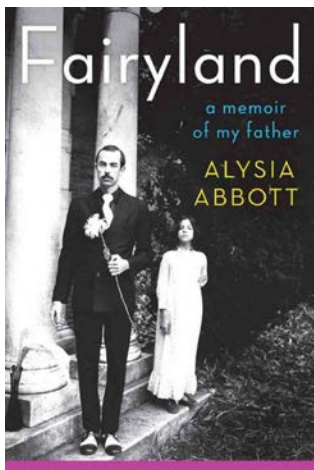


High School and Faculty Suggested Reading List Summer, 2014



Abbott, Alysia. **Fairyland: a Memoir of My Father**. When Alysia Abbott is just two years old, her mother dies. Her father, struggling to meet his own needs as well as his daughter's, moves them to San Francisco, where he can live as an openly gay man in a thriving artistic community. This is one family's story, set against the backdrop of gay life from the poetry of the 1970s through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and beyond. (Hannah Mermelstein)

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. **Americanah**. 📖 The novel opens with Ifemelu getting her hair braided in preparation for a move back to Nigeria after living in the states for thirteen years. As she sits in the hair-braiding chair, we learn about her growing-up in Nigeria (and about her first love, Obinze), how she came to the United States to study, and all the highs and lows of her time here. By far the most interesting aspect of this novel is Ifemelu's observations about race as seen through posts in her widely read blog called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. At times profound, usually perceptive, and occasionally infuriating, this

novel is nothing if not thought-provoking. (Ragan O'Malley)

Alexie, Sherman. **What I've Stolen, What I've Earned**. In what I think is his best collection to date, Alexie re-invents the sonnet, inverts the abecedarly, and consistently delivers poems that make us reconsider who and what we really are. Brilliant, riveting work. (Marty Skoble)

Angelou, Maya. **I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings**. Maya Angelou died last month, which made me think to recommend her searing, compelling memoirs. This first volume begins when 3-year-old Angelou is sent to live with her grandmother in the small town of Stamps, Arkansas. She thrives in the welcoming arms of the African American community there, but when she returns to stay with her mother for a time, she is raped. Angelou describes her struggle to find her voice in the face of sexual abuse, racism, and guilt. I remember reading this book in high school based on the recommendation of a friend who had chosen Angelou as the subject of her American Lit term paper. It made me regret having picked Sinclair Lewis. (Denise Rinaldo)

Atkinson, Kate. **Life After Life**. 📖 In February, 1910, on a snowy night in England, Ursula Todd dies during her own birth. That she comes back to life a page or so later suggests the premise of this bold narrative, which depicts the many lives (and deaths) of the main character in the years leading up to World War II. A brilliant, affecting novel. (Beth Bosworth)

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Atkinson, Kate. ***Not the End of the World***. 📖 A group of loosely connected short stories by one of my favorite writers. Humorous, poignant, and often tinged with fantastical elements, I particularly enjoyed the story of "The Cat Lover," where a woman brings home a stray who eventually grows to be a large tiger. (Nicholas Williams)

Bechdel, Alison. ***The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For***. The most brilliant piece of queer social history I've read. Yes, it's fiction. Yes, it's in comic form. But this collection of Bechdel's comic strip from 1987-2008 includes a cast of brilliant characters who are representative without being stereotypical, and tackles issues of love, work, politics, parenting, and more. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll root for the characters, you'll wish Bechdel were still writing the strip. Check out *Fun Home* too, in graphic memoir or musical form. (Hannah Mermelstein)

Cain, Susan. ***Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking***. 📖 Just like the title suggests, this book is pro-introvert! This is a really interesting read that chronicles the rise of the "extrovert ideal," and reminds us that great leaders, creatives, and scholars don't necessarily need to be loud. (Nicholas Williams)

Cameron, Averil. ***Byzantine Matters***. This exciting and freshly-published little book of essays reframes a number of important scholarly issues regarding the long-surviving Roman Empire at Constantinople. Most fascinating to me is the question of how we understand Byzantine identity through the lens of scholarly "Hellenism," Christian orthodoxy, or modern Greek nationalism. Really a very readable book. (Brian Deimling)

Chakrabarti, Lolita. ***Red Velvet***. This play just finished a run at Saint Ann's Warehouse. It is about race in America, featuring the first great black Shakespearean actor, Ira Aldrich, who appeared on the stage in the mid 1800s. (Nancy Reardon)

Child, Lee. ***Never Go Back***. 📖 Another (#18 in the Jack Reacher series! Give me more!) exciting, funny, and clever adventure story from a king of cerebral, butt-kicking military police. The first is: ***Killing Floor***. 📖 (Mike Roam)

Christie, Agatha. ***The Secret Adversary***. 📖 I really enjoyed reading the first three Miss Marples this year, but *The Secret Adversary* is the first of Christie's novels featuring Tommy and Tuppence, charming "Young Adventurers" brought together in London post WWI. Quite by accident, they find themselves searching for a missing American girl in possession of some important documents handed to her on the sinking Lusitania! (Nicholas Williams)

