



SUMMER READING 2020

9th and 10th Grades

In this packet, you will find information about Summer Reading for new and returning Commonwealth students. Traditionally, we begin each school by breaking into small groups to discuss a book or books that the whole community has read. This year, each group will discuss a different book, representing a range of topics and genres, chosen by the faculty member leading the conversation. Please select one book from the “Summer Reading Discussion Groups” list and come to school prepared to share your observations!

Summer break can be a wonderful time to catch up on your reading—to discover new genres or authors, to re-read old favorites, or to finally tackle a literary classic. We encourage you to explore the titles on the attached lists, which include recommendations from the library, your teachers, and your classmates. If you liked a book in one of your courses last year, you might want to try another by the same author this summer. When you return to school in the fall, your advisor will be interested to hear what you have read and your responses.

These lists are also available on the library webpage (under Academics at commschool.org) where I have provided links to online ordering options for the required reading. Most books on this list will also be available at your local bookshop or library.

Happy reading!
Ms. Johnson

PART ONE: Summer Reading Discussion Groups

Each student will participate a discussion group for one of these books upon returning to school in the fall.

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On the Mountain* (Ms. Eskelund): From Penguin Classics: “This haunting coming-of-age story, first published in 1953 and based in part on James Baldwin’s childhood in Harlem, is an American classic. John Grimes is the fourteen-year-old stepson of a fire-breathing and abusive Pentecostal preacher in Harlem during the Depression. The action of this short novel spans a single day in John’s life, and yet manages to encompass on an epic scale his family’s troubled past and his own inchoate longings for the future, set against a shining vision of a city where he both does and does not belong.” Baldwin is a gorgeous storyteller and prose stylist whose writing explores race in America in ways startlingly relevant today. Let’s talk about his first novel together!

Molly Ball, *Pelosi* (Dr. Eagle): From the Publisher: “She’s the iconic leader who puts Donald Trump in his place, the woman with the toughness to take on a lawless president and defend American democracy. Ever since the Democrats took back the House in the 2018 midterm elections, Nancy Pelosi has led the opposition with strategic mastery and inimitable elan. It’s a remarkable comeback for the veteran politician who for years was demonized by the right and taken for granted by many in her own party—even though, as speaker under President Barack Obama, she deserves much of the credit for epochal liberal accomplishments from universal access to health care to saving the US economy from collapse, from reforming Wall Street to allowing gay people to serve openly in the military. How did an Italian grandmother in four-inch heels become the greatest legislator since LBJ?” From Dr. Eagle: “I am really excited to read this, hope you are too. Nancy Pelosi is a woman and politician par excellence.”

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Ms. Johnson): A classic graphic novel memoir about cartoonist Alison Bechdel’s childhood growing up in a funeral parlor, her coming out at Oberlin College, and her complicated relationship with her father—who, like her, was gay.

Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark* (Ms. Dale): Joseph Brodsky was a Russian-American poet and essayist. Born in Leningrad in 1940, he ran afoul of Soviet authorities and was expelled (“strongly advised” to emigrate) from the Soviet Union in 1972, settling in the United States with the help of W. H. Auden and other supporters. *Watermark* is Brodsky’s paean to the city of Venice. It’s a little jewel of a book, forty-eight brief, meditative chapters that fold observation, rumination, and rueful confession into a lyrical contemplation of the city’s architectural and atmospheric charms—and of the relation between water and land, light and dark, present and past, and more.

Theodora Goss, *The Strange Case of the Alchemist’s Daughter* (Ms. Budding): The daughters of mad scientists from 19th century novels meet each other and Sherlock Holmes. It works surprisingly well!

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Mr. Chalue & Mr. Wolff): From Wikipedia: “The novel, a semiautobiographical account of British author Christopher Isherwood’s time in 1930s

Berlin, describes pre-Nazi Germany and the people he met. It is episodic, dealing with a large cast over a period of several years from late 1930 to early 1933. It is written as a connected series of six short stories and novellas. The musical, *Cabaret*, is based on the work. After moving to Germany to work on his novel, Isherwood moves around the city frequently and soon thus becomes involved with a diverse array of German citizens: the caring landlady, Frl. Schroeder; the 'divinely decadent' Sally Bowles, a young Englishwoman who sings in the local cabaret and her coterie of admirers; Natalia Landauer, the rich, teenage Jewish heiress of a prosperous family business; Peter and Otto, a gay couple struggling to accept their relationship and sexuality in light of the rise of the Nazis. The book, first published in 1939, highlights the groups of people who would be most at risk from Nazi intimidation. It was described by contemporary writer George Orwell as 'brilliant sketches of a society in decay.'"

Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (Mr. Singer): Written when she was only 23, Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter* takes a deliberate, intimate look at life in a Georgian mill town during the Great Depression. Although the book transports you to a different time and place, the main characters grapple with issues that still confront us today: class, race, ability, gender, addiction, and the politics which give rise to these matters. Living in a time of quarantine gives us a new way to relate to this beautifully crafted, unhurried story. Note that the book is an artifact of its time and does contain language that wouldn't be used today.

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (Mr. Conolly): This short, laser-focused novel by Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*, was discovered in a desk drawer after his death in 1891 (a circumstance weirdly prophesied in his novel *Pierre*). The story of a court martial aboard a British warship in the age of sail, it is equally a metaphysical exploration of what, if any, moral order governs the world. Billy Budd, the archetypal "handsome sailor," beloved by all his fellow sailors, finds himself morally and intellectually helpless in the face of the pure, elemental malice of the sergeant-at-arms Claggart. When a crime is committed, the ship's captain, wavering between strict legal principle and a natural sense of right, is forced to make an agonizing judgment ... with the eyes of his crew upon him.

Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (Ms. Brewster): A mystery that's also a romance and a real novel of ideas (no offense to mysteries generally) set in the academic paradise of an Oxford women's college. I like the way it shows that feminism was not invented in 1969.

Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (Ms. Schilder): In *Whistling Vivaldi*, Claude Steele paints a compelling picture, through personal stories and research results, of how simply being aware of negative stereotypes toward our social group diminishes our ability to perform.

PART TWO: Recommendations from the Class of 2020

Graduating seniors share some of their favorite books (and more!).

ELLIE BERKENBLIT—*Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen* by Christopher McDougall

ALEX DING—*The Three-Body Problem* trilogy by Cixin Liu

IZZIY DOWD—*Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder: “*Sophie's World* is a book about Sophie Amundsen, a Norwegian teenager who finds herself in the middle of a mystery when strange notes start showing up around her. *Sophie's World* is an introductory course to Western philosophy that provides a fairly comprehensive history without being too dense. Both of these statements are true; Gaarder weaves the strands fact and fiction together into an amazing work that is unlike anything else I've ever read.”

LILLIAN FANG—*Children of Time* by Adrian Tchaikovsky: “Who doesn't like giant, sentient spiders going to war with the remainder of the human race? Enjoy this brilliantly written science fiction novel that's filled with arachnids discovering science, space pirates, and an obsession with God.”

ELLA MARKIANOS—*Night Sky with Exit Wounds* by Ocean Vuong

ALEC MATHUR—*Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg

KATE O'ROURKE—*The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien: “Probably one of the best war novels of all time, the book recounts the author's harrowing experience in Vietnam, with stunning prose and an amazing understanding of a soldier's psyche.”

PART THREE: Books Recommended for Students Entering 9th and 10th Grade

NOVELS

Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (2007): When 14-year-old Junior transfers from the reservation school to a wealthy, predominantly white private school, he grapples with questions of community and Indian identity. This semi-autobiographical illustrated novel is sometimes tragic and nearly always funny.

Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994): In the Dominican Republic of the 1960s, the four Mirabal sisters each becomes active in the resistance against the Trujillo dictatorship. Based on real people and events (and inspired by the author's childhood in the Dominican Republic) this is an unforgettable historical drama.

Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1817): “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine”—and yet she becomes one in the funniest of Jane Austen's books, a sly sendup of the conventions of the gothic novel.

John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things* (2006): A story of growing up and of the difference between fantasy and reality for readers who were raised on fairy tales.

Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007): The character of Oscar, a “ghetto nerd” from Paterson, NJ is the focus of Díaz's descriptive, lyrical writing. Díaz describes how the experiences of Oscar's parents and grandparents in Santo Domingo impact Oscar's destiny.

Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens* (1990): Certainly the funniest book ever written about the Apocalypse (and probably one of the funniest books every written, period).

