

Saint Ann's High School/ Faculty Summer Reading List 2006



Ackerley, J.R.

My Father and Myself

I was reading this in the faculty lounge one day, and Victor looked fondly at the cover and said, "That's one of my favorite books. I read it every couple of years." What a good idea. Ackerley is master of the well-constructed sentence, and he has an amazing and gripping story to tell to boot. Without giving away too much, I'll just say, imagine finding out, as an adult, all sorts of major facts about your family that you didn't know. Ackerley writes with the studied remove of a weathered craftsman, though this book is by no means devoid of feeling, and has a great deal of material that inspires the most profound empathy. Gorgeously written. Fascinating. A page turner. It has it all. A must-read. (Liz Fodaski)

B., David

Epileptic

This is the first graphic novel that I have come across that I have wanted to read. Both the drawings and the story content are exceptional and moving. David B. draws a brutally honest portrait of what life was like growing up in France in the 1960's with an epileptic brother. In pursuit of a cure, his parents turned to magnetic therapists, acupuncturists, and macrobiotic communes. Sadly, every new cure offered false hope and eventually ended in disappointment. Epilepsy caused the family tremendous pain and heartbreak. David coped by constantly drawing complex battle scenes. Don't miss out on this powerful, emotive, and harrowing tale. (Maria Falgoust 9+)

Barnes, Julian

Arthur & George

Barnes weaves together the stories of two men, and one of them is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The other is George Edalji, who is framed for criminal misconduct as a result of racism: his father, of Parsi origin, is vicar in Shropshire, and his mother a Scot. Sir Arthur became the champion of Edalji. The story is beautifully told—and we get quite a look into England in the early 20th century. (Carol Miller 9+)

Barry, Dave

Big Trouble and Tricky Business

Goofball light novels, in the "Bunch of South Florida Wackos" genre shared by Carl Hiassen. (Mike Roam)

Benedict, Elizabeth

Almost

Sophy Chase, almost divorced, is suddenly confronted with her husband's mysterious death. This elegant novel sweeps us along as she faces her needs, her ambitions, and her personal demons. Her search to discover what happened or why becomes, of course, the question of who or what she is, and that drives this well-written, insightful page-turner. It's really hard to put down and wonderfully satisfying. (Marty Skoble 11+)

Berendt, John

The City of Falling Angels

Really fascinating account of contemporary Venice--and its many colorful residents--by the author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. (Michael Donohue 10+)

Black, Jack

You Can't Win

A memoir of a boxcar riding thief. His journey takes you through the old West of early 20th century America. You learn about the life and lingo of many members of the underworld and also about their code of honor. Vividly detailed. This was William S. Burroughs' favorite book as a teen and young adult. (Richard Mann 9+)

Bonnefoy, Yves

The Curved Planks: Poems, translated (in a bilingual edition) by Hoyt Rogers.

Fabulous poems by a great living poet, perhaps one of France's greatest. Who knew? They go down easily too! The translations are wonderful as poems, beautifully capturing Bonnefoy's grace and clarity. They will satisfy any reader of English poetry. If you have some French, the facing pages allows you to DIY if you are so inclined, or at least enable you to consider alternatives, and that's always fun too. (Marty Skoble 9+)

Busch, Frederick

Girls

This novel tells the story of the life of a couple after the terrible loss of their baby girl. Set in upstate New York—and Busch vividly and rather grimly evokes this region--*Girls* reads quite a lot like a detective story. The writing is very rewarding (and the novel includes a vividly drawn dog). Pretty wonderful. Sad, though. (Carol Miller 11+)

Calvino, Italo

If On A Winter's Night A Traveler

Best book I read all year: fantastic interweaving of stories with deep, dark characters. Stories with spies, war, love, professors, farmers, readers, and writers. The writing is surprising and playful and (how can I say this?) somehow charming and friendly without at all being cute. (Mike Roam)

Carr, J.L.