Cline, Ernest. ***Ready Player One***. 📖 The year is 2044. The economy has collapsed, the environment has gone to hell, the world is not a place you want to be. Sound familiar? It's not. Enter the OASIS, the online virtual reality in *Ready Player One*, where a billionaire has hidden clues to his inheritance for the one worthy of finding it. Teenager Wade and other "gunter" dedicate their lives to finding the fortune before corporations find it and take over the OASIS. This debut novel is brilliantly imaginative, highly original, and loads of fun. Full of 1980s cultural references. If you missed it last year, be sure to pick it up now! (Hannah Mermelstein)

Collins, Billy. ***Horoscopes for the Dead***. 📖 Poems that are subtle and moving while simultaneously straightforward and conversational. (Mike Roam)

Danticat, Edwidge. ***Claire of the Sea Light***. 📖 A small gem, set in a seaside fishing village in Haiti. The author pulls us into the life of the village and in steady, sure narrative steps—almost magical feeling—reveals the world of the characters. Set in the present but seems ancient as a fairy tale. (Carol Miller)

Danticat, Edwidge. ***Claire of the Sea Light***. 📖 Set in Haiti, it is the story of Ville Rose and its inhabitants who are all dealing with loss (Claire disappears in the first chapter) —a very beautiful book written in a poetic prose that I found almost hypnotic. (Marielle Vigourt)

Davis, Lydia. ***The End of the Story***. Her simple sentences constantly surprise, and there is a sense of omniscience in the musical writing that is unsettling. The characters are flawed and remarkable, seemingly trapped in a kind of flat world that they can acknowledge but are hopeless to change. Amazing writing. (Jonathan Elliot)

Diaz, Junot. ***This is How You Lose Her***. 📖 Believable characters and believable dialogue make these stories feel refreshingly uncrafted, slice-of-life, and real. (Liz Fodaski)

Dickens, Charles. ***Great Expectations***. 📖 A classic that deserves many rereads. Pip, Miss Havisham, Estella, Joe the blacksmith, Jaggers the lawyer, the escaped convict Abel Magwitch: fascinating, dark, and even funny characters who all come together with that great Dickens closure. There are two endings—read them both and see which you prefer! I myself am a sucker for a happy ending. (Eva Zasloff)

Dinesen, Isak. ***Out of Africa***. 📖 Escapist treat that I discovered when reading *The Catcher in the Rye* long ago. (Holden Caulfield mentions it is a book he likes.) It's the memoir of a Danish woman (real name Baroness Karen Von Blixen-Finecke) who in 1913 moved to the British colony that we now know as Kenya to run a coffee plantation. When she and her husband split up, she takes over the farm herself. The book is a collection of observations about the land, the people, and the work—but it adds up to an amazing story and multi-dimensional portrait of colonial life. Dinesen's (post-husband) love interest, the elusive Denys Finch Hatton (played in the movie by Robert Redford at his peak), is especially intriguing. (Denise Rinaldo)

Egan, Jennifer. ***The Keep***. 📖 A philosophical novel with many twists and turns. Secrets are locked in the keep of the castle but to penetrate, the characters must descend into their murky pasts. It will keep you guessing. (Richard Mann)

Eggers, David. ***The Circle***. This novel explores a not-too-unlikely, not-too-distant future scenario when a fictional company called The Circle has surpassed, bought or crushed the Facebooks, Googles and Apples of the world to become the single technological entity, more powerful and omniscient than governments. The book follows a new hire's entry into the company as it seeks to advance its agenda of radical transparency; this book is both stimulating and terrifying, but extremely timely. (J.P. Connelly)

Erickson, Steve. ***Zeroville***. Vikar was brought up by fundamentalists. Now he is an eccentric movie buff with images of Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor tattooed on his head. He arrives in Hollywood in 1969 and slowly becomes an auteur, making his unique, eccentric way through the world of sex, drugs, punk rock, drifters, movie makers, thieves and starlets. Vikar remains true to his vision of himself at all times, observing his environment with his love of movies, idiosyncratic judgments and prejudices as the only constants in a chaotic world. (Matthew Bloom)

Ferrante, Elena. ***My Brilliant Friend***. 📖 The first book of a three-part epic that begins in 1950s Naples and tells the story of the fascinating friendship between two young women—Elena and Lila—and the equally fascinating story of their families, teachers, friends and enemies in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. Beautiful story-telling and a rich array of characters that I couldn't resist comparing to people from my old neighborhood. (Rosalie Fisher)

Fontane, Theodor. ***Effi Briest***. 📖 If, like me, you can't get enough of portraits of women in the nineteenth century, this haunting story of Effi Briest, set in 1880s Prussia, is well worth your while. While she is often compared to other well-

known literary heroines of the second half of the century (Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina), her story is quite different and, I found, completely absorbing. I found Fontane's writing wonderfully understated and complex. (Rosalie Fisher)

