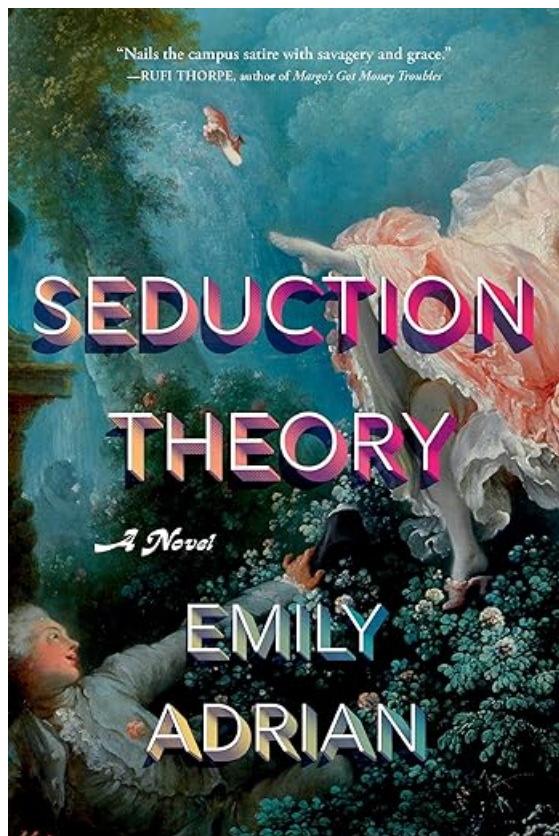


Saint Ann's School

Suggested Summer Reading List for High School, Faculty, and Staff, 2026



Adrian, Emily. ***Seduction Theory***. A Summer Romp for consumers of kale salad and alumni of liberal arts colleges. It's framed as an MFA student's thesis project, only her thesis novel is about... her professors' marriage. If this sounds like it could be really bad, that's what I thought too, but then it was really good. I laughed so much I almost didn't realize how smart it was. (Fiona Warnick)

Arjoon, Terence. ***The Disinherited***. I spent some time this year writing a review of this great new book of poems by a good friend. A big part of the book is creative translations of the French Romantic poet Nerval—Arjoon breathes new life into these delightfully esoteric little verses. (Bahaar Ahsan)

Austin, Emily. ***Is This a Cry for Help?*** This is actually a recommendation for all of Emily Austin's books. I also loved *Interesting Facts About Space* and *Everyone in this Room Will Someday be Dead*. Her books have similar protagonists—queer women going through some amount of mental turmoil as they try to go about their everyday lives. *Is This a Cry for Help?* follows Darcy's return to her job as a public librarian after taking time off for a self-described "mental health crisis." It is also a love letter to public libraries and their essential place in communities—one of my favorite topics! All Emily Austin's stories are incredibly compelling and you feel like you're watching a close friend move

through their life searching and ultimately finding some kind of inner peace. They're quick and funny and deep and lighthearted all at the same time. (Elizabeth Sheridan-Rossi)

Backman, Fredrik. ***Anxious People***. This is a book about a bank robbery, a hostage drama and a few police officers. But not really. It's a beautiful reflection on humanity. It's about love, loss, regret and hope. It's about connection and empathy towards others and ourselves. It's beautifully written and I found myself reading paragraphs over to reflect or aloud to whoever was near. Oh, and it is also funny. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. (Donna Grosman)

Read library books all summer with [Sora: The Saint Ann's Digital Library!](https://soraapp.com/library/saintannssny) Access it at <https://soraapp.com/library/saintannssny>. Many titles on this list are available on the digital library as an **ebook** , **audiobook** , or **both** . See the end of this list for more instructions.