A Month in the Country

Just beautiful and quick. Just pure loveliness. (Suzanne Sullivan 9+)

Chabon, Michael

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay

A book about comic books and WWII era New York City that won the Pulitzer Prize! Need I say more. (Matt Shapiro)

Chekhov, Anton

The Complete Short Novels

This is the recently published paperback edition, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. "The Duel" and "The Story of an Unknown Man" are gems. (Michael Donohue 10+)

Chelminski, Rudolph

The Perfectionist: Life and Death in Haute Cuisine

This is the fascinating and substantial biography of Chef Bernard Loiseau, the Michelin 3-Star chef who took his own life in 2003, while at the top of his career. With no particular interest in cooking or food, I was surprised how interesting his story is, and was engaged by the writing while being introduced to a different world. (Mike Roam)

Chomsky, Noam

Secrets, Lies and Democracy

A quick, lively, and provocative book, disagreeing with standard media take on most subjects of power, wealth, and freedom. For instance: what does democracy matter if corporations have all the power? (Mike Roam)

Coetzee, J. M.

Waiting for the Barbarians

Nobel Prize in Literature winner Coetzee tells a fascinating and morally disturbing story of life on the frontier of an empire. Desert country and salty lake are ominous enough and then the town is visited by a visitor from the castle who brings torture tools and fears of barbarian invasion. (Mike Roam)

Crosby, Alfred

Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy

The whole history of human energy use on this planet is less than 200 pages, salted with colorful anecdotes and written by the dean of America's environmental historians. From Neanderthal cooking to controlled nuclear fusion, with plenty of wisdom on the high price of motor fuel. (Bill Everdell 10+)

Crouse, Tim

The Boys on the Bus

Sure, even the seniors weren't yet born when Richard Nixon and George McGovern battled it out in the 1972 presidential election. But that doesn't mean you can't enjoy Crouse's hilarious, bitter, cogent analysis of the press's coverage of it (and of presidential elections in general). Not only do you learn a ton about the subtle dance in which the press and the politicians they cover engage, you also get to see pictures of famous correspondents when they still had hair!

(Melissa Kantor 9 +)

Crowley, John

Little, Big

An amazing epic about a family, a town not found on any map, a quest, a pack of cards, the Holy Roman Emperor, and ordinary people mixing with fairies at war. It's strange, sublimely weird and tremendously imaginative, if difficult and intensely cerebral. Not for everyone, but those with a taste for this kind of writing will absolutely love it. (Jane Avrich 11+)

Didion, Joan

Salvador

Finally, a chance to understand what went on in El Salvador in the 1980s. Or not. Either way, is there anything better than sinking into Didion's cogent prose? This slim volume is illuminating and horrifying. Be prepared to hate yourself and your country.

(Melissa Kantor 10+)

Didion Joan

The Year of Magical Thinking

This memoir of her marriage written in the year after her husband's death would be brutal even if you didn't know her only daughter (on the road to recovery at the book's end) died shortly before the book's publication. Once you know that, it's almost unreadable. Still, the intricate language and vividly drawn memories make the novel as beautiful as it is sad. Bring tissues.

(Melissa Kantor 11+)

Durrell, Gerald

My Family and Other Animals

Durrell is a zoologist with a past. This is one of the great fun memoirs. It tells the story of his family's decamping from London (to escape the rain) and heading, of all things, to the Island of Corfu. We meet Durrell's famous brother, writer Lawrence Durrell, as a bossy, funny older teenager, but even more entertaining are the stories of how Durrell became pre-occupied with things that crawl and swim. A joy forever. Non-fiction. (Carol Miller 9+)

Eco, Umberto

Baudolino

It's wonderful that one pivotal scene, answering years of suspicion, is resolved through Baudolino, a great liar/storyteller, being shown how gullible he has been. Eco's characters (living in the Middle Ages) also make a mockery of the faith-based "reasoning" of their era, which sometimes relies on only the quotes of elders and sages while disregarding physical evidence and rigorous logic. (Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver* and Eco's *The Name of the Rose* raise this same point.) The novel's characters have great experience and debate with questions of reality, truth, heresy, love, and occasional humor. ("The one time in my life I told the truth and only the truth, they stoned me.") (Mike Roam)

Evans, Karin

The Lost Daughters of China

An incredibly moving memoir, rich in emotion, vivid in detail. (Diane Gnagnarelli 10+)

Fadiman, Anne

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

A fascinating non-fiction account of a Hmong family's run-in with Western medicine in the United States. You learn a lot about the history of the Hmong, as well as their more recent experiences as immigrants. (Barbara Brousal 10+)

Farrell, J. G.