Galbraith, Robert. ***The Cuckoo's Calling***. 📖 This is a perfect beach read—Galbraith, aka J.K. Rowling, has put together an old-fashioned mystery, set in modern London. Cormoran Strike is a detective with a mysterious path, a famous estranged father, and just one leg. He moves in and out of the glamorous world of modeling in order to solve the question of whether the model Lula Landry actually committed suicide, or whether her death was in fact the work of a killer. This is a fast-paced novel, and Galbraith will keep you guessing until the end. (Stephanie Schragger)

Galbraith, Robert. ***The Cuckoo's Calling***. 📖 For those who like mysteries, this is a fantastic one. Features a perfectly appealing private eye—a one-legged Afghan war vet freshly jilted by his girlfriend and living (if you can call it that) in his office—and a clever plot that involves rock stars, supermodels, and London. Written under the Galbraith pseudonym by J.K. Rowling of *Harry Potter* fame. I hear a sequel, *The Silkworm*, is set for publication later this month. Can't wait! (Denise Rinaldo)

Greenwald, Glenn. ***No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State***. Last year, the existence of a worldwide system of totalitarian surveillance was one of my paranoid conspiracy theories. This year, we can read all about the development, practice, and infrastructure of these programs, along with looking at the snazzy charts the NSA made to celebrate the potential elimination of communications privacy. But with Obama in charge, we can trust him to do the right thing. Right? (Brian Deimling)

Greenwald, Glenn. ***No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State***. An excellent treatise on the Edward Snowden NSA revelations, explaining both how it happened and why Mr. Snowden came to make the decisions that would both change his life and the way we see government surveillance in our society today. It also addresses why personal privacy is still important to all of us. (Britt Whitton)

Hadfield, Chris. ***An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth***. By a guitar playing colonel and International Space Station commander. Brilliantly written, funny, with stories of life in space and astronaut training from the Canadian astronaut who recorded music videos while in space. (Mike Roam)

Halpern, Justin. ***I Suck at Girls***. So funny it almost killed me. You've hereby been warned. (Mike Roam)

Hamed, Mohsin. ***The Reluctant Fundamentalist***. 📖 A compelling tale whose narrator, Chargez, is a Pakistani professor in Lahore. The entire novel takes place over three hours during which he dines with a perhaps dangerous American in a restaurant in a local market. Chargez, a top-of-his-class Princeton graduate, was once a very high flyer in New York finance. As he tells the American his life story—his unrequited love, the impact of 9/11 on a Muslim professional in New York—the reader is fascinated by this compelling and complex character. Suspense builds. (Matthew Bloom)

Hamill, Pete. ***The Christmas Kid: And Other Brooklyn Stories***. Pete Hamill brings to life the rich, often raw, world that surrounds Saint Ann's but to which we are all-too-often oblivious. He is a master storyteller, and these are wonderful tales. (Marty Skoble)

Higashida, Naoki. ***The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism***. (Translated by David Mitchell.) Nonfiction essays: In his own words, an Asperger's spectrum teenager explains why he acts in ways that he knows look weird, and describes wanting to have friends like everybody else. (Mike Roam)

Hill, Reginald. ***The Woodcutter***. 📖 I call this a middlebrow thriller. It's entertaining enough to be a good beach or bedtime read, and literary enough to let you pretend you are doing some work as you work on your tan. *The Woodcutter* is set in gorgeous and remote areas of the UK, with a loveably cantankerous protagonist and enough twists to keep you guessing until the end. (I'd also recommend the audiobook version; the narrator does great Scottish accents.) (Eli Forsythe)

Ishiguro, Kazuo. ***Never Let Me Go***. 📖 I read this book in February and I can't get it out of my head. The story takes place in a world very much like ours, though the element of choice does not exist. It is a first-person narrative that takes us through the pre-determined life of a girl who went to a mysterious special school, and strives to see herself as an individual with an artistic soul. I've said enough already. Beautiful and sad. (Eva Zasloff)

Jansson, Tove. ***The Summer Book***. 📖 This may be the most charming book I've ever read. A novel for adults by the author of the famed Moomintroll comic books, it tells the story of a little girl and her grandmother spending summers on a rugged island off the coast of Finland. It is comprised of a series of short vignettes, which you might think would make it feel fragmented, but instead has the effect of distilling life on the island down to its most essential elements. The result is a kind of storytelling perfection. You will eat it up. (Pam Newton)

Jenks, Andrew L. ***The Cosmonaut Who Couldn't Stop Smiling: The Life and Legend of Yuri Gagarin***. Most of us know Yuri Gagarin as the first man in space, but there's much more to the story. Who was Yuri Gagarin? How was he idolized in the Soviet Union? How much truth was behind his public image and his space missions? The book offers an inside look at Gagarin's life (and that award-winning smile), along with the darkness behind his wildly popular image. I read it in two days! (Kayla Goodson)