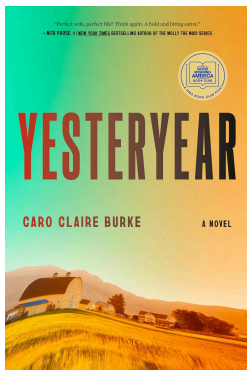
Barnes, Julian. **Departure(s)**. Presented as his final work, this hybrid (novel/memoir) explores memory (unreliable), love (unpredictable), trying to repair the past (everyone's dream), and the desire to write well (difficult). Barnes, of course, writes beautifully. It's a joy to read. (Marty Skoble) 📖 🎧

Baxter, Charles. **Blood Test**. Short but derangedly sweet. Brock, a mild-mannered Midwestern insurance salesman, takes a mysterious medical exam designed to predict one's future and learns he is likely to commit a murder. Then he spirals. Brock's story is darkly funny, increasingly bizarre and ends in a way you won't predict. (Molly Sissors) 📖 🎧

Berman, Marshall. **On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square**. The late great social critic lovingly documents the radically democratic crossroads of the world. (Liam Flaherty)

Bradley, Alan. **Flavia de Luce** series (**Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie**, etc.) I highly recommend the Flavia de Luce series about an 11-year-old amateur chemist with a passion for poisons. She lives in a crumbling castle in the English countryside, and travels around on her trusty bicycle (Gladys) solving mysteries. The audio books are delightful and entrancing—perfect for people like me who get distracted easily when listening. The narrator does a delightful Flavia voice. (Eva Zasloff) 📖 🎧

Brown, Rita Mae. **Rubyfruit Jungle**. Would argue that Molly Bolt is one of the best narrators in American fiction. Her voice! The unapologetic candor! Alive and kicking! Hilarious. (Ronica Bhattacharya) 📖 🎧

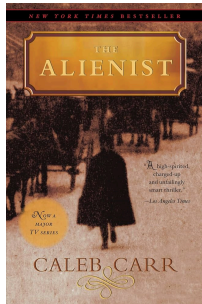


Burke, Caro Claire. **Yesteryear**. This might be one of the most discussed books of the past few months, and for good reason! You might not be able to put it down (I couldn't!) and it may send you down a rabbit hole, researching Ballerina Farm and trad wife merchandise... In terms of a plot—Harvard student-turned trad wife influencer Natalie spends years creating her brand, promoting her idyllic life with her husband and many (many) children out on a ranch, only to wake up one morning... back in the 19th century. Can she survive back in the past? And what, exactly, is going on? People have been fiercely divided about this book, but if you're looking for a compelling read and willing to think about what it means to be a "perfect" wife and mother, and the ways that women have been divided against one another—this will be a great summer read! (Stephanie Schragger) 📖 🎧



Butler, Octavia. **Kindred**. After hearing a bit about *Kindred* from some of the current 10th graders, I finally took the plunge and read a book that had been on my list for too long. I was not expecting such a visceral and complicated roller coaster ride that had me turning the pages, fearing for what would happen to Dana, the protagonist, next. *Kindred* wrestles with the heavy history of enslavement, ancestry, intergenerational trauma, and what continues to live in and among us. If you are willing, I recommend that you take the journey! (Josh Wizman) 📖 🎧



Campbell, Cebo. **Sky Full of Elephants**. This is an amazing book in the genre of science fiction/afro-futurism! Through the eyes of the protagonist, Charlie Brunton, we see what a United States would look like without white people (except a few in a part of Alabama), and how that would allow for African-Americans to take on jobs, careers, & use talents in areas where they were once marginalized. This is a true page turner! (Selah Johnson) 📖



Cárdenas, Mauro Javier. **American Abductions**. This is a tough read. Set in a near future where human rights have been severely degraded in order to deport the undesirable, this book tells the stories of how immigration policy shapes people's relationships to each other. Written in meandering and lyrical run-on sentences, the form challenges you to keep track and make sense of what is going on with the American relationship to immigrants and how government policy ruptures families. (Leda Fisher) 📖





Carr, Caleb. ***The Alienist***. This is an utterly fascinating and enjoyable combination of historical fiction and psychological thriller. Carr, who died (too young) two years ago, was a military historian and native New Yorker, and he doggedly researched this excellent read.



(Liz Fodaski)  

Cather, Willa. ***My Ántonia***. I heard that The West elective was going to read this, but ran out of time. So I'd like to recommend it as a brilliant (and relatively short) novel about life on the frontier in Nebraska near the end of the 19th century. That might sound dry but it's anything but, and the title character is just a wonderful creation. (Michael Donohue)  



Chambers, Becky. ***A Psalm for the Wild-Built***. In a harmonious world where machines long ago developed sentience and took to the wilderness, leaving humans completely behind, Sibling Dex (a tea monk seeking... more) ventures deep into the forest and encounters Mosschap (a curious robot determined to learn, after centuries of separation, what people need). Tiny novel, big questions. Read back-to-back with equally compact sequel *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy*. (B Mann)  