The Singapore Grip

I really enjoyed every word: the mix of tragic and comic, characters wondering about their own reality, arguing about whether colonization had brought more good or harm to the mix of natives and refugees and transplants, and even the way the author leaves some things unsaid (river of "gold", the doctor's fetish for some pricey treat, the Major's lost love in Ireland). I've been to 5 bookstores looking for his other books already. (Mike Roam)

Feynman, Richard

"Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!"

These scientific anecdotes will amuse and surprise you. Feynmann is a great storyteller and he writes with surprising candor about his life and accomplishments. (Alex Levin 9+)

Fforde, Jasper

The Eyre Affair

A hard-boiled detective/thriller story set in a world where characters jump in and out of books and where literature and war are the twin obsessions of the populace. This novel is a hilarious burlesque, a delight for the literate. Puns abound, time is definitely out of joint (the Crimean War is in its 131st year) and Big Brother (aka Goliath) is lurking in the wings. Great summer reading. (Marty Skoble 9+)

Fraser, George MacDonald

Flashman, Royal Flash, Flash for Freedom!, Flashman and the Angel of the Lord, and Flashman's Lady

These are just five stand-outs from a series of twelve novels (the most recent one came out last year) about Harry Flashman. He's a scoundrel, a coward, and a rake, but when he passes through many of the mid-19th century's best-known military conflicts, he comes out looking like a hero. It's Patrick O'Brian with a sense of humor. Warning: his bad behavior is depicted rather explicitly. (Michael Donohue 12+)

Frazier, Charles

Cold Mountain

A perfect book to read in the summer because once you start reading this long saga you don't want to stop. Beautifully written, it is about a young man, Inman, from the mountains of North Carolina sent off to fight in the Civil War. After a time in horrible battles he is wounded and when he is able, he starts to walk back from

Charleston to his home in the mountains and to his pre-war girl Ada. Ada meantime has had to find a living on her farm left to her by her father and she has had no word of the fate of her lover. She has no idea how to work the land and is helped by a great character – Ruby – a child mostly, self educated. This is the romantic saga of Inman’s return and whom he meets along the way, and how Ruby and Ada get along. A lovely book. (Anne Bosworth 11+).

French, Patrick

Tibet, Tibet: A Personal History of a Lost Land

This book is especially relevant as a reality check -- how much of what we know about Tibet is accurate, is well-meaning media hype, or is a manufactured reality? Once thought of as Shangri-La, now a celebrity cause, what is life really like in Tibet for Tibetans, and of what help or hindrance are “free Tibet” organizations?

Part travel journal, part history, part political analysis, “Tibet, Tibet” is the result of Patrick French’s second trip to Tibet, and of twenty years of working for the Tibetan cause. In 1986, following his first trip to China and Tibet, French co-founded the Free Tibet Campaign in England. Since his second sobering trip in 1999, French resigned from the organization he helped to found saying, “In practice, there is little prospect of a free Tibet until there is a free China.” And yes, maybe he was tired of dealing with Hollywood celebrities. Note Sharon Stone introducing the Dalai Lama as “the hardest working man in spirituality.”

The writer-adventurer F. Spencer Chapman once referred to Tibet as “the real Tibet of my imagination.” In contrast, Patrick French's memoir is rich with details of life in present day Tibet, and simply for that, it’s noteworthy. (Deborah Dobski 10+)

Friedman, Thomas L.