Jones, Chris. ***Too Far From Home: A Story of Life and Death in Space***. Fabulous true-life adventure story of astronauts who were stranded in the International Space Station when the space shuttles were grounded after one exploded during re-entry. While the astronauts found ways to stay calm and friendly, at least one of them knew where a shotgun was hidden in the Soyuz capsule, keeping it in mind in case his teammates started to act crazy. (Mike Roam)

Joyce, Rachel. ***The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry***. 📖 A "nowhere man" decides to go somewhere. To his surprise and the reader's delight, his journey becomes a pilgrimage in the truest sense. This is a marvelous, often hilarious, deeply moving book. (Marty Skoble)

Kahneman, Daniel. ***Thinking Fast and Slow***. 📖 Author is a psychologist who got his Nobel Prize in Economics for carefully showing some of the ways that people aren't as rational as economists assumed. In this book he explains his work for a general audience with clear examples and research data. Example: you get a thousand dollar gift and are really happy...until you find out your sister got two thousand. (Mike Roam)

Keret, Etgar. ***The Girl on the Fridge***. Not for the faint of heart, this Israeli-born author's collection includes magic show mishaps and fun with crazy glue. An added bonus, many of the stories are quite short. Special thanks to the Saint Ann's student who recommended it to me. (Will Geiger)

al-Khalili, Jim. ***The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance***. 📖 A lively history of Arabic-language science between the 8th and 13th centuries, when writers in Arabic in Spain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Central Asia were doing the best science in the world. Like inventing algebra. The author, raised in Baghdad, is a professor of physics at Cambridge University—not your usual science writer, but one who knows how to tell a story. My History of Science students liked it very much. (Bill Everdell)

Kushner, Rachel. ***The Flamethrowers***. Set in the 1970s, this bildungsroman adroitly marries a decadent New York art scene with the violent socio-political upheavals of Italy and the Red Brigades. By turns utterly romantic and wildly satiric, it is always entertaining—a real page-turner. (Marty Skoble)

Larkin, Philip. ***High Windows***. After reading *Excellent Women* at Philip Larkin's suggestion, I found myself turning to the man himself. My husband had the *Collected Poems* next to his side of the bed, but after making (trudging?) my way through a bunch, I hungered for the real deal (or what I think of as the real deal) and headed straight for *High Windows*. It's a slim volume, sure, but it contains some of the most perfect poetry ever written. Here (to paraphrase Woody Allen) is God's answer to Job: *Yeah, I do a lot of terrible things. But I can also make this*. The title poem with its "sun-comprehending glass" and its "deep blue air" makes you believe (if just for a moment) that all is not lost for the human race. (Melissa Kantor)

Leon, Donna. ***Death at La Fenice: A Commissario Guido Brunetti Mystery***. Sharp detective story from Italy with poignant family life—in a cheerful aside we are told that the detective's teenage son has discovered that people in power sometimes fight to stay in power! (Mike Roam)

Lerner, Ben. ***Leaving the Atocha Station***. 📖 Experimental poet nauseated by phoniness of experimental poetry only loathes self more for winning prestigious fellowship to write poetry in Spain. Retreats into cozy cloud of theory about how all communication fails, all experience is mirrored, mediated, trapped in language—which in his case is perfectly true since his Spanish is awful. The novel is small, modest, and self-aware—you've met its hero before—but very well made, I think. Recommended for Gen-X MFAs but available to anyone who would like to learn more about our struggles. (Ben Rutter)

Lessing, Doris. ***The Grass is Singing***. 📖 This is Lessing's first novel, written long before she was awarded the Nobel Prize, but I found it particularly haunting. Set in Southern Rhodesia under white rule, it is at once a riveting chronicle of human disintegration, a beautifully understated social critique, and a brilliant depiction of the quiet horror of one woman's struggle against a ruthless fate. (Marielle Vigourt)

Lewis, Matthew "Monk." ***The Monk***. 📖 Matthew Lewis's sensational novel is the perfect beach read—or creepy campfire tale. A grotesquerie of incest, cannibalism, lechery, and all other forms of corruption, *The Monk* illuminates the darkest corners of the author's imagination. Given its provocative nature, I hesitatingly recommend it to only the most virtuous and mature readers. You have been warned! (Alex Levin)

Lipsyte, Sam. ***The Fun Parts***. Brilliant and crazy stories. (Mike Roam)

Manning, Kate. ***My Notorious Life***. Although Axie, Manning's exquisitely fabricated orphan heroine, goes from rags to riches in 19th century New York City, she is no Horatio Alger. A midwife in an era when men "owned" the medical profession, a provider of "female remedies" of various sorts as well as a dispenser of information women were not supposed to have, she runs afoul of Henry Comstock. A stunning look into our own history, this book made me realize how hard it was to get even this far on the road to equality of the sexes. The irony shimmers. (Marty Skoble)

