

SUMMER READING 2017

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 with discussions of a book or books that the whole community has read. This year, we will be trying something a bit new—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!

We hope that you will read *every day* this summer. We ask that you read a total of 6 to 12 books over the summer vacation, including those that are required. One of these books should come from the “Identity and Diversity” list below; you may also have required reading for one or more of your classes. Beyond that, the balance of your reading may come from recommended books on the school lists or those you choose on your own. If you liked a book in one of your courses last year, you might want to try another by the same author this summer.

We encourage you to keep a reading journal, in which you keep track of what you have read and what you thought of it. Jot down favorite quotations and make a note of anything that comes to mind in the course of your reading. 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 titles listed below; most 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.

Tamim Ansary, *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan-American Story* (Ms. Budding)

This is a highly readable memoir of Ansary's coming of age between two worlds, those of his Afghan father and his American mother. A great starting-point for discussions of identity, religion, and politics.

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Ms. Glenn-Haber)

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign / No more water but fire next time," runs the old spiritual. This slender volume contains some of the most beautiful and challenging American writing of the 20th century as James Baldwin contemplates the coming reckoning of America's long history of racial oppression. Written on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (1963) in the full recognition that the promise of freedom had not been met, the book examines the psychic costs of racism to all Americans. The essay is part autobiography, part exploration of separation and integration, and a meditation on expanding the imagination of what the ideal America might be.

E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Ms. Tyson)

The self-interested disregard of a dying woman's bequest, an impulsive girl's attempt to help an impoverished clerk, and the marriage between an idealist and a materialist — all intersect at a Hertfordshire estate called Howards End. The fate of this beloved country home symbolizes the future of England itself in E. M. Forster's exploration of social, economic, and philosophical trends, as exemplified by three families: the Schlegels, symbolizing the idealistic and intellectual aspect of the upper classes; the Wilcoxes, representing upper-class pragmatism and materialism; and the Basts, embodying the aspirations of the lower classes." — Publisher description

Mark Greif, *Against Everything: Essays* (Mr. Kerner)

In his first collection of essays, literary and cultural critic (and Commonwealth alumnus!) Mark Grief has assembled a thrilling set of skeptical reflections on the values—political, aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical; sometimes explicitly held, sometimes tacitly—that underpin contemporary American life. From the cult of aerobic exercise to the rise of foodie-ism, from the role of YouTube in our collective life to the range of discourses surrounding punk, rap, and pop music, Greif explores the elements of the world we too often take for granted—his responses are intellectually nimble, deeply felt, and bracingly counterintuitive.

Stephen Johnson, *How We Got to Now* (Mr. Wharton)

This history of six topics (glass, cold, sound, clean, time, light) whose transformative advances (e.g. the invention of refrigeration and the lightbulb) reshaped human life. The book explores the interweaving technology and culture, the way complex conditions come together to make possible new advances, and the way the inventions have far-reaching and unforeseen effects. If you are curious to learn, as the *New York Times* review noted, "why flash photography led to antipoverty programs at the turn of the 20th century" or "how the invention of the laser contributed to the decline of mom-and-pop stores," you will enjoy this book.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (Ms. Tarnoff)

"If you aren't in the moment, you are either looking forward to uncertainty, or back to pain and regret." — Jim Carrey

How can we be present and not stress so much over what we need to do or what we should have done? Just like any other skill such as writing a research paper, shooting a basketball or baking cookies, mindfulness is a practice. But mindfulness can be a very evasive and challenging concept, one that many do not understand. Instead, why not dive in and discover how mindfulness can help manage stress, or train one's brain to focus? Here is an opportunity to read and discuss one of the most-read books on mindfulness, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, from one the world's leading teachers, Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's* (Mr. Lew and Mr. Paul)

From Amazon: Illuminated by pop fantasies, Donna Summer disco tracks and teen passion, the fiercely earnest characters in *Rolling the R's* come to life against a background of burning dreams and neglect in a small 1970s Hawaiian community. The characters' stories unfold largely in the documentary detritus of their lives—their poems and prayers, book reports and teacher evaluations—all written in carefully observed, pitch-perfect vernacular. Now back in stock, Linmark's tour-de-force experiments in narrative structure, pidgin and perspective roll every "are," throwing new light on gay identity and the trauma of cultural assimilation. *Rolling the R's* goes beyond "coming of age" and "coming out" to address the realities of cultural confusion, prejudice and spiraling levels of desire in humorous yet haunting portrayals that are, as Matthew Stadler writes, "stylish, shameless and beautiful."