Cheever, John. ***The Wapshot Chronicle***. Get to know a few generations of a kooky New England family as imagined by someone who should know. A little tragic, a little goofy, always carefully observed. You can read this and then watch Christian Petzhold's new *Miroirs No. 3* and consider if you think the similarities are a coincidence or not. (Julia Fields) 



Christensen, Inger. ***The Painted Room***. Inger Christensen is a Danish experimentalist better known for her poetry, but I think this strange little novella is Christensen in top form. It is at once a Renaissance gossip novel, a description of painterly process, a theoretical meditation on family, economy and patronage, and an allegory full of peacocks and dwarves and princes. (Bahaar Ahsan) 

Collins, Suzanne. ***Sunrise on the Reaping***. This is the fifth book in the Hunger Games series. I found myself in a reading slump earlier this year. I wanted a satisfying page turner. Did you ever wonder why Haymitch ended up a drunk? Read this book and your reading slump will be over and all your questions will be answered. (At least about Haymitch.) (Ragan O'Malley)  

Denis, Nelson A. ***War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony***. The first part of the title is a quote, and the story is true (Liam Flaherty) 

Diaz, Hernan. ***Trust***. *Trust* is a brilliantly layered novel that turns the idea of truth into a puzzle, revealing how power and wealth shape the stories people choose to believe. Hernan Diaz crafts the book through multiple conflicting narratives, making it both intellectually engaging and emotionally unsettling in the best way. It blends psychological depth, historical insight, and sharp social commentary. (Verónica Rodríguez-Torres)  

Dunham, Lena. ***Famesick***. She is such a truth teller, even when she's telling you that she didn't know the truth. Just read it! (Marty Skoble)  

Egan, Timothy. ***A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them***. D.C. Stephenson shows up in Indiana and within two years he is the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan. He leads the group out of the shadows, filling the churches, judiciary, local and state government with KKKer's while having his eye on the Presidency of the United States. How does his demise come? Who will stand up to him? This is a compelling and powerful book; profoundly resonant today. (Jackie Henderson)  

El-Kurd, Mohammed. ***Perfect Victims***. A refreshing and bold book on propaganda and the politics of innocence and dehumanization. El-Kurd writes about the constraints on Palestinians that determine if they are deserving of sympathy and what emotions an oppressed people is "allowed" to express. (Leda Fisher) 📖 🎧

Espach, Alison. ***The Wedding People***. I loved this book! It's a totally fun read but surprisingly deep and thoughtful. Phoebe, an adjunct Victorian English Literature professor has given up. She is miserable, her marriage is over, and her cat just died. She decides to treat herself to one last splurge and books a room at a fancy hotel she once dreamed about visiting with her husband. On the elevator to her room, she meets the bride of the wedding party that is occupying every room in the hotel with the exception of Phoebe's. The bride questions her right to be staying at the hotel (and many of her other plans) and the story that unfolds is as hilarious as it is heartwarming. Thank you, Denise, for recommending it last year! (Ragan O'Malley) 📖

Friss, Evan. ***The Bookshop***. To whatever extent we are a literate nation, it's because we read books. The history of books (their making and their reading) is all tied up in how they are sold, which is a surprisingly fascinating story. Friss tells it superbly: meticulously researched yet a pleasure to read. (Marty Skoble) 📖 🎧

Gafari, Haleh Liza. ***Gold***. Elegant translations of Rumi. Gafari's versions allow the heart of each poem to speak rather than forcing the form. It works. She also has a second volume called *Water*. (Marty Skoble) 📖



Garber, Romina. ***The Last Vampire***. I'm (yet again) recommending my sister's latest book because I'll always support her art—but I also genuinely think a lot of people would enjoy it. Described as "*Pride and Prejudice* meets vampires with a dark academia twist," it's perfect for anyone who loves YA gothic romance with deeper themes of identity, belonging, and self discovery. Romi is always praised for her immersive world-building, and this book totally delivers with a mysterious New England boarding school, dark secrets, eerie vibes, and lots of fun literary references for fellow book lovers. It's worth checking out if you like moody suspense and haunting romance. (Meli Garber) 📖 🎧