Marx, Harpo and Rowland Barber. ***Harpo Speaks***. It's my bible. My life grows better and better the more I adhere to the principles of joy, goodness, and excellence, embodied by this autobiography. Do yourself a favor and read this book while eating a cookie in a comfy chair. Harpo would've wanted it that way. (Lainie Fefferman)

McCarthy, Cormac. **All the Pretty Horses.** 📖 A classic: Young cowboys in Texas find brutal adventures across the border, with commentary from soft-spoken philosophers and an all-powerful grandmother. Love, horses, knife fights. (Mike Roam)

McDermott, Alice. **Someone.** If you liked Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn*, you will love this book. It's one generation later, and McDermott's Marie is "someone" who sees the world differently, both figuratively and literally. It's all about light and perception. It's also intensely local. A great read. (Marty Skoble)

McFarland, Dennis. **Nostalgia.** 📖 Some books one is given for Christmas languish on the shelf. This one I read. It is the story of a young ballplayer from Brooklyn who enlists in the Union army and after the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864 suffers from what we would today describe as post-traumatic stress. He has lost the ability to speak, does not know his own name, and believes he suffers from actual physical wounds. He finds himself on the ward of a military hospital in Washington D.C., where a certain poet from Brooklyn endeavors to nurse him back to health and protect him from military bureaucrats who view him as nothing more than a deserter. While far from flawless, this is a good and timely read that I'm glad to have pulled off the shelf. (Vince Tompkins)

Mitchell, John Cameron. **Hedwig and the Angry Inch.** (play) You can finally understand all the words to my favorite song, "The Origin of Love." (Nancy Reardon)

Moore, Lorrie. **Bark.** 📖 Moore is a master of the sixteen-page story. Count them! Almost all of them add up, and the middle story that tips the balance at a whopping 40 pages could be edited down. These are smart, funny, and occasionally painful but always interesting. Along with George Saunders, Moore is a brilliant critic of modern life. (Liz Fodaski)

Munro, Alice. **Dear Life.** 📖 I was enchanted by these stories and the lives they sketch, when sometimes a brief moment changes everything, with love and hope and disappointment. There's a magical moment when a narrator tells us about the dance of cars waiting for parking places, which is happening while she is sitting in a car with her love who is telling her (in words we don't hear) that their wedding—scheduled for later in the day—is off. The unheard words and unseen gestures are just hinted at, and the event is made haunting by the narrator's zombie-like state of shock, and unwillingness to tell the words. (Mike Roam)

Naipaul, V. S. **Miguel Street.** 📖 From Trinidad's Nobelist, this short novel uses locals' stories to detail life in Port of Spain. It's funny, and haunting. (Will Geiger)

Nelson, Roger and Melissa. **Sugar Alpha: The Life and Times of Señor Huevos Grandes.** Amazing: I truly couldn't put it down—a fascinating and true aviation action story written while the author (Roger Nelson) had time on his hands because he was in prison. He was a skydiver and drug smuggler (not exactly at the same time) with soul and brains. The story is full of teamwork, competition, jealousy, payoffs, courage, and—believe it or not—sensitivity and grace. His daughter Melissa polished up and published his manuscript. (Mike Roam)

Palacio, R.J. **Wonder.** 📖 This novel for "kids" describes the lives of a group of middle schoolers, from each of their points of view, and how they deal with an array of social and emotional issues. It isn't just for children, though. This page turner's main character has some serious stuff to deal with it. The book will make you truly appreciate the strengths that each person has been given to deal with the challenges life has thrown. My daughter was reading the book and I decided to get a copy for myself to read at the same time; I was glad I did! (Diane Gnagnarelli)

Patchett, Ann. **State of Wonder.** 📖 I loved Patchett's *Bel Canto*, which I found gripping from the outset. *State of Wonder* is a different type of book. At times the darkly interwoven story lines (a doctor must travel to the Amazon to find her reclusive mentor as she deals with her own history), seem to veer off in unwieldy directions. But ultimately, I stuck with it and was rewarded with a complex and engaging novel. (Ellen Friedrichs)

Perlstein, Rick. **Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America.** The single best history of US politics in the 70s and late 60s. Full of anecdote, and explains where the Tea Party came from, as well as Nixon's assault on the Constitution. I lived this history. (Bill Everdell)

Piketty Thomas. **Capital in the Twenty-First Century.** Everyone is talking about this book! Piketty uses statistical surveys and tax records from advanced capitalist countries and looks at the historical reality rather than the ideology of economic growth and distribution. What he has demonstrated is that wealth trickles up and not down, and that instead of a meritocracy of hardworking and innovative entrepreneurs, capitalism tends to produce the kind of antidemocratic hereditary oligarchy that Teddy Roosevelt warned against a century ago. (Brian Deimling)

Pochoda, Ivy. **Visitation Street.** 📖 In this beautiful novel Ivy Pochoda (Saint Ann's '94) "channels" her characters' inner as well as outer beings. She gets their "spirit," literally! Vividly local (set in Red Hook) and completely universal, this is a marvelous, riveting book. (Marty Skoble)