Ian McEwan, *Nutshell* (Ms. Watson)

"The novel's title comes from Hamlet—'I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space'—as does the plot, which involves a mother named Trudie and an uncle named Claude—i.e., Gertrude and Claudius—planning the murder of the narrator's father. Like Hamlet, our narrator is haunted by his own inability to act, though in fairness he has some constraints on his action that Hamlet didn't. The resulting novel is... very funny. It's also gripping and occasionally terrifying. In its premise and the extent of its intertextual playfulness it is... like nothing McEwan has written before, and this may be finally what makes it a quintessential Ian McEwan novel." – Christopher Beha

Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Mr. Holub-Moorman)

We live in the age of the algorithm. Increasingly, the decisions that affect our lives—where we go to school, whether we get a car loan, how much we pay for health insurance—are being made not by humans, but by mathematical models. In theory, this should lead to greater fairness: Everyone is judged according to the same rules, and bias is eliminated. But as Cathy O'Neil reveals, the opposite is true. The models being used today are opaque, unregulated, and uncontestable, even when they're wrong. Most troubling, they reinforce discrimination: If a poor student can't get a loan because a lending model deems him too risky (by virtue of his zip code), he's then cut off from the kind of education that could pull him out of poverty, and a vicious spiral ensues. Models are propping up the lucky and punishing the downtrodden, creating a "toxic cocktail for democracy." Welcome to the dark side of Big Data.

Edith Pearlman, *Binocular Vision: New and Selected Stories* (Ms. Dale)

A local author's collection of short stories, many of which focus on Pearlman's favorite theme, "accommodation." From the *New York Times*: "Pearlman writes about the predicaments—odd, wry, funny and painful—of being human. Her characters are sophisticated, highly literate, relatively affluent and often musical. They travel, they read, they go to museums and concerts: they take pleasure in what the world offers. They're also principled, and moral responsibility plays an important part in their lives. Pearlman's prose is smooth and poetic, and her world seems safe and engaging. So it's arresting when, suddenly, almost imperceptibly, she slips emotion into the narrative, coloring it unexpectedly with deep or delicate hues."

Mo Yan, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* (Ms. Grant)

A tragicomic romp through Maoist China, driven by reincarnation, the story centers on a landowner, Ximen Nao, who is executed by the villagers (as many were in the early years of the Communist state) for supposed crimes. He goes down to the Buddhist underworld, where he protests his innocence to Lord Yama, god of the dead. He begs to be reincarnated so he can prove his innocence. Yama sends him back to earth, and to his village, but with a cruel twist – Ximen Nao will be living life as a donkey. This is a great book for anyone, but if you are taking Modern East Asia next year, you will especially enjoy it.

PART TWO: Course-Specific Reading List

ANCIENT HISTORY

Homer, *The Essential Iliad*, edited and translated by Stanley Lombardo (ISBN: 0872205428). (Please, no Kindle copies of the book as students are expected to mark up their copies).

MEDIEVAL WORLD HISTORY

Students taking Medieval World History next year are asked to read one of the following:

1. *The Arabian Nights* (ISBN: 978-0393331660). The classic medieval Islamic work, constructed as a labyrinth of story within story, *The Arabian Nights* draws on tales from many eastern lands, and provides material in turn for the literature of medieval Europe. First volume of the Husain Haddawy translation.
2. Dante, *The Inferno* (ISBN: 0374524521). A poetic journey through the many levels of Hell, *The Inferno* (first part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) presents an encyclopedic vision of medieval European culture. The poet Robert Pinsky chose to translate this work because he believes it to be "the best book ever written about the sadness of evil." Robert Pinsky translation.
3. Lao-Tse, *The Tao Te Ching* (ISBN: 978-0872202320). The central text of Taoist philosophy, attributed to the possibly mythical Lao Tzu, this collection of terse poems exemplifies the deceptively simple ideas that lead to Taoist enlightenment. Translation by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo.
4. D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (ISBN: 0582264758). An oral history, told by the griot Mamadou Kouyate, of the life of a thirteenth-century African king who united the twelve kingdoms of Mali into one of the most powerful empires of Medieval Africa.