The World is Flat: A Brief history of the Twenty-First Century

An amazing book that had me doing something I rarely do: inserting little bookmarks (at least 15) to mark highlights and topics that I want to re-read and re-think. Highlights include the plausible assertion that there is an economic race to the top, NOT to the bottom, with an increasing ability for the participation of the poor and ambitious and creative people all over the world: "outsourcing" might create more jobs here as well as abroad. (Mike Roam)

Gaskell, Elizabeth

Wives and Daughters

A mid-nineteenth century novel that's smarter and edgier and less drippy than most. Some great characters and relationships as a doctor remarries an awful, superficial, babbling woman with a compellingly amoral daughter who clashes with the introspective, practical heroine, Molly. (Jane Avrigh 9+)

Greene, Graham

The Heart of the Matter

I really enjoyed spending time with this author's character and setting. I particularly had to stop and muse after the part in which Scobie was thinking about a house in which a child, after surviving a torpedoing and 40 days in a lifeboat, lies dying: "Outside the rest-house he stopped again. The lights inside would have given an extraordinary impression of peace if one hadn't known, just as the stars on this clear night gave also an impression of remoteness, security, freedom. If one knew, he wondered, the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached what they called the heart of the matter?" (Mike Roam)

Greenway, Alice

White Ghost Girls

Two sisters, bold Frankie and watchful Kate, come of age in Hong Kong during the summer of 1967. Their father is a war photographer away working for long stretches in Vietnam. Their emotionally distant mother spends her time waiting for her husband's visits and painting watercolors of local life. The girls are cared for by a Chinese woman who calls them gwaimui, or "white ghost girls." After a terrifying incident in the marketplace, Frankie, always a risk-taker, becomes recklessly, willfully wild, and Kate, who is younger than Frankie and in awe of her,

begins to suffer from the stress of trying to keep Frankie safe. In a remarkable and lyrical memoir the book vividly evokes Hong Kong's sights, smells, and sounds as the writer seems to have remembered every single charged emotion from adolescence and filtered them all through the sisters' fierce, complex lives. This is a memoir about loss and, most of all, yearning.

(Anne Bosworth. 9+)

Gregory, Philippa

The Other Boleyn Girl

Sure, I'm embarrassed to admit I read this novel. But let's be honest: who doesn't like a story of palace intrigue and bitter sibling rivalry? Betcha didn't know that King Henry the VIII had two children with Mary Boleyn before turning his attention to her sister Anne. Will he divorce Katherine of Aragon and marry Anne? Will he have a male heir? The need to know will keep you turning the pages of this wonderfully terrible historical novel. (Plus, you'll finally understand the origins of Protestantism!)

(Melissa Kantor 9+)

Haddon, Mark

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

A very funny and (gasp) heartwarming novel about an autistic boy and his dad. A quick, engaging read. (Barbara Brousal 9+)

Helprin, Mark

Freddy and Fredericka

A falcon with lineage has refused a third time to take flight from the Prince of Wales's arm on a remote heath on the Isle of Skye which would have proved his readiness for the throne. Down but not out, the prince and his princess jump buck naked from a C-130 into the meadowlands around Paramus to begin an American odyssey before attempting one last time to assume the monarchy. Wacky, funny, tender. (Cathy Feurst)

Hemingway, Ernest

To Have and Have Not

An adventure story that hooked me from the first paragraph with both its action and dry tone of voice. I particularly enjoyed his mockery of authors, though I grew tired of all the drinking. (Mike Roam)

Herriott, James

All Creatures Great and Small

The first in the wonderful series by Herriott, Yorkshire large animal vet and great writer of farm life. If you love animals, you'll enjoy this. If you love animals and things English, you'll be thrilled. Herriott recounts his early days as a vet with riveting clarity. Great stories here about dealing with Yorkshire farmers. A joy. (Carol Miller 9+)

Hill, Reginald

Arms and the Women

Yes, it's a detective story set in modern England (Yorkshire), but if you've read *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, you'll love this exquisitely literate novel in which the so-called weaker sex take center stage. The language is first rate, and the plotting is ingenious. A great summer snack! (Marty Skoble 10+)