Pochoda, Ivy. **Visitation Street.** 📖 June and Val are two teenage girls who decide, rather recklessly, to take a pink kiddie raft out on the bay in Red Hook one hot summer evening. Only Val returns. There are a host of characters: Jonathan, a Julliard school dropout and Val's music teacher; Cree, a teenager in the wrong place at the wrong time; Fadi, a Lebanese bodega owner; and Ren, a mysterious graffiti artist do-gooder. Dream-like and rich with detail, this is a book to savor. (Ragan O'Malley)

Pym, Barbara. **Excellent Women.** Barbara Pym's quiet novels went unpublished for more than a decade after her early success, but then Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil nominated her as "the most underrated writer of the century," and suddenly she was the comeback kid. An odd appellation to apply to a woman who writes what are arguably some of the quietest novels I've ever read. But quiet doesn't have to mean boring (look at baseball). In *Excellent Women*, Pym describes a season in the life of Mildred Lathbury (described on the back of the book as a "mild-mannered spinster"). Pym eschews the marriage plot and opts instead to have her heroine live a life of her own. The book's satirical tone (think *Lucky Jim*, only on estrogen) and wicked insights into such disparate subjects as anthropology, infidelity and the sex lives of the clergy (oh my) make for darkly hilarious and satisfying reading even without a Mr. Darcy popping the question in the book's final pages. (Melissa Kantor)

Rachman, Tom. **The Imperfectionists.** 📖 I loved the title, and first thought it was a collection of short stories about human foibles. But no, it turns out to be a wonderfully structured novel, both funny and poignant. A great read. (Marielle Vigourt)

Roach, Mary. **Gulp: Adventures on the Alimentary Canal.** If you believe, as Socrates did, that knowledge begins with the self, then this is where you start. We are complex organisms well worth understanding as physical entities. We are food processors, and we act pretty funny about it. Roach ingeniously blends the history of medicine (and quackery), food "science" (aka: marketing), and an ingenious curiosity to give us a beautifully orchestrated "journey" in which we discover how we work (or not). Her footnotes might be the best touch. A science page-turner! (Marty Skoble)

Roam, Dan. **Show and Tell: How Everybody Can Make Extraordinary Presentations.** Quick great book (by my little brother) is a confidence builder about entertaining an audience while providing truth, perspective, and stories. Includes

the adventure of a cosmonaut having some trouble during a space walk—"Moscow, I can't fit back into the airlock."
(Mike Roam)

Rodriguez, Deborah. ***The Little Coffee Shop of Kabul***. This book about American and British ex-patriots in Afghanistan is interesting, readable and fun. A bit fluffy at times, but still, it feels like lucky, unusual access to a strain of daily life in Kabul, Afghanistan. A very nice book to have tucked into your Kindle for summer vacation. (Carol Miller)

Rowell, Rainbow. ***Fangirl***. Cath is leaving home—and her emotionally fragile father—for the first time. Her twin sister Wren, while at the same college, begins to push Cath away and joins a whole new social scene. Cath is a master of fan fiction writing, and, with Wren's help, has made quite a name for herself in the *Simon Snow* (think *Harry Potter*) fandom. In Cath's version, the character who bears a striking resemblance to Harry Potter and the one who may remind you of Draco Malfoy are in love with each other. Cath writes these stories with ease, but in real-life romance, she is less confident. What makes this book stand out is that Cath is so full of integrity and committed to honesty that she always finds a way to express how she feels, even when it is difficult. This is a refreshing, intelligent, funny, and sweet story full of the real emotions of a teenage writer stumbling through first romances, family crises, and the beginnings of adult life. If you like it, check out Rowell's other books, *Eleanor and Park* (YA) and *Attachments* (adult). (Hannah Mermelstein)

Russell, Bertrand. ***The Problems of Philosophy***. 📖 Wonderful introduction to the art and skill of philosophical thinking. Super readable with clear examples: important and helpful. (Mike Roam)

Saunders, George. ***Tenth of December***. 📖 Stories with one startling mood and surprising event after another, including drugs that make you more articulate, cries of parental love, and a Renaissance Faire. I picked it up to nibble and couldn't put it back down—kept reading standing up. Also read *Pastoralia* 📖 and *The Braindead Megaphone* 📖 by Saunders. (Mike Roam)

Semple, Maria. ***Where'd You Go, Bernadette***. Very good fun, super contemporary-feeling. Set in the private school world of Seattle. Told through a series of documents—letters, texts, school letters, etc. Stellar airplane/beach reading. Semple is deft and sometimes smashingly funny with current idiom. A pleasure. "The people mutht be amuthed. They can't always be alearning" as Dickens' sibilant-challenged Mr. Sleary once said. This amuses. (Carol Miller)