CITY OF BOSTON

Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families by J. Anthony Lukas (ISBN: 978-0394746166) is a fantastic but depressing book that looks at the effect of attempts to desegregate Boston's schools in the 1970s. It was not written for high school freshmen, so I recommend starting early and not worrying if you find it difficult: give it a try and get what you can out of it. The recommended sections are chapters 1-4; 8-9; pp. 167-174; chapters 12; 14-17; chapter 18 up to p. 338; chapters 21-23; 25-27; 29. Feel free to read a copy from the library; you'll get a photocopy of any sections we'll ask you to discuss more fully.

SPANISH 2

Students are encouraged (but not required) to read one or both of these books (fun, easy to read, and full of useful information):

1. Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *The Story of Spanish*, about the Spanish language, where it came from, and what influenced/influences it.
2. T.C. Boyle, *Tortilla Curtain*, will be helpful when we discuss immigration, racism, etc.

PART THREE: Identity and Diversity

Commonwealth students and faculty have compiled a list of books that deal with sexual, racial, and social matters important to the whole community. We ask that you choose at least one of these to read over the summer.

FICTION

Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, *Americanah*

“It is not a stretch to say that her finely observed new book, which combines perfectly calibrated social satire and heartfelt emotion, stands with *Invisible Man* and *The Bluest Eye* as a defining work about the experience of being black in America.” – Bookforum

Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*

“Exploring Indian identity, both self and tribal, Alexie's first young adult novel is a semiautobiographical chronicle of Arnold Spirit, aka Junior, a Spokane Indian from Wellpinit, WA. The bright 14-year-old was born with water on the brain, is regularly the target of bullies, and loves to draw. He says, ‘I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats.’ He expects disaster when he transfers from the reservation school to the rich, white school in Reardan, but soon finds himself making friends with both geeky and popular students and starting on the basketball team. Meeting his old classmates on the court, Junior grapples with questions about what constitutes one's community, identity, and tribe. The daily struggles of reservation life and the tragic deaths of the protagonist's grandmother, dog, and older sister would be all but unbearable without the humor and resilience of spirit with which Junior faces the world.” – *School Library Journal*

Noël Alunit, *Letters to Montgomery Clift: A Novel*

“A story about a Filipino boy, Bong Bong Luwad, who is sent to America by his parents to escape the Marcos. Following the Filipino tradition of writing letters to the ghosts of ancestors, Bong Bong Luwad begins to write letters to the ghost of Montgomery Clift, at first asking to be reunited with his family, but as he undergoes the pains of adolescence, sexual discovery, and mental illness, the letters form a journal of self-discovery.” – Publisher description

Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

“In this debut novel, the García sisters—Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía—and their family must flee their home in the Dominican Republic after their father's role in an attempt to overthrow a tyrannical dictator is discovered. They arrive in New York City in 1960 to a life far removed from their existence in the Caribbean. In the wild and wondrous and not always welcoming U.S.A., their parents try to hold on to their old ways, but the girls try find new lives: by forgetting their Spanish, by straightening their hair and wearing fringed bell bottoms. For them, it is at once liberating and excruciating to be caught between the old world and the new. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* sets the sisters free to tell their most intimate stories about how they came to be at home—and not at home—in America.” – Publisher description

Ursula Hegi, *Stones from the River*

Born as a Verg (dwarf) in a small town of Bergdorf, Germany, in 1915, Trudi Montag tells of the isolation, prejudice, compassion, and extraordinary courage of her childhood and youth and her entanglements with the lives of the townspeople. The book provides an insider's view of the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism and their inescapable grip on the souls and minds of her family and community. This is a compelling, surprising, and uplifting book.

Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*

“The rich stew of ethnic differences in America's melting pot provides robust fare in Jen's wickedly and hilariously observant second novel. In chronicling the coming-of-age of a refreshingly un-neurotic Chinese-American teenager, Jen casts an ironic eye on some of the hypocrisies of contemporary society, and her amusing insights illuminate several minority cultures. Mona Chang is in eighth grade in the late 1960s when her family moves to Scarshill, an

affluent, mainly Jewish suburb of New York City. ... Smart, wisecracking Mona soon comes to the conclusion that 'if you want to know how to be a minority, there's nobody better at it than the Jews,' and she approves of Judaism's intellectual latitude and social activism. 'American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish,' Mona says...." – *Publishers Weekly*

Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

"An intimate, closely observed family portrait that effortlessly and discreetly unfolds to disclose a capacious social vision." – *The New York Times*

Rahul Mehta, *No Other World*

"From the author of the prize-winning collection *Quarantine*, an insightful, compelling debut novel set in rural America and India in the 1980s and '90s, part coming-of-age story about a gay Indian American boy, part family saga about an immigrant family's struggles to find a sense of belonging, identity, and hope." – Publisher description

Fran Ross, *Oreo*

"What a rollicking little masterpiece this book is, 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." – *The New York Times*

Benjamin Alire Sáenz, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*

"When Aristotle and Dante meet, in the summer of 1987, they are 15-year-olds existing in "the universe between boys and men." The two are opposites in most ways: Dante is sure of his place in the world, while Ari feels he may never know who he is or what he wants. But both are thoughtful about their feelings and interactions with others, and this title is primarily focused on the back-and-forth in their relationship over the course of a year. Family issues take center stage, as well as issues of Mexican identity, but the heart of the novel is Dante's openness about his homosexuality and Ari's suppression of his. Sáenz (Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood, 2004) writes toward the end of the novel that "to be careful with people and words was a rare and beautiful thing." And that's exactly what Sáenz does—he treats his characters carefully, giving them space and time to find their place in the world, and to find

Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*

"*The Underground Railroad* confirms Colson Whitehead's reputation as one of our most daring and inventive writers. A suspenseful tale of escape and pursuit, it combines elements of fantasy and the counter-factual with an unflinching, painfully truthful depiction of American slavery. Whitehead revisits the grotesque barbarities of our nation's history in the interest of our common stake in freedom and dignity. He has given us an electrifying narrative of the past, profoundly resonant with the present." – National Book Award committee

Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

"Jin Wang starts at a new school where he's the only Chinese-American student. When a boy from Taiwan joins his class, Jin doesn't want to be associated with an FOB like him. Jin just wants to be an all-American boy, because he's in love with an all-American girl. Danny is an all-American boy: great at basketball, popular with the girls. But his obnoxious Chinese cousin Chin-Kee's annual visit is such a disaster that it ruins Danny's reputation at school, leaving him with no choice but to transfer somewhere he can start all over again. The Monkey King has lived for thousands of years and mastered the arts of kung fu and the heavenly disciplines. He's ready to join the ranks of the immortal gods in heaven. But there's no place in heaven for a monkey. Each of these characters cannot help himself alone, but how can they possibly help each other? They're going to have to find a way—if they want fix the disasters their lives have become." – Publisher description

MEMOIR & BIOGRAPHY

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*

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.

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Told in the form of a graphic memoir, “this autobiography by the author of the long-running comic strip, ‘Dykes to Watch Out For’, deals with her childhood with a closeted gay father, who was an English teacher and proprietor of the local funeral parlor.” – *Publishers Weekly*

Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me*

“Cartoonist Ellen Forney explores the relationship between ‘crazy’ and ‘creative’ in this graphic memoir of her bipolar disorder, woven with stories of famous bipolar artists and writers.” – Publisher description

John Lewis, *March: Books 1-3*

“March is a vivid first-hand account of John Lewis' lifelong struggle for civil and human rights, meditating in the modern age on the distance traveled since the days of Jim Crow and segregation. Rooted in Lewis' personal story, it also reflects on the highs and lows of the broader civil rights movement.” – Publisher description

James McBride, *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*

The author set out to write about growing up as a black male in an urban ghetto, with a white mother. He learns much more about her in the process and has some poignant thoughts on color, class and religion.