Amitav Ghosh, *Gun Island* (2019): An unassuming rare book dealer ends up on a whirlwind international journey in this story which blends elements of folklore and myth to tell a very current story about climate change.

Myla Goldberg, *Bee Season* (2003): A novel about a gifted and unconventional family, told through the eyes of 9-year-old Spelling Bee champ Eliza Naumann.

Peter Hoeg, *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1992): A thriller is set in Denmark and Greenland, full of what one reader called “danger, violence and moral dread.”

Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962): Shirley Jackson is a master of building dread. If you are hooked by this story of the unsettling sisters of Blackwood House, try *The Haunting of Hill House* or a collection of Jackson's short stories next.

Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996): When the Chinese-American Chang family relocate to the affluent, predominately Jewish New York suburb of Scarshill, teenage Mona decides she wants

to reinvent herself: “American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish.” A wickedly funny coming of age story. If you like this one, consider checking out Jen’s newest

Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962): Alternately funny, violent, and heartbreaking. Randall McMurphy gets himself committed to a mental institution to avoid prison. Quickly, though, he crosses the dominating, infantilizing Nurse Ratched, and they begin an escalating series of battles for control of the world and of McMurphy’s mind. Seen through the eyes of a mute Indian, whose story of liberation this finally becomes.

Laurie R. King, *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* (1994): This book provides an energetic update to the Sherlock Holmes canon. It follows the great detective at the end of his career as he takes on a new protégée—eccentric, intelligent teenager Mary Russell. Fans of John Watson may be a bit dismayed by his portrayal in this book series, but most mystery lovers will find a lot to enjoy.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974): What would it be like, in practice, to have a society built on principles, not laws, where the only rule might be no roller skating in the halls? In what she called her “ambiguous utopia,” Ursula K. Le Guin explores the inherent inescapable tension between individuals and communities, between freedom and responsibility... in space.

Sinclair Lewis, *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935): Frequently humorous in its depiction of how American fascism, presided over by “Buzz” Windrip and his legions of armed “Minute Men,” comes to Fort Beulah, Vermont in the 1930s; nonetheless, a deadly serious critique of America between the wars.

Chris Lynch, *Freewill* (2001): Lynch has been called stylistically daring, and *Freewill* is a prime example. The story of Will, a disconnected teenager who finds solace in the woodworking class at what the second-person narrator deems “Hopeless High.” He falls under suspicion when his wood sculptures are found near the sites of students’ drownings, which may or may not be suicides.

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2001): Piscine “Pi” Patel—raised by a zookeeper in Pondicherry, India—is shipwrecked for nearly a year with a 450-pound Bengal tiger called Richard Parker. This is both an exciting survival story and a reflection on faith and identity (with a tiger).

Patricia McCormick, *Never Fall Down* (2012): Based on the harrowing true story and told in the voice of Arn Chorn-Pond, a survivor of the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s. Chorn-Pond uses music to survive the Khmer Rouge labor camps, then serves as a child soldier, before finally escaping to Thailand and then America—although his experiences as a young man never leave him.

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970): Growing up in Ohio in the 1940s, Pecola Breedlove is told constantly that she is “ugly” by her neighbors and classmates and she dreams of having blue eyes and blond curls like the white dolls that she receives as birthday presents. This book is exquisitely written but deals with very hard topics, so take care.

Patrick O’Brian, *Master and Commander* (or any other novel of the 17 in the series): O’Brian’s novels tell the story of a British naval captain and his ship’s doctor (in reality a secret agent) during the Napoleonic Wars. Far more than conventional historical fiction: a lot of action, quirky conversation, and psychological insight—all in very elegant, very readable prose.

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1945): Ostensibly a simple story of farm animals trying to run the farm themselves, this is also a stark representation of Stalinist brutality, which poses questions about the essential corruptibility of power. It caused a sensation when it was first published nearly seventy-five years ago.

Ann Patchett, *Run* (2007): Set in Cambridge, MA, *Run* is a story about how tight-knit multiracial family readjusts upon becoming acquainted with once-hidden relatives.