Shteyngart, Gary. ***Little Failure***. 📖 A hilarious, touching and insightful memoir of the immigrant experience right here in NYC. As a first generation American, I was howling with laughter at the shared experiences of embarrassing picnic lunches and the trip to the mythical Florida. I also learned so much about the Russian Jewish experience from the perspective of a growing child living in Queens, commuting to a Manhattan high school, and eventually attending a small liberal arts college. Shteyngart's self-effacing humor and his search to find a place in his new American homeland make for a delightful read. (Pumpkin Wentzel)

Shteyngart, Gary. ***Little Failure***. 📖 One of the great things. This is a memoir about moving to America, to Queens, no less, from Soviet Russia in the late seventies. It is, at times, dangerously funny. I could not read it on the subway because of the indecent public laughter problem (although one does have people move away from one, which isn't all bad...something learned while reading *Bridget Jones's Diary* on the train). On the other hand, it is completely heartbreaking. On the other hand, it is a contribution to one's education in immigrant experience. Planning to read again. (Carol Miller)

Sijie, Dai. ***Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress***. (Translated from French by Ina Rilke.) Lovely story of literature, secret books, and romantic aspiration, during tough times for some city boys undergoing re-education in a mountain

village during China's brutal "Cultural Revolution." (Mike Roam)

Simenon, Georges. ***Monsieur Monde Vanishes***. 📖 A successful Parisian businessman, Monsieur Monde leaves his life behind one day. Without premeditation, he takes some money from the bank and walks away. When he arrives at a cheap hotel on the Riviera, he feels more at home living with a prostitute and assorted lowlifes than he did with his haute bourgeois family. Simenon was a prolific writer, capturing scenes and people in all their odd absurdities. All his books tell short succinct stories of the weird and wonderful ways people find of expressing their needs. Try the many Inspector Maigret novels if you want to fall in love with Paris. (Matthew Bloom)

Sloan, Robin. ***Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore***. 📖 Yep, that's right. A 24-hour bookstore. What a lovely idea, huh? As it turns out, Mr. Penumbra's little bookstore houses much more than just books. Inside these pages, you'll discover a world unto itself. Narrator Clay Jannon finds himself employed at this odd little stand, and the adventures unfold from there. If you're a fan of books, computer programming, art, San Francisco, New York, and even immortality, then this book is for you! Easy to read, this book has all the trimmings—adventure, love, and everything else that makes life fun. Enjoy! (Steven Chu)

Spencer-Fleming, Julia. ***In the Bleak Midwinter***. First in a series of mystery novels set in the Adirondacks. Meet Episcopal priest Clare Fergusson, new to Millers Kill, and Police Chief Russ Van Alstyne as they set out to solve the mystery surrounding a newborn left on the steps of the Reverend Clare's new church...not to mention a budding romance between the priest and the married police chief— forbidden love, oh the scandal! I've read four in the series; my mom has read them all. Get on it! (Nicholas Williams)

Stephens, Simon and Mark Haddon. ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time***. A play coming to Broadway in the fall, and a huge hit in London. This will rivet you. (Nancy Reardon)

Strout, Elizabeth. ***The Burgess Boys***. 📖 Strout has put together another quiet tale of a family from Maine. Moving between Park Slope and Maine, Strout examines the wildly disparate lives of three siblings who are held together by a buried family secret. A crisis involving one of their children brings them together and forces them to reexamine their lives. This book is beautifully written and moving—a great summer read! Also read ***Amy and Isabelle*** 📖 and ***Olive Kittridge*** 📖 (Stephanie Schragger)

Tartt, Donna. ***The Secret History*** and ***The Goldfinch***. 📖 ...with perhaps a predilection for the former. Donna Tartt has a way of making her books impossible to put down. The intricate plots, thorough research and careful writing make them mesmerizing. Page turners, both of them. (Marielle Vigourt)

Taylor, Mildred D. ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry***. 📖 I have always loved this beautiful story written from the perspective of the only girl in an African American family with four children. It shed some light on how life was in the south (three generations, I believe) after the war, both for the African American landowners as well as sharecropping families. The author said she created the book based on her own family stories that were shared by her grandmother. This is the summer to read this classic—or perhaps reread it! (Toní John)

Tolstoy, Leo. ***Anna Karenina***. 📖 I loved this book when I was in college and came back to it this spring for the first time in over twenty years. While I'm finding Tolstoy's treatment of Anna infuriating (don't get me started), the beautiful writing, hilarious, moving, descriptions and exquisitely drawn characters keep me reading. If you don't know the story, Anna's a married woman who falls in love with another man. Levin's a good, smart, kind man who falls for an innocent virgin. Guess who gets to live happily ever after? I'm not telling, but let me just say that if you pick it up for the sex, you'll stay with it for the writing. (Melissa Kantor)

Toole, John Kennedy. ***A Confederacy of Dunces***. If you're like me and your friends have been telling you for years to read this book, do it! You'll meet a ragtag and ne'er-do-well cast of characters against the backdrop of New Orleans. Walker Percy described the main character, Ignatius Reilly, as a "slob extraordinary, a mad Oliver Hardy, a fat Don Quixote, a perverse Thomas Aquinas rolled into one." (Jessica Gorman)

