school should be required to read. The story of Paul Farmer who, during his undergraduate years at Duke became interested in Haiti and, after medical school, founded a health clinic in rural Haiti and continued to run it while simultaneously becoming a major player in the fight against AIDS, TB and the wretched living conditions of the world's poor, is one of the most powerful stories I've ever read. A work of non-fiction, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* reads like a novel—Kidder's prose is clear and evocative, and you'll find yourself lingering over his beautiful descriptions despite your eagerness to find out what happens next. Let me add (and I say this without feeling it is hyperbolic) that this is a book with the power to change the direction your life takes. Therefore, be forewarned, any of you who thought you wanted to be captains of industry. Paul Farmer's story may start you along a very different path. (Melissa Kantor 9+)

King, Dave

**The Ha-Ha**

King's marvelously realized narrator, Harold, is a damaged (both physically and psychically) Vietnam vet who is unable to speak, read, or write. Suddenly finding himself required to care for the nine-year old son of his childhood sweetheart, Harold is also forced to confront (and abandon) his own alienation. This, of course, renders him utterly vulnerable and terrifyingly defenseless. Of course it's sad, but by the end, King has given us a glimpse of human nature at its very best. This is a great read; compelling and completely satisfying. (Marty Skoble 10+)

Krakauer, Jon

**Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith**

This is the kind of book you might have to read alone in a room; otherwise you will probably stop every few minutes to regale your family and friends with fascinating, bizarre and truly unbelievable tidbits about Mormon Fundamentalists in the United States. (Murder, polygamy, gold plates buried under a rock, and the story of Elizabeth Smart are but a few of the tidbits.) Chock full of historical information, it manages to be utterly engrossing. (Ragan O'Malley 10+)

Krauss, Nicole

**The History of Love**

Tender, beautiful writing not without humor. The story of a book and the lives it has affected. And yet also of a friendship between two old men - one who bakes a cake and leaves an angel impression in flour dust by his friend's bedside and the other who has spent his life trying to be heartbreakingly invisible (even his image in photographs is "a scratchy grayness") and now is constantly making a spectacle of himself - dropping his popcorn at the movies, trying on crazy shoes at Athlete's Foot - so the world around him will know he is still alive or, conversely, miss him when he's gone. (Cathy Fuerst 9+)

Livesey, Margot

**Eva Moves the Furniture**

Wonderful quick read (one sitting--up 'til 12:30 AM) that sort of sneaks up on you. I finished the book, turned out the light and burst into tears—in a good way. (Daphne Klein 9+)

London, Jack

**The Iron Heel**

Frightening view of fascism in early twentieth century America. (Brian Deimling 9+)

Mandelstam, Nadezhda

**Hope Against Hope: A Memoir**

What can happen to art and lives when Fascism rules. Osip Mandelstam, one of the greatest poets of 20th-century Russia, satirized Stalin in 1933. His life somersaulted into an initial short-range exile and then a mortal imprisonment. His widow recounts their lives together, the unimaginable burden of living in Stalin's era, the sustaining role of poetry in Russia. One of the most important books I've ever read. (Ruth Chapman 10+)

Manji, Irshad

**The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith**

A reformist Muslim girl from Canada who earns her living as a comedian. (Bill Everdell 9+)

Martel, Yann

**The Life of Pi**

An amazing story! Imagine sharing a lifeboat with a Royal Bengal Tiger! That's just what Martel does: brilliantly imagine an absolute struggle to survive. The construction is ingenious; the narrator is subtly invested with credibility, and, as this wonderful allegorical story unfolds, the reader is swept along on a journey that is about many things, faith, will, ingenuity, intelligence, and the joy of living. (Marty Skoble 9+)

Martin, Valerie

**Property**

As this chillingly clever novel, set in New Orleans in 1828, makes clear, there are many kinds of slavery and everyone is a victim when people are chattel. The parallel between the narrator, Manon Gaudet, and her slave Sarah is eerily ironic; "free" white women and their personal fortunes are actually owned and (mis)managed

by their brutish husbands, but no one sees “outside the box” of their own social assumptions. A terrific read. (Marty Skoble 9+)

This might be the most absorbing read of the summer. Manon Gaudet describes her life as the daughter and then wife of slave owners. It’s an exploration of what it means to be property and what it means to “own” another human being. Of course, in a time when everything a woman owned belonged to her husband, Manon is property too. And the enslaved have a power all their own. Things aren’t so great for the plantation owners either. Everyone is short of money and fear of the immanent slave rebellion is pervasive. (Gabe Howard 10+)

