

Upper School English Department Summer Reading The Choice Book: Faculty and Staff Recommendations

As you think about reading a “choice” book, we encourage you to review the following list. We hope that these recommendations inspire you to read. You might even want to share your reading experience with the teacher or administrator who endorsed the story. Enjoy!

Daniel Block

Philip K. Dick: Four Novels of the 1960s. Even if you do not recognize the name, you may be familiar with the work of Philip K. Dick from Hollywood blockbusters such as *Total Recall* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (1990) and *Minority Report* starring Tom Cruise (2002). Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and *Ubik* represent some of the most astoundingly unconventional and mind-blowingly imaginative science fiction you will ever read. In Philip K. Dick you will encounter stories beyond your wildest dreams.

Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine. Published in 2014, Rankine’s book defies categorization. Part poetry, essay, photography, and art book, Rankine reflects on what the Washington Post calls the “painful double consciousness of black life in America.” Among the book’s many topics include Serena Williams, Trayvon Martin, stop-and-frisk, Zinedine Zidane’s headbutt of Marco Materazzi in the 2006 FIFA World Cup Final, and the inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the United States. As a companion to Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*, Rankine offers a gripping poetic reflection on the crucible of race and racism in America today.

Margie Farrell

For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway. Set in 1937 during the Spanish Civil war, it is the story of Robert Jordan, who joins the International Brigades. It speaks of loyalty, courage, and the loss of youthful ideals.

The Sun Also Rises by Ernest Hemingway. Set in post WWI Europe, *The Sun Also Rises* chronicles Brett and Jake as they travel from Paris to the bullfighting rings of Spain with a rather lost group of expatriates who are always ready to get to the next bar. It exposes a fragmented world - a world of disillusionment.

Julia Finkelstein

The House of Spirits by Isabel Allende. If you watch the TV show, *Jane the Virgin*, you will know that this book is Jane’s favorite. It is one of my favorites, too. Forbidden love. Magical realism. Political upheaval. Class conflict. This epic spans three generations of the Trueba family, and has a little something for everyone. Not to mention a surprise



ending that will make you weep. You will be transported into a world both familiar and unfamiliar, and you will not regret committing to the book, despite the length.

The Time Traveler's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger. Librarian Henry DeTamble has the ability to travel through time, yet lacks control of his power: without warning, he vanishes into either the past or the future. This “gift” (or, perhaps, “burden”) ignites his love affair with Claire Abshire, an artist, but it also strains and complicates their relationship. Written in both Henry and Claire’s perspectives, this book is a must read for lovers of romance. Bring out the tissue box before you embark, and note that the novel is more moving than its movie counterpart.

Brooklyn by Colm Tóibín. In this beautiful coming-of-age story, protagonist Eilis Lacey emigrates from a small town in Ireland to Brooklyn, where she finds success in work and in school, and, of course (as these books go), falls in love. Yet when tragedy strikes back at home, she must choose between two worlds: Ireland and America, Tony and Jim, the past and the future. Read the book and watch the film: the endings are subtly different and are worth discussing!

Christos Galanopoulos

Soul Mountain by Gao Xingjiang. The author is diagnosed with cancer, and a few weeks later finds out that the diagnosis was false. His view of himself and the world are transformed from the experience, and he sets out to explore it by touring China's vast terrains. Along the way, he discovers an Old China that is also being transformed into a New China. The author's narrative use of the second person creates a touching literary ambience, which draws the reader into the evolving story.

Suzanne Gigante

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves, Karen Joy Fowler. College student Rosemary describes the brother and sister who have left her family with a sense of loss and surprising humor. There are a couple of great plot twists along the way, but the plot isn't really the point here. Instead, the novel considers, with grace and with wit, how we define our families and how our families help to define us.

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins. A Victorian novel for people who think they don't like Victorian novels. A fantastic, page-turning mystery that was a sensation in the nineteenth century and remains sensational today.

When Will There Be Good News by Kate Atkinson. A detective story by my favorite contemporary mystery writer. It's complicated and beautiful and completely gripping.

Away by Amy Bloom. A sprawling story about a woman coming to America in the early twentieth century. It's riveting and beautiful and about the limits of what we can change in our lives.



The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins. Is it possible you haven't read this yet? It's a mystery, and not a simple-minded one, about how much we know about the people we love.

Victoria Khiznichenko

The Housekeeper and the Professor by Yoko Ogawa is a story about what it means to live in the present and about the unexpected equations that create family. He is a talented math professor who suffers from short-term memory loss. She is an observant young housekeeper who is hired to care for him. Every morning, as the professor and the housekeeper are re-introduced, a strange yet beautiful relationship develops between them.

Jessica Landis

11/22/63 by Stephen King. The reader has a front row seat to the events surrounding the JFK assassination through the eyes of protagonist Jake Epping, who has traveled back in time in order to try to prevent it. Moving between both real and fictional places, events, and characters, King weaves a suspenseful story that offers a new perspective on this landmark moment in American history.

Special Topics in Calamity Physics by Marisha Pessl. What starts as an engaging story focused on an eccentric group of friends at an elite boarding school quickly turns into an engrossing murder mystery. I can't say anything else without ruining the story.

Ran LaPolla

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius by Dave Eggers remains one of my favorites. This book tells the story of how a young man is propelled into the responsibilities of adulthood through extreme circumstances. He observes this strange world as an outsider, with humor and touching honesty.

Claudia Lydon

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hosseini. I loved it for its story. An unusual friendship/bond forms between two women who are brought together by difficult circumstances. The story is narrated by the women, yet written by a man.

Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell. An interesting take on what makes people successful. Gladwell suggests we should pay attention to an individual's upbringing - the family and cultural environment - rather than simply focus on character traits.

For any escape, I enjoy anything by **Nelson DeMille** or **David Baldacci**. They have some fun spy/espionage stories. Pure entertainment.



Tricia Manganello

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver is the story of Nathan Price, an evangelical minister who takes his wife and four daughters to the Belgian Congo in 1959. Told from the point of view of the Nathan women, it is a tragic and triumphant story of one family's experience in postcolonial Africa.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz. The story of a first-generation Dominican-American living in New Jersey. Told from multiple perspectives, it is like nothing I have ever read and attests to the idea that an individual can only be understood in relation to his familial and national history.

Elizabeth Messinger

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Epic, experimental, disorienting and wildly popular, this politically radical work of magical realism redefined the novel half a century ago. Woven through multi-generational layers of longing, the narrative is a clarion call to realize all that ultimately connects us. Better still, if you can read it in the original Spanish!

On Love and Other Difficulties by Rainer Maria Rilke. A tidy collection of the writer's most compelling poetry and prose, assembled into a wonderfully accessible paperback. Touching on the human struggles of love, work, and being, these essays, letters, and verses exhort and inspire readers to make friends with that which we find most challenging about life.

Breakfast with Buddha by Roland Merullo. Sound lofty? More of a road trip romp. The journey includes plenty of ballast, but more as a surprising by-product of the laugh-out-loud lightness of heart here. It is the incongruousness of the driver (a buttoned-down Manhattanite who needs to go settle his parents' estate in the Midwest) and his passenger (the red-robed Skovordinian guru to his flakey sister) that conjures up the unlikely comedy/epiphany combo.

Ted Parker

The Unbearable Lightness of Being, by Milan Kundera. Amidst the Prague Spring movement of 1968, this historical-novel-meets-philosophical-dissertation juggles such questions as how do mind and body relate and how can we balance freedom and responsibility.

What the Dog Saw, and Other Adventures, by Malcolm Gladwell. This compilation of Gladwell's essays from *The New Yorker* offers Gladwell's perspectives on a wide variety of topics, from dog obedience training to football quarterbacks and to the supermarket ketchup aisle.



Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity by Katherine Boo. Boo adopts novelistic techniques in her meticulously researched nonfiction account of life in a Mumbai slum. A poignant look at the underside of “progress” in the developing world.

Carolyn Patten

Life of Pi by Yann Martel. I didn’t see the movie, but the book is magical and offers a healthy dose of confusion. On one level, it is the story of Pi, who is shipwrecked along with a set of animals (or are they animals?). Lost at sea for 227 days, he finally bumps up against the shores of Mexico. What happens during those 227 days? The story keeps you going as you try to figure out what is real and what is not.

All Our Names by Dinaw Mengestu. This book surprised me and helped me to think about the American experience from a new perspective. Set in the 1970s in Africa and the American mid-west, it is the story of Isaac and Helen, of their past lives and past names, the American status-quo, and the fight to be understood. It is a story of transcendence and the idea that hope and possibility do exist. Beautifully written in vignette form, I read it in three days. Quick, thoughtful, and relevant to today, I highly recommend it.

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller is lyrical. Fuller tells her story of growing up in Rhodesia, of her on-again and off-again relationship with her family, and of a war that tears apart her childhood and her country. Fuller gives a comic, heartfelt, tragic account of a land that I can only imagine. Well worth it.

Animal Dreams by Barbara Kingsolver. I read this novel many years ago and am now revisiting it. I had forgotten what a beautiful job Kingsolver does revealing a young woman’s dreams and fears. Codi, the protagonist, searches for meaning in her life by returning to her broken past to confront her father and herself in this beautifully vignetted story that takes place in the American southwest.

Anything by Jane Austen; there is nothing better than escaping into eighteenth century England.

History of Love by Nicole Krauss is the story of a Polish immigrant, a love story during the Holocaust, and a young girls search for family. It spans multiple perspectives and time periods. Beautifully written.

Merrill Shafer

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri. The story of Gogol Ganguli, a first generation American whose first name is neither Russian nor Indian. And thus, Gogol sets forth upon an immigrant’s journey, striving to find his place in the world as a young, bright architect.



Mark Silence

The Road by Cormac McCarthy:

A father and son journey to survive in post-apocalyptic America. Saddest, best book ever.

All the Pretty Horses by Cormac McCarthy. Two brothers travel to Mexico to work on a horse ranch. Beautiful, simple and poetic.

The Fencing Master by Arturo Perez Reverte. Historical mystery/thriller about an aging master who is enticed by a mysterious woman. Intrigue, betrayal and revenge.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams. The funniest book ever written about the end of the world.

Sacred Hunger by Barry Unsworth. Historical fiction about a family involved in the slave trade in England. Epic and complex but worth the effort.

Morality Play by Barry Unsworth. Set in Medieval England, it is the story of a man who escapes his past by accidentally joining a traveling theatre company and inadvertently solving a murder mystery.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon. The story of two friends in the golden age of comic books.

Carter Beats the Devil by Glen David Gold. A magician performs his greatest trick ever.

Megan Yelton

Unbroken by Lauren Hillenbrand. I really enjoyed *Seabiscuit*, so I was excited when I heard she had written another book, this time about Louie Zamperini, who was a runner in the Olympics and later joined the Army Air Corps when World War II broke out. It was a riveting read about the courage he showed in the face of extreme danger and adversity after his plane went down in the Pacific and he spent time as a POW for the Japanese.

Tom Zoubek

Guns, Germs and Steel by Jared Diamond. An interesting look at disease's role in world history.