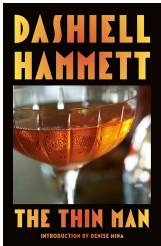
Garner, Helen. ***Children's Bach***. An Australian writer born in 1942, not very well known in the US; Helen Garner's voice seems to be deliberately understated, but it is incredibly powerful. She is able to capture the ambiguity and importance of "insignificant" moments we normally don't pay much attention to, in either life or art. Intentionally, but without strain, without obvious "stylization," she manages to "abstract" experience as she zooms in and pulls out, at the same time; to grip us with writing about what we viscerally experience on a minute-to-minute basis, through honesty, and pure reliance on our senses. (Larissa Tokmakova) 📖

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. You're in the basement rewatching the Finals with your cousin when 2005 Orlando Bloom appears after a long-enchanted journey you didn't completely follow. He's here, he's gorgeous, and he's going to teach you all courtaysye, or how to talk to women. At this moment, your wife descends the carpeted staircase with a bowl of pretzels. She welcomes the guest. He says something witty. You didn't catch it. Her ears go red. This is the plot of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a medieval romance I learned about from I-Huei and fell in love with this fall. If you want to know what luf-talkynge sounded like in 1380, this is the 2500-line poem for you. (Ben Rutter) 📖 🎧

Gombrowicz, Witold. ***Cosmos***. A chaotically constructed novel that employs a unique use repetition and long winding sentences. Addicting to read. (Chuck Roth) 📖

Gordon-Reed, Annette and Peter Eнуf. **"Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination.** A lively and thought-provoking re-assessment of Jefferson that pretty convincingly argues that Jefferson's time in France, away from the nitty-gritty of American life, allowed him to maintain—and even make peace with—his cognitive dissonance regarding slavery. (Michael Donohue) 📖

Greenblatt, Stephen. **Dark Renaissance: The Dangerous Times and Fatal Genius of Shakespeare's Greatest Rival.** Greenblatt tells the story of Christopher Marlowe, who despite dying at 29 had one of the most interesting lives ever. You may have read about it before, but I found Greenblatt's version especially fresh and lively. (Michael Donohue) 🎧



Hammett, Dashiell. **The Thin Man.** This is the quintessential detective novel. Your detectives are Nick and Nora Charles and their dog Asta. As they drink their way through New York City, they solve the mystery of the Thin Man. (Sam Aronson) 📖 🎧

Hanff, Helene. **The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street and Q's Legacy.** Great news, guys—if you read and loved *84, Charing Cross Road*—a perfect collection of twenty years' worth of trans-Atlantic correspondence between American writer Helene Hanff and her favorite London antiquarian bookshop—on the strength of my recommendation last summer, there is a sequel: *The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street*, in which Hanff makes it to Marks & Co. in person. Once you read that, you're ready for *Q's Legacy*, a longer (but still not too long) memoir about how Hanff pursued a self-directed literary education—namely, through the work of the excellently-mustached Arthur Quiller-Couch (rhymes with "pooch"), editor of the Oxford Book of English Verse. Mostly, though, Q, is about Hanff's experience writing and publishing and getting famous from Charing Cross, so it is best for existing fans. These books, all three of them, are so good. Light reading but with some serious emotional heft. Be warned: *Duchess* might make you cry. (Josie Ingall) 📖

Highsmith, Patricia. **The Talented Mr. Ripley.** Saw the movie first but, as usual, the book is MUCH better. At points, you find yourself rooting for a con man. (Sherwyn Smith) 📖

Hoff, Benjamin. **The Tao of Pooh.** I recommend this book because it helps you find peace in a busy life. It talks about the Chinese idea of 'Wu Wei,' which means going with the flow of nature. It is very easy to read and teaches us that being simple is actually a great strength. (Yejing Gu) 🎧

Ishiguro, Kazuo. **Klara and the Sun.** The titular Klara is one of several characters who are 'AFs/Artificial Friends.' In her ego-lessness, Klara is a dedicated artificial—and actual—friend to Josie, a fourteen-year-old who exists in a speculative place/time during which children are 'enhanced.' A novel of great (im)plausibility. Ishiguro imagines worlds wracked by loneliness and illuminated (The Sun!) by love. Recommended by Jack Allen Greenfield '23. (Laura Barnett) 📖 🎧