Marx, Harpo

**Harpo Speaks!**

The best bio/story I’ve ever read. Full of substance, warmth, humor, and NYC! (Lainie Fefferman 9+)

Meloy, Maile

**Liars and Saints**

This is a first novel. It’s lean, spare and utterly charming. It could easily be read in a single sitting. I was instantly involved with the Santerre family whose struggles and successes give us a glimpse of life in Catholic America since World War Two. They are an immensely likable lot, who keep getting in their own way while trying to be “good.” God is a player too. (Gabe Howard 9+)

Muldoon, Paul

**Moy Sand and Gravel**

This remarkable collection of poems (a Pulitzer Prize winner) is happily polycultural: Irish, American; working class, Academic; urban, rural. Muldoon speaks many “languages,” all of them poetically, all of them delightfully intelligible. His use of forms is almost balletic: stunning but never intrusive. Included, for example, is a one-sentence sestina on interrupting one’s writing. The major piece in the book is an extraordinary poem which ties together ancient and modern floods, immigration exploitation, the holocaust, American and Irish history and poetry: it’s beautifully moving, beautifully musical, and fun. (Marty Skoble 9+)

Murakami, Haruki

**Kafka on the Shore**

The colliding stories of a teenager in Japan who runs away from home and finds himself in an Oedipian tangle, and a profound simpleton who rescues cats. Blending the hyper-real and the surreal, this book made me feel like I had died or gotten caught in strange time loop. Amazing exploration of characters and how love and passion simply *are*, violating boundaries of their chronological occurrence. (Sara Nolan 10+)

Nafisi, Azar

**Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books**

Imagine people having to study in secret, with religious police tearing around town, with (Iraqi) missiles falling unpredictably. It took courage to believe and act as though there were important truths to be found in “decadent” novels. This was a pleasure to read and learn from and puzzle over. (Mike Roam 11+)

Niffenegger, Audrey

**The Time Traveler’s Wife**

A wonderful book to read in the summer. Told in two voices. Henry and Clare are not a normal couple. Henry, who works in the Newberry Library in Chicago and who is the son of a famous musician, suffers “Chrono Displacement” disorder. At random times, he suddenly disappears without warning and finds himself in the past or future, usually at a time or place of importance in his life and always without any clothes on which can lead to unpleasant situations. It can be for months, years or just a few minutes. Sometimes he

encounters his younger or older self in the same time frame. An enchanting and very stylish love story with numerous references to the culture of the times. I highly recommend it. (Anne Bosworth 10+)

Norman, Donald A.

**Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things**

Another book from the author of "The Design of Everyday Things," for anyone interested in product and software and web design, hoping to combine aesthetics and novelty and joy in things that people use. The author starts by noticing how many people love some devices (hand-held music players, certain shoes, etc.) and places, and tries to look for ways to plan all kinds of things so that they're useful and enjoyable. I especially like his section about education, acknowledging the role of engagement, focus, and passionate drive. (Mike Roam 10+)

Pagels, Elaine

**Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas**

Moving and thoughtful: Focus on how Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon in the 2nd century AD, attempted to unite early Christianity by selecting the four (now) canonical gospels while declaring other gospels heretical. Though his declarations of heresy were divisive, he seems to have thought that the other "gospels" (and their supporters) were more dangerously divisive because they allowed for more creation of new interpretations. Improvisation, if you will. The author is not a religion basher, and enjoys describing the range of possible religious understandings. (Mike Roam 11+)

Pagels, Elaine

**The Gnostic Gospels**

A remarkable, wonderful and substantial book. It's great that the "heretical" Nag Hammadi scrolls weren't found a thousand years ago when they no doubt would have been destroyed. Her compassion for religion combines with a personable writing style and scholarly interest in truth, while telling the story of Gospels that were not included in the Bible for various reasons. (Mike Roam 11+)

Parker, Robert

**Double Play**

Another Parker page-turner! This one is not a Spencer novel. The tough guy is a World War Two vet, Joseph Burke. The other tough guy is Jackie Robinson. It's a well-crafted period piece punctuated by the voice of a young boy in love with the Dodgers. Parker renders Robinson "As he was, or as I imagined him to be, in 1947, when I was turning fifteen, and he was changing the world." (Gabe Howard 10+)