Karolina Pavlova, *A Double Life* (1848): The earth-shattering insights into the human condition we find in the great works of 19th-century Russian literature are distorted in that that tradition is so male-dominated. This is precisely what makes Pavlova's 1848 masterpiece so vital. A *tour de force* of experimental form, the novel is a devastating study of the chasm between a woman's inner dream life (represented in verse) and the soul-crushing role she, as a woman in a patriarchal society, is forced to assume in her waking life by the other women around her and by her own sense of propriety.

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929): The author was a German veteran of World War I. The book describes the horrors of World War One and the postwar suffering of the men returning to Germany after the war.

Mary Renault, *The King Must Die* (1958): Mary Renault's historical fiction set in Ancient Greece are classics of the genre. This one retells the life and adventures of the mythological hero Theseus. If you got hooked on the time period in Ancient History, give Renault's books a try!

Fran Ross, *Oreo* (1974): The *New York Times* review calls this book "a rollicking little masterpiece...truly one of the most delightful, hilarious, intelligent novels I've stumbled across in recent years, a wholly original work written in a wonderful mashed-up language that mixes high academic prose, black slang and Yiddish to great effect. I must have laughed out loud a hundred times, and it's a short book, just over 200 pages, which averages out to one booming gut-laugh every other page."

Benjamin Alire Saenz, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012): A moving story about the friendship that develops in the summer of 1987 between two very different gay Mexican-American teenagers (one who is open about his sexuality, the other of whom is still struggling with his identity), and about all different kinds of love.

Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943): A classic coming of age novel about the hopes and dreams of an impoverished Irish-American family living in turn-of-the-century Brooklyn.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (1963): A zany, darkly funny satire of the arms race, science, religion, and the end of the world.

T. H. White, *The Once and Future King* (1958): This epic masterpiece of Arthurian legends is at times tragic, at times comic, and always engrossing. Although this story is set in England's mythical past, it was written between 1938 and 1958, and concerns about the rise of fascism, the fall of empire, and modernization permeate the novel—and make it feel still relevant today.

Jacqueline Woodson, *The House You Pass on the Way* (2010): Mixed-race Staggerlee has always felt different—even more so as she begins to develop feelings for a female friend. Then her bold

cousin Trout comes to visit and gives Staggerlee a new perspective on herself and on her future life. Jacqueline Woodson crafts beautiful stories.

SHORT STORIES, POETRY, AND PLAYS

Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950): “The men of Earth came to Mars...They came because they were afraid or unafraid, because they were happy or unhappy, because they felt like Pilgrims or did not feel like Pilgrims. There was a reason for each man. They were leaving bad wives or bad towns; they were coming to find something or leave something or get something, to dig up something or bury something or leave something alone. They were coming with small dreams or large dreams or none at all. But a government finger pointed from four-color posters in many towns: THERE’S WORK FOR YOU IN THE SKY: SEE MARS! and the men shuffled forward, only a few at first, a double-score, for most men felt the great illness in them even before the rocket fired into space. And this disease was called The Loneliness.” This classic collection of short stories about the colonization of Mars is moving and well-written.

Rita Dove, *Thomas and Beulah* (1986): Dove traces her grandparents through a series of poems. The voice of each takes half of the book, moving back and forth between Thomas and his mandolin on the river to Beulah watching the sweeping “crow’s wing” of the Civil Rights Movement on television.

Chris Duffy, *Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics* (2014): This book pairs comics artists with World War I poets to create a unique, artistic anthology that explores the realities of war, of loss, and of coming home.

Athol Fugard, *Master Harold...and the Boys* (1982): The scene: St. George’s Park Tea Room, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The time: around 1982. The characters: Sam and Willie, black South Africans who work in the tea room, and Hally (“Master Harold”), a white South African high-school student whose mother owns the cafe. The action: a painful attempt to define love, loyalty and identity. *Valley Song*, a play by South Africa’s master playwright which looks hopefully and wistfully at the new, post-apartheid South Africa and is a wonderful complement to his earlier *Master Harold*.

V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street* (1959): A series of brief life studies, each about a resident of Miguel Street in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, where Naipaul grew up. These people live and talk with a strong street-wise vitality, even as their stubborn oddities carry them to obscure, distinctive ends.

Octavio Paz, *Early Poems 1935-1955* (1973): Selected early poems from this Nobel Prize-winning Mexican poet, translated by such distinguished poets as William Carlos Williams and Denise Levertov.