Hogeland, William

The Whiskey Rebellion

It was, at least for me, often hard to hear Bill Hogeland when he read in the church, but his book is certainly not hard to understand and is often hard to put down. He makes it clear that what many historians discount as a minor incident in our history was in fact a dramatic, fascinating, and important turning point in the way our country was

governed and developed. And the extraordinary people involved come alive with his vivid, almost novelistic treatment of the events. (Jim Halverson 9+)

Hosseini, Khaled

The Kite Runner

Although this book appeared on an earlier summer list, it deserves a repeat. A best seller that truly deserves that status, this novel is a thriller and often very disturbing, but a true work of art. It's also an expose of the ravaging of Afghanistan by various countries and factions, including America's self-serving complicity. (Jim Halverson 9+)

James, Henry

The Portrait of a Lady

Intensely subtle and knowing, with focus on the internal mental life of hope and reserve and inspiration. (Mike Roam)

James, Henry

Roderick Hudson and The Princess Cassamassima

Not James's most famous novels, but my personal favorites. They're connected by a central character, but you don't have to read them in order. (Michael Donohue 11+)

Jarry, Alfred

Ubu Roi

This play should be required reading. It's wacky, fun to read, and anyone interested in recent political and corporate scandals will find that it resonates quite accurately. (Diane Gnagnarelli 9+)

Jelloun, Tahar Ben (translated by Linda Coverdale)

This Blinding Absence of Light

A harrowing tale about a minor cadet who found himself in the middle of an attempted coup against the King of Morocco. Confined to eighteen years of subterranean incarceration, his spirit never broke. His descriptions of the conditions--his loneliness, near despair, and the dwindling number of fellow prisoners-- are breathtaking and surprisingly uplifting given the seeming hopelessness of his circumstances. (Barbara Everdell and Coco van Meerendonk 10+)

King, Dave

The Ha-Ha

The Ha-Ha's unforgettable main character, Howard Kapotstash has not spoken in 30 years and he has extremely limited communication skills: he can't process written words and his words unravel as he speaks. Howard manages to get along using hand gestures and basic sounds. Most people consider him mentally disturbed but he is the same person that he has always been. (His injury is a result of a severe blow to his head in his army days.) Still pining for Sylvia, his beloved high school sweetheart who has problems of her own, Howard ends up having to care for her 9-year-old son while she goes into a drug rehab program. This new addition to his already unconventional living situation disrupts his routine and forces him to really come alive and live life. Of course, fully living life means that one must deal with a full range of emotions. This profound novel is full of humor and heart. (Maria Falgoust 9+)

This wonderful first novel takes you deep into the mind of a Vietnam veteran who has lost the ability to speak as a result of a war injury. Very moving. (Richard Mann 9+)

Kingsolver, Barbara

Animal Dreams

A drifter returns to her childhood home in Grace, Arizona. She confronts an old boyfriend who is an American Indian, an estranged father who is the local doctor, and carries on a correspondence with her sister who has traveled to Nicaragua to help the indigenous population after the revolution. Her search for identity becomes a more and more compelling story with each page that you turn. Kingsolver is a wonderful writer. (Richard Mann 9+)

Kooser, Ted

Winter Morning Walks: 100 Postcards to Jim Harrison

America's poet laureate writes fresh haiku-like poems. (Mike Roam)

Krauss, Nicole

The History of Love

The author is young and pretty so we didn't want to like it, but we really liked this novel. About a Jewish refugee from WWII living in NYC. It is romantic, compelling and sad. (Neeltje Henneman & Barbara Brousal 10+)

Larson, Erik

The Devil in the White City

The greatest piece of American history you never knew. This book takes you to the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago we celebrated America's growing decadence and the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage. As if that wasn't enough—a brutal serial killer, who believes he is the devil, uses the fair to lure untold victims. Wow! (Matt Shapiro)