"Poem of the Day"

**Saint Ann's Students**

Check out Saint Ann's website (<http://www.saintannsny.org>) and especially the "What's New" page on the front. In "Poem of the Day" you'll find not only a (randomly picked) new poem each day, but also links to more than a thousand poems by students in Marty Skoble's poetry classes (mostly middle school so far), organized by poet. (Mike Roam)

Pullman, Philip

**His Dark Materials Trilogy**

For the few folks out there who haven't had a chance to check out this trilogy yet—do it!! (Tricia Reixach 9+)

Roach, Mary

**Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers**

I'll admit- this is a weird book. Surgery on decapitated heads? Some reviewers say it is hilarious. I wouldn't go that far, but I will say that it will make you chuckle- not an easy feat when one is discussing what happens

to the human body after death. Always respectful, this book covers topics such as embalming, human anatomy classes, surgery practicums, human crash test dummies, organ donation, composting, and “polymer-preserved” bodies (plastic!). Very educational. (Ragan O’Malley 9+)

Robinson, Marilynne

**Gilead**

Gilead is a land east of the Jordan traditionally viewed as the source of a healing salve: the balm of Gilead. But in the Old Testament this same region is sometimes described as a place of war, bloodshed and iniquity.

“Marilynne Robinson draws on all of these associations in her new novel, which is so serenely beautiful, and written in a prose so gravely measured and thoughtful, that one feels touched with balm just to read it.” In 1956, toward the end of Reverend John Ames’s life, he begins a letter to his young son, an account of himself and his forebears, about the tension between his father--an ardent pacifist--and his grandfather, whose pistol and bloody shirts, concealed in an army blanket, may be relics from the fight between the abolitionists and those settlers who wanted to vote Kansas into the union as a slave state. He writes of his second marriage to the boy’s mother who brings him a constant source of joy. All in all a great book, thoughtful and entrancing. (Anne Bosworth 12+)

Rosoff, Meg

**How I Live Now**

I have been obsessed with Young Adult fiction this year. This is truly one of the best I’ve read. Daisy is a 15-year-old disgruntled Manhattanite sent to live with her cousins on their remote English farm when all hell breaks loose. I couldn’t put this book down. Perfect for all ages. (Ragan O’Malley)

Roth, Joseph

**The Radetzky March**

Europe in the late 1800’s, soldiers and townspeople and colonial outposts, flavored with confusion and love by a thoughtful author. It is a gentle and sometimes sad story, as the world spins toward a “great” war. (Mike Roam 10+)

Saramago, Jose

**The Cave**

Saramago creates worlds - the lush world of the countryside, the sterile futuristic world of The Center. The world of the potter - its anxious artisans who shape and fire things that crumble or crack - is at odds with the world of the citizens - scheduled, tidy consumers. Material from the earth that makes the hands dusty, dry - that create - is at odds with the material world, which is, after all, our bread and butter. We’re not necessarily rooting for or against - but made aware of choices and the things we keep hidden from ourselves as we are searching for them. (Cathy Fuerst 10+)

Saramago, Jose

**The Stone Raft**

What a great idea - the Iberian Peninsula breaks free from Europe and floats off into the Atlantic, altering even nameless characters’ perceptions of their universe: “Let me just tell you, mister, that the morning sun used to come through my front window and now it comes in at the back.” As journalists, politicians, pilots, and know-it-all experts mine this turn of events, five people wandering the newly-created island discover “My God, happiness exists, and perhaps that’s all it is, sea, light, and vertigo.” (Cathy Fuerst 10+)

Silber, Joan

**Ideas of Heaven: A Ring of Stories**

A finalist for the National Book Award. I had read some reviews criticizing the selection of this book and was delighted to find it is so good. Silber’s new collection is indeed a ring, but one so subtle that the connections seem to arise more from chance than deliberate design. There is a link between the end of the book and the

beginning. A poet mentioned in the second story becomes the subject of the third, and so on. The author writes successfully in many voices, women and men, gay and straight, present-day and historic. A matter-of-fact detachment toward affairs of the heart is contrasted with moments of uncontrollable passion. Death can come suddenly, violently, but all can be borne by Silber's sturdy characters. "Ideas of Heaven," the title story about missionaries in late nineteenth-century China is wonderfully evocative of time and place. This is a collection to be read and savored by the reader. Anne Bosworth (11th +)