Jim Ottaviani, *The Imitation Game: Alan Turing Decoded*

“Award-winning duo Jim Ottaviani and artist Leland Purvis present a factually detailed account of Turing's life and groundbreaking research—as an unconventional genius who was arrested, tried, convicted, and punished for being openly gay, and whose innovative work still fuels the computing and communication systems that define our modern world. Computer science buffs, comics fans, and history aficionados will be captivated by this riveting and tragic story of one of the 20th century's most unsung heroes.” – Publisher description
each other.” – *Booklist*

David Sedaris, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*

A collection of humorous personal essays about the narrator's comical and loving family and growing up gay.

Jeannette Walls, *The Glass Castle*

“Walls, who spent years trying to hide her childhood experiences, allows the story to spill out in this remarkable recollection of growing up...she remembers the poverty, hunger, jokes, and bullying she and her siblings endured, and she looks back at her parents: her flighty, self-indulgent mother, a Pollyanna unwilling to assume the responsibilities of parenting, and her father, troubled, brilliant Rex, whose ability to turn his family's downward-spiraling circumstances into adventures allowed his children to excuse his imperfections until they grew old enough to understand what he had done to them—and to himself.” – *Booklist*

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

“Night is one of the masterpieces of Holocaust literature. First published in 1958, it is the autobiographical account of an adolescent boy and his father in Auschwitz. Elie Wiesel writes of their battle for survival and of his battle with God for a way to understand the wanton cruelty he witnesses each day.” – Publisher description

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

An account of how the author, from an early age exposed to a raw and hostile environment, managed not to be destroyed by it. What the Deep South was like for a black person, and how Wright found an integrity of his own in response to it.

Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

The remarkable story of one of the most brilliant and charismatic leaders of the Black Revolution. In part, the development of his philosophy from Black Separatism to a belief that blacks have an integral role to play in the American community.

NON-FICTION

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

“A stunning account of the rebirth of a caste-like system in the United States, one that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to a permanent second-class status—denied the very rights supposedly won in the Civil Rights Movement.” – Publisher description

Ryan Berg, *No House to Call My Home: Love, Family, and Other Transgressions*

“Just as there is a school-to-prison pipeline in this country, so too, this grim report reveals, is there a home-to-homeless paradigm for many young people. Life on the streets is tough. It is tougher still for LGBT—or, as writer, activist, and former counselor Berg would have it, LGBTQ, the last element meaning ‘questioning’—kids, who constitute as much as 40 percent of the population of young homeless people... Berg's portraits are arresting... His fraught encounters with individuals become universal, offering a touch of hope...” – *Kirkus Reviews*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

“In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation’s history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of “race,” a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?” – Publisher description

Barbara Findlen, *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*

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.

Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*

“Surveying political rhetoric and policy, popular literature and scientific theories over four hundred years, Isenberg upends assumptions about America’s supposedly class-free society—where liberty and hard work were meant to ensure real social mobility. Poor whites were central to the rise of the Republican Party in the early nineteenth century, and the Civil War itself was fought over class issues nearly as much as it was fought over slavery. Reconstruction pitted poor white trash against newly freed slaves, which factored in the rise of eugenics—a widely popular movement embraced by Theodore Roosevelt that targeted poor whites for sterilization. These poor were at the heart of New Deal reforms and LBJ’s Great Society; they haunt us in reality TV shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and *Duck Dynasty*. Marginalized as a class, white trash have always been at or near the center of major political debates over the character of the American identity.” – Publisher description

Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*

An "engrossing and relentless intellectual history of prejudice in America...The greatest service Kendi [provides] is the ruthless prosecution of American ideas about race for their tensions, contradictions and unintended consequences." – *The Washington Post*