Ishiguro, Kazuo. **The Unconsoled.** For fans of dream-like, Kafka-esque stories. Ish is a popular author in English classes at Saint Ann's. This is one of his books that you probably won't encounter below an elective, but it's excellent and has many of his signature themes—the dignity (and indignity) of work; parent-child relationships; and landscapes imbued with sadness. (Katherine Biers) 📖 🎧

Ito, Hiromi. **The Thorn Puller.** Was absolutely enchanted by the ways in which Ito weaves in a wealth of literary allusions and the Buddhist deity Jeizo in this genre-defying text. Wry middle-aged narrator moves between her family in California and elderly parents in Japan. Great translation by Jeffrey Angles. (Ronica Bhattacharya) 📖

James, C.L.R. ***Beyond a Boundary***. Politically vehement sports writing from the great historian C.L.R. James—everything he ever wrote is analytically sharp and narratively punchy. This book is about cricket on the one hand (and indeed it contains fairly granular and specific descriptions of the sport), but on the other hand it is about colonialism and race in the West Indies. Both an entertaining summer read and a fitting text for our time which is a lot about empire and sports... (Bahaar Ahsan)

Jemisin, N. K. ***The City We Became***. This book is first and foremost an ode to NYC. Is it an urban fantasy/sci-fi novel? Absolutely! Don't let that dissuade you from giving it a try. Imagine that NYC is born as a living creature on an interdimensional plane. When this happens, six New Yorkers become the avatars of the city, one for the whole city, and one for each borough. The first few chapters can seem a bit slow, but it is worth the time to meet each avatar and understand the social implications of their identities and the powers they gain. I will say the battle scenes are so creative and fun! I couldn't put it down. (Ellie Raab) 📖

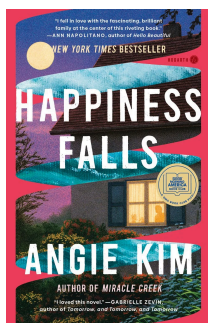
Johnson, Cyrene Jarelle. ***Watchnight***. “Who can survive America?” That is the central question in the long poem at the heart of this powerful collection. Johnson’s attention to rhythm and form subtly supports a vibrant voice with important things to say. (Marty Skoble) 📖

Kidder, Tracy. ***The Soul of a New Machine***. This book filled a niche that may be vanishingly small, but if you too like to spend time at the intersection of technology and history, come on in, the water is warm. Following the year and half development of a mini-computer at Data General in MA's 1970s tech corridor, Kidder's Pulitzer Prize winner is rife with nerdery, interpersonal studies, and glorious imagery of disco-era office work. (Eli Forsythe)

Kang, Han. ***We Do Not Part***. The worlds of nightmares and reality are blurred in this slow-paced novel by Han Kang, a Korean writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2024. Pain, darkness, flooding (real or not), snowstorm (the novel reads as one continuous snowfall, it can kill you, or it can... heal?); shadows created by the flame of a candle, about to die at any minute... This is some of the imagery Han Kang deploys to bring us to the light as we try to understand how we can possibly reconcile the atrocities humans are capable of. And, of course, there is always love, friendship, and art as catalysts, places we can all hope to “land on” to start over from, once again. (Larissa Tokmakova) 📖 🎧

Kawamura, Genki. ***If Cats Disappeared from the World***. Great book! It explores the impact of giving things up to gain other things in life. (Natalie Emery) 📖

Kehlmann, Daniel. ***The Director***. This novel explores the themes of individual vs. society, art vs. politics... The fictional (yet factual) life of the German film director G. W. Pabst during the rise of the Nazi regime in Europe is at the center of it. The novel is heartbreaking at times, and hysterically funny at others; it often felt Nabokovian to me: the ladder/staircase imagery, the cellar, the spider...the smoke and mirrors. Light and shadow. The way we perceive reality is never absolute. (Larissa Tokmakova) 📖