Lee, Harper

To Kill a Mockingbird

A recent "New Yorker" article by Thomas Mallon attacked it; re-read it and you'll see why Mallon is so wrong. (Michael Donohue 9+)

Lethem, Jonathan

Motherless Brooklyn

If you enjoyed Lethem's reading, this novel is a good one to start with. A novel that is set in our part of Brooklyn—you'll know many of the places that are mentioned in the book—it's a fast-paced whodunit on one level, a vital portrait of living with Tourette's Syndrome on another, and a very funny, entertaining book on both. (Jim Halverson 9+)

Lodge, David

Souls and Bodies

This wonderfully poignant, often painfully wry novel, gives "the sexual revolution" true historical depth. Lodge vividly and powerfully makes clear what it used to mean to grow up sexually ignorant and secretly terrified. His characters discover and wrestle with the social freedoms most of us take for granted and examine the implications of change in ways we rarely take the time to consider. Philosophically rich, theologically informative, Lodge is a wise satirist whose characters make us care and, with luck, make us carefully glad. (Marty Skoble 10+)

Mahfouz, Naguib

Children of the Alley

It is a fictional version of the bible that reads with the ease and passion of *Arabian Nights* with modern social commentary. Lush and powerful! (Lainie Fefferman 9+)

Márquez, Gabriel García

Love in the Time of Cholera

Almost a catalog of love stories, including a long-term marriage with some tender compromises while another man, who had loved the wife as a teenager, spends 50 years pining for her while chasing other skirts. (Mike Roam)

Maxwell, William

So Long, See You Tomorrow

What a beautiful, moving, brilliant, tiny book. While I sing the merits of both, Maxwell is something like the opposite of Faulkner. In one 135 pages of direct and unencumbered prose, he tells a chilling and poignant story. This is a slim, straightforward volume that will break your heart and mend it too. Maxwell writes with rare honesty and precision. A precious book. (Liz Fodaski 9+)

McCourt, Frank

Teacher Man: A Memoir

Reads quickly and engagingly, with dead-on portraits of student-teacher give and take. I appreciated his candor, mood-swings, critique of the beat-them-into-conformity education he received, and enjoyed the cameo appearances of our "not shy" colleague Maureen. (Mike Roam)

McEwan, Ian

Saturday

A British neurosurgeon's world takes a surprising turn after he has a run-in with a man on the street one Saturday morning. The best part of this book is the detailed description of the physician's observations and conclusions about the events that unfold around him. (Liz Yuan 10+)

Millhauser, Steven

Edwin Mullhouse

A fantastic piece of writing that somehow infuses the wonder of being a child and the complexity of adulthood in all his characters. This book is a true masterpiece! (Matt Shapiro)

Marai, Sandor

Embers

A GREAT novel (originally published in Budapest and newly translated from the German edition) about a sinister secret that threatens an old friendship. Simply stunning. (Alex Levin 9+)

Munro, Alice

Runaway

Maureen McSherry lent this collection of short stories to me. Great travel reading, on the beach reading, etc. (Diane Gnagnarelli 9+)

Munro, Alice

Something I've Been Meaning to tell You: 13 Stories

The book is for me a series of watercolor sketches, attempting to reveal hidden layers of her surrounding society—I felt the magical extraction of separate and distinct fibers, woven three dimensionally from observation, to describe successfully, in soft strokes and colors, interior feelings and associations. (Micheline Gringas 9+)

Nabokov, Vladimir

Pnin

See what all the fuss is about. After Lolita, Nabokov took a break from sadistic nympholepts and wrote this beautiful, hilarious portrait of a misunderstood Russian exile. You'll never read a more moving description of an

old man doing the dishes. (Michael Donohue 11+)

Narayan, R.K.