Vásquez, Juan Gabriel. ***The Sound of Things Falling***. 📖 (Translated from Spanish by Anne McLean.) One of NPR's 6 Best Books of the Summer, *The Sound of Things Falling* takes readers on a journey through Colombia's recent history and explores the aftermath of the reign of drug lord Pablo Escobar. As Edmund White in his New York Times review said, the novel is "a page turner, but it's also a deep meditation on fate and death. Even in translation, the superb quality of Vásquez's prose is evident, captured in Anne McLean's idiomatic English version. All the novel's characters are well imagined, original and rounded. Bogotá and the Colombian countryside are beautifully if grimly described." (Jesus Martin-Basas)

Vlautin, Willy. ***The Motel Life***. 📖 Two luckless brothers in Nevada live intensely for each other. This noir story of a few weeks in their lives is as minimalist as it is moving. The language and the story are simple and spare but their impact is blunt and powerful. Frank and Jerry Lee are the lost boys of modern times and the truth of these American lives is not pretty. Read it in one day on the beach, appreciate the sun and the water and hopefully be old enough to legally drink. (Matthew Bloom)

Walter, Jess. ***Beautiful Ruins***. 📖 A light book, an easy read, takes you back a number of decades to coastal Italy. Sweet. Romance, a bit of intrigue. The main character owns a small hotel in the Cinque Terre region of Italy, (one of my favorite spots on the planet). His life becomes intertwined with that of some film stars who are making a movie. Not to name drop, but Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton have brief cameos in the book. (Diane Gnagnarelli)

Waters, Sarah. ***The Night Watch***. 📖 I had never heard of this contemporary British author or this book when a friend gave it to me for my birthday, and then it sat neglected on my bookshelf for years. I finally picked it up over spring break and was instantly absorbed. It is a beautifully rendered story about the interlocking lives of several Londoners set against the backdrop of World War II. The story moves backwards in time (from 1947 to 1941) and largely orbits the gay and lesbian communities in London in this era, which is fascinating. This is one that could count as a (so-called) serious novel or a beach read, depending on your mood. Now I want to get my hands on more Sarah Waters! (Pam Newton)

Wecker, Helene. ***The Golem and the Jinni***. 📖 Every immigrant arriving to the tenements of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century was a stranger in a strange land. Only those who had arrived earlier could provide comfort. The titular characters in the spectacular novel are unique immigrants, and their search for meaning, purpose, and even love makes a compelling narrative: exciting, often dangerous, beautifully rendered. (Marty Skoble)

Winchester, Simon. ***The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary***. 📖 This absolutely riveting history of the writing of that civilizational event, The Oxford English Dictionary, is part cultural history. An unusual and fascinating book, but also a surprising one... (Carol Miller)

Wolfe, Tom. ***The Bonfire of the Vanities***. This hilarious and poignant book has never been so relevant as the city becomes more and more aware of its inequalities. You'll laugh out loud and ignore all friends and family. (Jesse Kohn)

Yashima, Taro. ***Crow Boy***. This was written as a children's book, but resonates with all. It is beautiful in spirit and images, and is worth tracking down. The author, Taro Yashima, was a wonderful painter who lived during California in World

War II, but went to Art Student's League in New York in the early part of the 20th Century. He was born in Japan in 1908. (Anna Maria Baeza)

Zafón, Carlos Ruiz. *The Shadow of the Wind / La Sombra del Viento*. 📖 This novel is part one of a series (the 4th book has yet to be released) that takes place in the gothic streets of Barcelona where the main character discovers a world of secrets, murder, love, and tragedy. This series explores the power of books and storytelling in an awesome way. If you can, I highly recommend reading this book (and the ones that follow) in Spanish. (Meli Garber)

Zambra, Alejandro. *Ways of Going Home*. 📖 (Translated from Spanish by Megan McDowell.) Ways of Going Home, Alejandro Zambra's third book to be published in English packs a lot of themes—historical memory, difficulties of love, honesty in literature—into a brief 139-page novel set between two Chilean earthquakes in 1985 and 2010. It's an ambitious project from one of Granta's "Best Young Spanish-Language Novelists." Zambra's style is emotionally affective and incredibly compelling to read. (Jesus Martin-Basas)

Zasloff, Beth and Joshua Steckel. *Hold Fast to Dreams: A College Guidance Counselor, His Students, and the Vision of a Life Beyond Poverty*. 📖 This is a powerful and compelling new book written by my sister and her husband who is a college guidance counselor for low-income students in New York City. It's a work of narrative nonfiction, providing a close-up view of the college admissions process and college itself for ten students. Each story is unique, but together they show how our education system fails to meet its promise as a ladder of opportunity. But *Hold Fast* is also a story of hope; the way the students achieve in the face of poverty and adversity is truly inspiring. Senior Isabel Parkey says this is a must-read for Saint Ann's high school students. (Eva Zasloff)

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