Susan Kuklin, *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*

“Author and photographer Susan Kuklin met and interviewed six transgender or gender-neutral young adults and used her considerable skills to represent them thoughtfully and respectfully before, during, and after their personal acknowledgment of gender preference. Portraits, family photographs, and candid images grace the pages, augmenting the emotional and physical journey each youth has taken. Each honest discussion and disclosure, whether joyful or heartbreaking, is completely different from the other because of family dynamics, living situations, gender, and the transition these teens make in recognition of their true selves.” – Publisher descriptions

Robert F. Murphy, *The Body Silent: The Different World of the Disabled*

“Murphy was in the prime of his career as an anthropologist when he felt the first symptom of a malady that would ultimately take him on an odyssey stranger than any field trip to the Amazon: a tumor of the spinal cord that progressed slowly and irreversibly into quadriplegia. In this gripping account, Murphy explores society's fears, myths, and misunderstandings about disability, and the damage they inflict. He reports how paralysis—like all disabilities—assaults people's identity, social standing, and ties with others, while at the same time making the love of life burn even more fiercely.” – Publisher description

Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*

“This book transcends categorization as memoir, literary criticism or social history, though it is superb as all three. Literature professor Nafisi returned to her native Iran after a long education abroad, remained there for some 18 years... Woven through her story are the books she has taught along the way, among them works by Nabokov, Fitzgerald, James and Austen. She casts each author in a new light, showing, for instance, how to interpret *The Great Gatsby* against the turbulence of the Iranian revolution.” – *Publishers Weekly*

Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*

“In popular culture, Rosie the Riveter symbolized the thousands of women who worked assembly line jobs during World War II; her image lives on as an iconic poster for women's rights. Shetterly tells a companion story: starting in 1945, about 50 college-educated African American female mathematicians were among the approximately 1,000 women quietly hired by Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory as entry-level “computers”— their job title before the actual machine was invented. The author focuses on four black women who worked alongside engineers—that more prestigious title went to white men—to run tests, produce calculations, and tweak theories, pushing America into the modern aviation age. Their work ethic, smarts, and loyalty also gave them something else: earning power. Proudly securing a place in the middle class for their families, they could afford their own homes and college educations for their children. In exchange, they agreed to fit in—enduring, for example, the daily humiliation of the company's segregated cafeteria...As an insider, Shetterly, whose father was an African American career scientist at Langley, pieces this history together lovingly and carefully, with more than 250 footnotes.” – *School Library Journal*

Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

“Science journalist Skloot makes a remarkable debut with this multilayered story about faith, science, journalism, and grace. It is also a tale of medical wonders and medical arrogance, racism, poverty and the bond that grows, sometimes painfully, between two very different women—Skloot and Deborah Lacks—sharing an obsession to learn about Deborah's mother, Henrietta, and her magical, immortal cells. Henrietta Lacks was a 31-year-old black mother of five in Baltimore when she died of cervical cancer in 1951. Without her knowledge, doctors treating her at Johns Hopkins took tissue samples from her cervix for research. They spawned the first viable, indeed miraculously productive, cell line—known as HeLa. These cells have aided in medical discoveries from the polio vaccine to AIDS treatments. What Skloot so poignantly portrays is the devastating impact Henrietta's death and the eventual importance of her cells had on her husband and children.” – *Publishers Weekly*

PART FOUR: Books Recommended by the Class of 2017

Graduating Seniors share some of their favorite books.

HALIMA BLACKMAN—*Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek

SHOSHANA BOARDMAN—*Mistborn* by Brandon Sanderson

“A hero tried to save the world. He failed. 1,000 years later, the people suffer under a terrible tyranny. Nights are full of mist and ash falls from the sky. One crew of thieves attempts an unthinkable heist, but powerful forces are at play, and whenever they think they know what’s happening they discover that there is always another secret. Each book in the trilogy moves outward, from a single dictator to a divine battle. *Mistborn* is the first of three trilogies set on this world, the first approximating its antiquity, the second its industrial era, and the third in the future. This allows the reader to follow the course of development of religion, culture, language, technology, and even geography on this planet over a period of centuries.”