Edgar Allan Poe, *Stories* (there are many collections): One of the most influential 19th-century American writers, inventor of the detective story, master of the tale of horror and suspense, Poe is not an author to read when you are alone at night!

Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia* (1993): Following the Coverly family over two centuries, this play mixes together architecture, Romanticism, chaos theory, and the pursuit of historical “truth” in ways both comic and beautiful.

GRAPHIC NOVELS

John Lewis, *March: Books 1-3* (2013-15): A riveting account of the Jim Crow South and the early Civil Rights movement through the eyes John Lewis, former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and current congressman from Georgia.

Jim Ottaviani, *The Imitation Game: Alan Turing Decoded* (2016): Ottaviani specializes in graphic novel biographies of scientists, and this one about Alan Turing—a forefather of computing and code-cracking hero of World War II, later persecuted by his government for being gay—digs deeper than the recent film of the same title.

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2000): This two-part graphic novel memoir paints a vivid picture of life in Iran in the 1980s as the Islamic Revolution brought on rapid social changes. Satrapi’s child’s-eye view of the Revolution is affecting, sometimes funny, and often relatable.

David Small, *Stitches: A Memoir* (2010): When teenage David goes in for a routine surgery, he awakens to be told that he had cancer and a vocal cord has been removed, leaving him virtually mute. This surreal graphic memoir follows the aftermath of this surgery, including David’s complicated relationship with his parents (including his physician father, who continues to make medical decisions on his behalf) and the escape he finds in art.

Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese* (2006): Interweaving stories of Chinese mythology and Asian-American identity come together in unexpected ways in this excellent graphic novel. For those with an interest in history, Yang’s *Boxers & Saints*, a two-part graphic novel about the 1899 Boxer Rebellion, is also highly recommended.

MEMOIR & AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002): The first book is volume one of Maya Angelou’s autobiography, the account of her traumatic childhood in Stamps, Arkansas and St. Louis, Missouri. The second is volume six of her autobiography, covering her participation in the Civil Rights movement working with both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007): Beah provides a riveting but often extremely disturbing account of his time as a child soldier in Sierra Leone before his eventual escape to the United States at age 17.

Richard Blanco, *The Prince of los Cocuyos* (2014): As Barack Obama’s second inaugural poet, Richard Blanco “ticked many boxes” as: first openly gay poet, first Latino poet, first immigrant poet,

and youngest inaugural poet. This funny and heart-breaking memoir tells the story of his Cuban family finding their place in America, and Blancos' own feelings of being different.

Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965): A detailed firsthand account by a member of the Malcolm X generation of everything that could go wrong in a young man's life growing up in Harlem, New York. Raw, direct, warm-blooded, reflective.

Frank Conroy, *Stop-Time* (1967): This autobiography, a few years back, had a cult following among Commonwealth students. It is a powerful book, both bleak and funny. Conroy examines, with unsparing honesty, his own character and how he "slipped into the state of being in trouble," as well as the crazy, sometimes brutal adults in his life. It leaves a reader with a vivid sense of raw experience, but also with a kind of wonder at the writer's ability to survive by his wits and his strength of soul.

Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood* (1985): Instead of trying to find in her own youth some grand scheme of development, Dillard gives a series of trenchant retrospections in which oddities are pursued with fearless intensity and the indestructible self is looked on as a marvel.

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947): Anne Frank's diary, which she kept between the ages of 13 and 15, captures in fresh, tart language the day-to-day joys, discoveries and pains of an ardent and observant girl. At the same time, it matter-of-factly (and therefore even more poignantly) captures the fear, hunger, tedium and confinement felt by the eight Jews (including Anne, her sister, and her parents) who fled the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands by hiding in the "Secret Annex" in the back of an Amsterdam warehouse. They were discovered in August 1944, and all but Anne's father eventually died in the camps just weeks before the Allied victory. Get the "definitive" edition, which restores material deemed too sensitive for original publication.

Hope Jahren, *Lab Girl* (2016): Jahren, a geobiologist who studies trees and other flora, writes a memoir that captures the joy and wonder of discovering the natural world.

David Sedaris, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2005): A collection of humorous personal essays about the narrator's comical and loving family and growing up gay.

Elie Wiesel, *Night* (1960): "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed." Wiesel, who survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald and went on to receive a Nobel Peace Prize for his post-war activism, writes of his experiences in the camps with profound humanity.