The Guide

Narayan is such a superb storyteller. The chameleonic protagonist of this novella is an incredible creation--flawed, hilarious, likeable, and in the end, mythical. Read it! (Jane Avrigh 9+)

Packer, George

Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq

A must-read account of the early stages of the war in Iraq. Packer was The New Yorker's correspondent in Baghdad. (Michael Donohue 9+)

Pamuk, Orhan

Istanbul: Memories and the City

Pamuk, a great contemporary Turkish writer, grew up in Istanbul in the 1950s and 60s and describes the great city as a place of mystery and after-empire melancholy. Written in shortish chapters, this is a good work to dip into now and then. I found myself wanting to savor its sections (rather than press on), and in fact, it's a bit like reading poetry. Lovely back and white photos. (Carol Miller 11+)

Pye, Michael

Pieces from Berlin

The time is 1980's, well after World War II. When Sarah Freeman passes a Zurich antiques shop owned by Lucia Muller-Rossi she spies an inlaid table that she and her husband had owned in pre-World War Berlin. Her recognition of the antique opens a window onto crimes half a century old. In the early 1940s, Muller-Rossi, Italian by birth and married to a Swiss, is in Berlin with her young son, Nicholas, living by her wits, trading sex or whatever else for privilege. Her outsider status as an Italian allows her a degree of freedom not enjoyed by most Berliners, and she assists her Jewish acquaintances in hiding their belongings or getting them out of the country. As Berlin crumbles beneath the Allied Powers' bombing, she leaves for Switzerland with eight truckloads of goods, making her fortune by selling the art and antiques of owners who will never return. Even at a remove of 50 years, the sudden revelation of truth profoundly affects Lucia, Nicholas, Sarah, and those around them. A well-told tale of guilt and moral complicity by the son Nicholas, it shows another side of the Holocaust. (Anne Bosworth 11+)

Roth, Philip

The Plot Against America

Imagine you lived in New Jersey in 1930 in a middle-class Jewish neighborhood enjoying the end of the depression era. Two boys, an anxious mother and father and a rich aunt with an eye to making friends in Washington. All very normal. Lindbergh, who has just crossed the Atlantic in a solo flight, is the hero running for president and he wins over Roosevelt. Roth has conceived a completely credible story on how America became fascist. Using the Jewish family as a springboard he has written a fascinating turn-around in America using familiar figures such as Walter Winchell who tries run against Lindbergh. A central event of the novel is the relocation effort made through the Office of American Absorption, a frightening government program whereby Jews would be placed, family by family, across the nation, thereby breaking up their neighborhoods--ghettos--and removing them from each other and from any kind of ethnic solidarity. The impact this edict has on Philip and all around him is horrific and life-changing. Everything in this novel is completely possible and in these days sounds even more so. Having lived in that time, I found this a fascinating book. (Anne Bosworth 10 +)

Saporta, Lionel René

A Hole In the Water

Combines a legal thriller with a contemplative search for self, against a backdrop of secret family history and

mysterious heritage. (Author is a Saint Ann's parent, and the book can be ordered from online bookstores.) (Mike Roam)

Saunders, George.

CivilWarLand in Bad Decline

In his first collection of surreal and satiric stories the author prods a number of cultural tumors through brilliantly grotesque frames, and he makes you laugh out loud while you writhe. (Don't miss his remarkably moving "Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz.") I also recommend his wonderful children's book, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*. (Ruth Chapman 9+)

See, Lisa

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan

In 19th century China, the women in a remote Hunan county practiced a secret form of writing known called nu shu. It was shared between women of the same families and taught from one generation to the next. Author Lisa See traveled to remote villages in China and found one woman who could read this secret language. After much research and storytelling, she wrote *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, a wonderful novel based on the practice of nu shu and the traditions of the laotong or "old sames". Old sames are girls who are selected by their mothers and matchmakers to be best friends for life. The depth of a laotong relationship far exceeds any other, even that of man and wife. (Anne Bosworth 10+)

A moving story from the era in China of bound feet. It involves a secret written language used only by women who were restricted to the home of their husband's family. One gets wonderful insights into the social and economic strata of women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The description of the foot binding process is highly graphic and painful. The subservience of all women is painfully and clearly described.