Sillitoe, Alan

**The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner**

Short stories in grungy parts of 1950's England, provoked me to feel and to think. (Mike Roam 9+)

Smith, Zadie

**Autograph Man**

What you don't want to happen on a looked-forward-to outing with a parent. What the parent wouldn't want for his child after event happens. Yet, amidst the recklessness and ambivalence of growing up, there is salvation, and love enough, and an epic search for quixotic celebrity not unlike that of Ray Kinsella dragging Salinger off to a Red Sox game. (See *Shoeless Joe*.) Energetic, often funny writing. (Cathy Fuerst 9+)

Smith, Zadie

**White Teeth**

Now this is a great novel, ranging through people and stories and societal change. Like Dickens for its smorgasbord of varied characters and wild (almost goofy) events. A real pleasure to read. (Mike Roam 9+)

Spence, Alan

**Way to Go**

A funny, absorbing and moving novel -- about death and how we handle it. Niel McGraw has no intention of ever taking over his father's undertaking business which he hates (both his father and the business), but he's obsessed with the question "What happens to us when we die?" So take over the business is, of course, is exactly what he does and with a touch all his own. Ever thought of being buried in a model spitfire, suitably weighted, and dropped into the ocean? Spence plays with religion, convention, and language to wonderful effect. (Gabe Howard 10+)

No matter how far you go, it's always yourself you find. In this amazing, beautifully told, often hilariously clever novel, we watch with awe and delight as Neil McGraw, son of a Glasgow undertaker, struggles to find out "what happens when you die?" His spiritual and carnal journey is richly laced with music and literature, puns and wordplay, wit and wisdom. It's all about death and all about the richness of life. Pure unexpected joy! (Marty Skoble 10+)

Stephenson, Neal

**Quicksilver** (Volume 1 of the Baroque Cycle)

Some intense story telling, with eccentric and dynamic characters who dash through crises (religion, royalty, science, slavery, crime) in America and Europe during the late 1600's and early 1700's. In just one of the many side stories, Newton's discovery of the principles of gravity truly shines, because it so clear that amazing mental gymnastics were necessary for laying out its mathematical principles. In another, a harem slave is rescued from the Turkish siege of Vienna. In another, a spy discovers that the French army is sneaking in heavy weapons to attack the German castles of the Rhine. (Mike Roam 10+)

Stoll, Clifford

**The Cuckoo's Egg**

People with an interest in the world of identity theft, high-tech espionage, and computer hacking might enjoy this true life story of an accidental detective. The author, a graduate student at the time of the writing, was

working as a computer lab assistant when two cents of financial irregularity (who has been using this former professor's computer account??) lead him into a year-long spy chase with tapped phones and "honey pot" data traps. He expected his hacker to be a nearby high school student, but satellite networks and phone traces lead him further away, wondering who the good guys are (and aren't). (Mike Roam 9+)

Toibin, Colm

**The Master**

Toibin recreates the life of Henry James. I loved this book, in spite of myself! Fictionalizing the life of one of the all time great fictionalizers takes something over the top. Toibin either quotes James or (more likely) puts words into his mouth "...I view the historical novel as tainted by a fatal cheapness....It would be all humbug!" Humbug or not, this is a brilliant, moving, book. And, I, for one, didn't know that James dictated his novels or did Toibin make that up too? If you know, please let me know. It does have a fabulous ending and there is something irresistible about novels with fabulous endings – don't you think? (Gabe Howard 11+)

A fantastic book, living inside the observant mind and subtle emotions of the author Henry James. I know a half dozen people who have read it and all seemed to love it, as did I. Friendships, (accusations of) betrayals, brilliant lively friends, and pregnant silences; drama sometimes arising through a look or through what isn't said. (Mike Roam 10+)

Tolstoy, Leo

**Anna Karenina**

The best novel ever written? (Nancy Fales Garrett 9+)

Winton, Tim

**Cloudstreet**

A beautiful novel of the intertwining stories of two working-class Australian families who wind up living together in the same haunted house. Winton treats their saga with a loose touch as the shifty shadow of fortune waxes and wanes. It will make you laugh and cry. It is better than CATS (which I have never seen). (Sara Nolan 9+)

X, Malcolm (as told to Alex Haley)

**The Autobiography of Malcolm X**

When I read this book as a teenager it really changed my world view and opened my eyes to issues of racism and classism in American society through understanding history and an individual's amazing personal history. (Noa DeSimone 9+)