NON-FICTION

M.T. Anderson, *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad* (2015): The Siege of Leningrad was a devastating chapter in Russian history; Anderson looks at it through the lens of a performance by composer Dmitri Shostakovich that brought global attention and some rays of hope to the beleaguered city.

H.G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream* (1990): This story of a high school football team and the small Texas town that gathers together every Friday night to watch them play can't be put down.

Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2017): "Eviction does not simply drop poor families into a dark valley, a trying yet relatively brief detour on life's journey. It fundamentally redirects their way, casting them onto a different, and much more difficult, path. Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty." This is the argument of Desmond's humane and moving book, which tells the stories of Milwaukee families going through the process of eviction and makes the case for reforms to our housing system.

Richard Feynman, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out* (1999): This collection of essays and lectures is a marvelous introduction to Richard Feynman, a theoretical physicist with a unique knack for making science engaging and accessible. *Six Easy Pieces* or *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman* (the first of Feynman's memoirs) would make a great next read for students who get hooked on his quirky writing.

Barbara Findlen, *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995): A powerful collection of essays written by young women. The authors are generally in their 20's. Contains a wide variety of topics, from race relations, faith, sexuality, to body image issues.

Stephen J. Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (1980): A selection of essays on evolution. Gould's strength is in his ability to find large truths in the particulars, even the minutiae, of an organism or event. Especially recommended after Biology 9.

Jon Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946): This short work is a classic of journalism; it brings the bombing of Hiroshima to life through the eyes of the ordinary Japanese people who were its victims. The entire text is now available online from *The New Yorker*, where it was originally published as a standalone issue in 1946.

Paul Hoffman, *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers* (1998): This biography examines the life of a modern mathematician. Along with the entire life of Paul Erdos, related through the eyes of his many admirers and friends, it contains much information on the habits of mathematicians: their humor, commitment, fears, and failings. The book also touches upon some of the most fun and interesting fields of mathematics.

Susan Kuklin, *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2014): Six transgender and gender-nonconforming teens tell their stories in their own words in a series of interviews with author and photographer Susan Kuklin, sharing both the joys and the challenges of becoming their authentic selves.

Konrad Lorenz, *King Solomon's Ring* (1949): A wonderful book about animals and their habits; a most felicitous combination of keen scientific accuracy and affectionately humorous narrative.

Sy Montgomery, *The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness* (2015): Another excellent book for animal lovers, this one exploring the remarkable intelligence of octopuses. Montgomery is a Massachusetts native and did her observation at the Boston Aquarium.

Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England: A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century* (2008): A more tongue-in-cheek (though still scholarly) approach to Medieval Europe than you're likely to encounter in Medieval World History. Mortimer writes in the style of a travel guide, painting a vivid sensory picture of daily life in the 14th century that makes the past feel alive and fresh.

Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (1994): After reading a study showing that girls' self-esteem plummeted as they entered adolescence, Peggy Orenstein conducted her own investigation in two diverse middle schools in California. This fascinating book reveals the inner lives of the girls she interviewed, exploring the pressures they face from friends, teachers, and parents as they move into high school.

Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (2003): Mary Roach doesn't shy away from the funny, weird, or gross in her science writing. This book dives deep into what becomes of bodies donated to science; other of her books take a close look at the digestive system (*Gulp*), life in outer space (*Packing for Mars*), and the afterlife (*Spook*).

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010): Skloot, a science journalist, uncovers the hidden story of the African-American woman whose uniquely hardy and productive cell line (HeLa) is famous in the medical world for helping advance treatments for cancer, AIDS, polio, and other devastating illnesses, but whose contributions were unknown to her family, who lived in obscurity and poverty. A moving story of family, scientific discovery, and of the troubling intersections between race and science.

Kory Stamper, *Word by Word: The Secret Life of Dictionaries* (2017): A funny, geeky look at the day-to-day life of working on a dictionary, by one of Merriam-Webster's lexicographers.

Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (1977): A short, non-mathematical account of the birth of the universe, by a Nobel Prize-winning physicist.

Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (1979): A gripping story of the cowboy pilots who became the first group of U.S. astronauts.

Bee Wilson, *Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat* (2012): A witty history of eating, from prehistory to the contemporary kitchen.