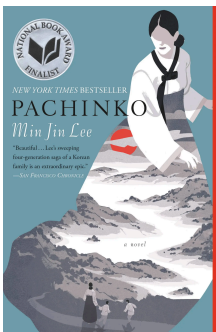


Kim, Angie. ***Happiness Falls***. I kind of feel like this novel has it all. I was initially drawn to it because it's a mystery. There's this tight-knit biracial Korean American family in Virginia—the dad and the teenage son go out for a walk in the neighboring woods. The son returns home running—bloody and alone. What happened to the dad? The son has Angelman syndrome and is nonverbal so he can't explain what happened. There are two other college-aged children home for the summer and a high-powered mom. In the process of unraveling the mystery, you, as a reader, learn so much about Angelman syndrome, become intensely invested in the well-being of this loving family, and start questioning everything you thought you knew about language and communication (or at least I did). Such a great novel. (Ragan O'Malley) 📖 🎧

Lacey, Catherine. ***The Möbius Book***. Structured like a Möbius strip, you can read this book from either side. One side is a memoir about the end of a relationship between two writers and all of what that entails emotionally and materially. The other side is a novella about two friends who are in their own kind of relationship crisis themselves. The themes connect in strange ways and at the end of both parts, you'll probably want to read the whole book again. (Jen En)

Lahiri, Jhumpa. ***Interpreter of Maladies***. Lahiri's debut Pulitzer prizewinning collection of nine stories. The economy and profundity of the writing mirrors the profound relationships between people who briefly intersect: an MIT student from Calcutta boarding at the Cambridge home of a 103-year-old woman; workers at adjacent cubicles; an extramarital liaison; a caretaker and a single mother; a medical translator (the titular 'interpreter') guiding expats through the Sun Temple near the Bay of Bengal. Set largely in India and the Boston area, these memorable characters often live out-of-context. These stories take place just before the ubiquity of the digital age; the yearning for love and home felt reflective of those times. I enjoyed speaking about these stories with Sherwyn Smith, with whom I briefly intersect in Room T105 between bell rings. (Laura Barnett) 📖 🎧

Laxness, Halldor. ***A Parish Chronicle***. I stumbled across a pretty edition of this short book (put out recently by Archipelago Books, a great Brooklyn-based indie press for literature in translation) in a used bookstore, and I bought it and read it and loved it in ways I didn't at all expect to. It is a totally viable bedtime read, for one thing. At first, it's told like a local news story from Mosfell Valley, in Iceland, but it both expands outward and burrows in, and you wind up feeling like you really Get the soul of this place and its people. But do not worry—it's also very funny. As in it made me laugh out loud. And it really made me want to read *Independent People*, the sheep-farming epic that won Laxness the Nobel Prize, which I have been trying to psych myself up to tackle for years. (Maybe it'll happen this summer... anyone want in?) (Josie Ingall) 📖



Lee, Min Jin. ***Pachinko***. I picked up this novel at Shakespeare and Company in Paris on my honeymoon in 2019 but the pandemic had to force my hand before I finally opened it. And then I couldn't. put. it. down. I was reading while walking, reading while eating, asking my husband to drive everywhere so I could sit in the passenger seat and read. I had *Pachinko*-mania. *Pachinko* is a sweeping multigenerational fictional saga following four generations of a Korean immigrant family beginning in 1910 during the Japanese annexation of Korea. Min Jin Lee famously researched this novel for 11 years, and that depth shows. Through her characters, I experienced WWII from an East Asian perspective for the first time—history I'd only ever been taught through a Eurocentric lens. It was revelatory. I'd give it 100 stars if I could. (Neha Jiwrajka) 📖

Lennon, J. Robert. ***Pieces for the Left Hand***. These stories, all hundred of them, are very short, no longer than a page or so, and all set in an Ithaca-like town. Each story opens with the sort of interesting person or event you'd come across in your own neighborhood—quirky neighbors, minor emergencies, local tragedies. These are the sorts of stories you might hear someone tell over dinner, except for the perfect construction and gentle twists. The story I remember best is about a lucid dreamer who injures his hand trying to make sure he wasn't dreaming. (Michael Pershan) 📖

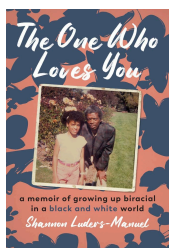
Lerner, Ben. ***Transcription***. A scarily spot-on opening chapter regarding life with, and without, cellphones. *Transcription* is a slim book, exploring the intersection of lives—two 45-year-old males, friends from college; and a 90-year-old professor/artist, the father of one man and the mentor of the other. Each middle-aged man has a young daughter with anxieties of her own. It is a surprising circle: stylish and smart, misleading and satisfying. I'm

rereading it to savor the writing and the nuance. Oh, and I forgot, it's also about memory. Ben Lerner teaches in the MFA writing program at Brooklyn College. (Deborah Dobski) 📖