ORENNA BRAND—*Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese

JAVIER DIAZ—*A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole

NIKA ERINGROS—*Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden

“*Memoirs of a Geisha* is a historical fiction novel about a young girl, Chiyo, who becomes a geisha when her village falls into poverty. The book explores geisha culture in the early 20th century, as well as the American and Japanese stigmas surrounding the profession.”

ELLIE LAABS—*The Elegance of the Hedgehog* by Muriel Barbery

“Through the alternating lenses of a reclusive, middle-aged concierge and a precocious 12-year-old girl, this beautiful book handles, implicitly and delicately, what it means to look at the world with the attitude of a philosopher. It is a book of paradigms, life lessons, needle point philosophies arriving from two different backgrounds who each combat, in their turn, what it means to age and to grow up and what our mind truly adds to a world ultimately swept along by time and by heart with no other anchorage in sight.”

BELLA PUCKER—*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* by Haruki Murakami

ZELDA STEWART—*Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez

“If you’re a fan of magical realism, or don’t know too much about the genre yet, I would highly recommend this novel. In short, it’s an endearing love story spanning fifty years with Márquez’s distinctive, lyrical voice that will transport you to a dreamy land of mysterious cities, strange love affairs, and lots of tea-drinking. The male protagonist makes Romeo Montague look uncommitted in comparison. The language is such that it is very hard to put down, so it’s an ideal novel for long car rides, days on the beach, or just relaxing at home. I read it while on vacation in South America for the full experience, but that’s not necessary ;) If you take Spanish, I dare you to read it in the original language.”

MAYA VENKATRAMAN—*American Gods* by Neil Gaiman

“A darkly funny account of an ex-con’s journey through America’s heartland. Recommended to anyone who enjoys mythology and clever characters.”

PERRI WILSON—*Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino

“This short book is mystical and beautiful and funny, in an odd kind of way. It’s a collection of vignette-like descriptions of metaphorical cities, as described by Marco Polo in the garden of Kublai Kahn. You could approach the cities mindlessly, allowing yourself to be swept up in each’s imagery and language, or read it as a larger puzzle to be pieced together.”

SARAH WU—*The Crossing* by Cormac McCarthy

REID YESSON—*City by City* by Keith Gessen & Stephen Squibb

RANDY ZHOU—*1984* by George Orwell

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

FICTION, POETRY, PLAYS

Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*

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*

"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.

Andrea Barrett, *Ship Fever: Stories*

Some of these stories are set in contemporary America, some in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Russia, rural England, and Canada, but all are linked by their connections with science, particularly the study of evolution, including both experiments and the prodigious collecting of natural specimens. In the long title story, an idealistic young doctor responds to the suffering of Irish famine victims who flee to Canada, only to be interned on Grosse Isle off Quebec because the diseases that they carry threaten the public health. You'll be gripped by the characters and fascinated by the vivid historical detail. Scientists would take a special delight in these stories.

Aimee Bender, *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

On her ninth birthday, Rose Edelstein's discovery that she can taste the emotions in food leads her to the secrets hidden beneath the surface of her seemingly perfect family. A strange, compelling story.

Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*

"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.

Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*

A "swash-buckling thrill of a book" (*Newsweek*). The reader is immersed in the world of 1930s New York and in the Golden Age of comic books, as cousins Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay team up to spin superheroic tales.

John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things*

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*

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.

Chris Duffy, *Above the Dreamless Dead: World War I in Poetry and Comics*

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*

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*.

Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*

This is a mystery story that contains within it an introduction to the major periods, intellectual trends, and thinkers of the European tradition. The story, which begins when a fifteen-year-old girl receives an anonymous note that asks "Who are you?" and "Where does the world come from?" cleverly reflects and plays upon the questions raised in the philosophical sections of the book, and is especially recommended as a review or follow-up to the Greco-Roman beginnings studied in Ancient History.

Brian Hall, *The Saskiad*

Saskia is a well-read and funny twelve-year-old who lives with her organic-farmer mother and various half-siblings on a decaying hippy commune, until she runs off with her long-lost father. Her voice is at once American know-it-all slang and timelessly epic-heroic. (Hence the pun on *The Iliad* in the title.) How life looks and feels to a smart, irreverent and imaginative girl on the brink of adulthood.

Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

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.

Tove Jansson, *The Summer Book*

Six-year-old Sophia spends the summer on an island in the Gulf of Finland with her grandmother, exploring the natural world and discussing "things that matter to young and old alike: life, death, the nature of God and of love."

Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

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*

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.

Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*

Arthur Koestler was a Hungarian Communist who, after breaking with the Party, spent much of the rest of his life trying to explain how it attracted, held on to and destroyed its most loyal members. *Darkness at Noon* is his fictional recreation of an Old Bolshevik whose own loyalty to the Party is used to destroy him: he confesses to crimes he never committed. The definitive study of the Stalinist purges and show trials of the 1930s.

Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*

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.

Yann Martel, *The Life of Pi*

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).

V. S. Naipaul, *Miguel Street*

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.

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*

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*

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

Octavio Paz, *Early Poems 1935-1955*

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!

Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

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*

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!

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Rhys, herself a Creole (in Caribbean usage, a white West Indian), wrote this short, intense novel in outrage at Charlotte Bronte's portrayal of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys re-imagines Bertha (now called by her lovely middle name Antoinette) as a vulnerable and romantic young woman largely shaped by her island's painful history—by what happened to her family, and between black people and white people, as a consequence of slavery. You do not need to have read *Jane Eyre* to enjoy the novel's vivid evocation of an exotic and sensuous culture, as seen alternately through the eyes of those who belong there and those who visit and recoil.

Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

Two sisters, Ruth and Lucille, come of age in a Far West town, raised haphazardly by various relatives. A sometimes painful but often beautiful story of growing up.

Mary Dora Russell, *The Sparrow*

This book combines science fiction with philosophy and religion as it recounts the story of humankind's first, doomed encounter with alien life.

Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

A classic coming of age novel about the hopes and dreams of an impoverished Irish-American family living in turn-of-the-century Brooklyn.

Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*

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.

Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*

Described not as a whodunit but as a *whydunit*, this book starts with a murder—and then spools backwards to reveal why a tight-knit group of friends at an elite Vermont college would kill one of their own.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

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*

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*

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.

MEMOIR & BIOGRAPHY

Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

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.

Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*

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*

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*

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*

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 new "Definitive" edition, which restores material deemed too sensitive for original publication.

Paul Hoffman, *The Man Who Loved Only Numbers*

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.

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

An unsentimental account of growing up poor and Black in Jim Crow-era Mississippi, as well as the author's growing political engagement. Moody was 28 when she wrote this book and was deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*

In 1931, an aged holy man of the Oglala Sioux (cousin to Crazy Horse), in order to "save his Great Vision for men," relates his life story to a white man he feels "has been sent to learn what I know."

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*

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*

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.

NON-FICTION

M.T. Anderson, *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad*

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.

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*

Though the numbers are a bit dated (Ehrenreich did her research in 1998-2000), this remains a highly readable and sadly relevant account of what minimum wage really buys in America.

Stephen J. Gould, *The Panda's Thumb*

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*

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.

Konrad Lorenz, *King Solomon's Ring*

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*

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.

Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*

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.

Michael Pollan. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*

“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” These are the answers Pollen proposes to America’s current dysfunctional relationship to food.

Lawrence S. Ritter, *The Glory of Their Times: The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It*

Ballplayers in the first half-century of the game were a rough-cut and colorful lot. The zestful, outright way they played, lived, and talked in those days comes across with great freshness in this book—a tremendous relief from the crass money-making that now dominates the game and the times we live in.

Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*

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*).

Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*

A short, non-mathematical account of the birth of the universe, by a Nobel Prize-winning physicist.

Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*

Compiling the *Oxford English Dictionary* was a massive undertaking. Its authors first thought writing the dictionary would take ten years, but after five years they had only reached the word “ant.” To track each word’s history, the authors relied on submissions of quotations from contributors around the globe (one of the earliest with the modern spelling of “ant” came in 1533: “The lyttelle ant or emote helpeth up his felowe”). Thousands of these quotations came from one surprising source—an inmate at the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. If you think a book about the dictionary sounds boring, think again!