(Barbara Everdell & Coco van Meerendonk 9+)

Seth, Vikram

An Equal Music

I've got to find more by this author: I was craving to find out what comes next in this novel about chamber musicians. (Mike Roam)

Shteyngart, Gary

Absurdistan

Just published. Not as good as his first novel (*The Russian Debutante's Handbook*), but it has a superb narrator in Misha Vainberg, a rich, soft, spoiled, spectacularly obese Russian. (Michael Donohue 11+)

Sileika, Antanas

Woman in Bronze

Engrossing, enjoyable, subtle story of a Lithuanian who wants to be a sculptor and flees some World War 1 tragedies (and some comedy) at the family farm to become a starving artist: first in the forest and then in 1920's Paris. (Mike Roam)

Stapinski, Helene

Five-Finger Discount: A Crooked Family History

Stapinski's lively memoir conveys the grittiness of growing up in Jersey City in the 1970's and of her colorful family history. Many members of her family were petty thieves and were involved in illegal activities. Stapinski writes of the city's notoriously crooked politics, local toxic waste, Mafia trials, and gentrification and intertwines it with stories of her family's escapades. While most of the tales are truly hilarious, some are frankly heartrending. This book gives the reader a taste of Jersey City's culture in a straight-forward, sassy manner. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and highly recommend it! (Maria Falgoust 9+)

Strachey, Lytton

Queen Victoria

Very interesting—Strachey makes the Queen seem entirely human and, in fact, does give some sense of that most mysterious realm—royal living. He writes about her, of course, and some of the ins and outs of her life are plainly fascinating, even rather deliciously interesting in their details. And, of course, Strachey can be wonderfully sly in some of his remarks, unsurprising for the writer of *Eminent Victorians*. But it's oddly sympathetic towards her, too. Fun. (Carol Miller 9 +)

Tolstoy, Leo.

War and Peace

Some books change the way you see and name the world. I urge a first reading of this sovereign novel before you turn nineteen. (Ruth Chapman 10+)

Traig, Jennifer

Devil in the Details

If you like David Sedaris's work (which I highly recommend if you haven't already it) then you will love Jenny Traig's comic take on her childhood. She admits to being an obsessive compulsive religious fanatic. Stories from her interfaith upbringing about holidays with her Christian mother and Jewish father, or summer craft projects had me laughing out loud. (Ragan O'Malley 9+)

Urrea, Luis Alberto

The Hummingbird's Daughter

A wonderful, rich, beautiful and entertaining story that reminds one of Garcia Marquez and Allende. The heroine is the hummingbird's daughter who, left on her own, becomes the protégée of an old woman healer in Mexico around 1906. She is wild, funny and courageous and ultimately becomes a natural healer herself. According to the author, she was a famous distant relative of his from the Yaqui Indian tribe and he recounts her history with imagination and verve. A great summer read. (Annie Bosworth 10+)

Zakaria, Fareed

The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad

Does an astounding job asking how you can have democracy with civil rights, without grid-locked government, without mob-rule. Like the Federalist papers, a cry for Republic style democracy with stability, civility, and an eye on the long-term good of everybody. Not a call for "strong-man" iron rule, this includes warnings about the hate-filled policies of fascist mobs-and-leaders. Warns that "government by referendum" (public voting on too many things) gives power to those with the money to buy advertising. He also notices an unintended consequence of the "sunshine laws" (public airing of every committee meeting) that not only protect against secret deals and corruption but unfortunately also mean that every move by politicians is exposed to lobbyists and clamor and sound-bite rhetoric. (Mike Roam)

Zusak, Markus

The Book Thief

In the U.S. this book is being marketed as a young adult book, but in Australia (where the author lives) it is marketed as an adult book, (much as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon was young adult in England and adult in this country). The point is, *The Book Thief* will appeal to everyone. It is narrated by death and tells the story of Liesel Meminger, a young girl who goes to live with foster parents in Nazi Germany. Her parents, being Communists, have already disappeared. The characters are memorable, the plot is interesting, the writing is beautiful, and, yes, she does steal books. (Ragan O'Malley 9+)