Lerner, Ben. **Transcription**. I had to pause this very short novel halfway through for reports, but it's really good so far. It seems to be a meditation on the McLuhan-Postman-Ong thesis that the medium is the message. In the 30's, radio made Hitler. In this novel, the narrator drops his phone in the sink. Recommended. (Ben Rutter) 📖

Levi, Allen. **Theo of Golden**. Theo, an elderly gentleman with an artistic eye moves to Golden, a small town in Georgia. He is instantly smitten by the portraits by a local artist displayed on a popular coffee shop wall. He buys them one by one and begins the bestowals. Giving the portraits to their rightful owners, characters are introduced, friendships are formed and lives are changed. This is a beautiful book about connection and generosity. (Donna Grosman) 📖

Lipsyte, Sam. **No One To Come Looking For You**. I really hate "funny" novels that aren't funny, but Sam Lipsyte makes me laugh. This one's about a suburban kid in an artsy punk band whose bass guitar is stolen from his Lower Manhattan apartment. What follows is something sort of like a detective story—but, like, a really, really well-written one with snappy dialogue and hilarious sentences. At least, I find them funny. (Bonus rec: *The Ask* by Lipsyte is also amazing.) (Michael Pershan) 📖 🎧



Luders-Manuel, Shannon. **The One Who Loves You: A Memoir of Growing Up Biracial in a Black and White World**. Shannon's story of growing up biracial and working class in various Northern California towns—with a striving mother who remarries a controlling man and a troubled but encouraging father—is exquisitely, almost painstakingly written. She explores her journey through evangelical Christianity, caretaking for her dying father, a disappointing early marriage in Oregon and various attempts at completing a BA before enrolling at UMASS Amherst for an MA in English and settling in L.A. (Ebony Murphy) 📖 🎧

Mahler, Jonathan. **Gods of New York: Egotists, Idealists, Opportunists, and the Birth of the Modern City, 1986-1990**. A page-turner account of New York in the late 80s, written by a former Saint Ann's parent. The main figures are Ed Koch, Al Sharpton, Rudy Giuliani, and Donald Trump, and Mahler gives gripping accounts of all the terrible events of the period including the racist attack in Howard Beach, the Tawana Brawley case, and the trial of the so-called "Preppy Murderer." (Michael Donohue) 📖 🎧

Malamud, Bernard. **The Magic Barrel**. Searing, soaring. Each of these thirteen stories impressed me, not only as literary fiction, but in how each actually impressed itself... on my gut and (dare I say?) my soul. If Chagall's paintings were stories, it would be these. Winner of the National Book Award for Fiction in 1959. (Laura Barnett) 📖 🎧

Markson, David. **Wittgenstein's Mistress**. The most accessible David Markson to start with. Good for people who can enjoy the telos of a good novel without requiring a narrative. (Chuck Roth) 📖 🎧

Mason, Daniel. **North Woods**. Time: Four centuries. Place: A yellow house on a plot of Western Massachusetts land. The story of the house is told from the perspectives of those who lived and died there. There is a Puritan, a British soldier with a passion for apple orchards, a painter, a clairvoyant, a beetle, a ghost, a familiar figure you might run into on a hiking trail or Stop & Shop. Winter 2026 was long and cold. This book helped bend time. I read it, but also heard the audio book is terrific. (Laura Barnett) 📖

Massie, Robert K. ***Nicholas and Alexandra***. Old-school narrative history of the last royals of Russia, their turbulent but tender marriage, and their eventual cold-blooded murder at the hands of the Bolsheviks. Massie is a terrific storyteller, and it's not surprising that Hollywood adapted the book into an epic drama in 1971. Especially recommended for students just finishing the Russian literature elective. (Michael Donohue) 📖

Mbue, Imbolo. ***Behold the Dreamers***. Whatever your race or class, the American dream can become a nightmare. A beautifully sad novel about the desire for upward mobility, for assimilation, and also, somehow, freedom. (Marty Skoble) 📖

McEwan, Ian. ***What We Can Know***. *What We Can Know* may sound like a vague title at first, but by the time I finished the book, it felt like the perfect way to capture the novel's message. Moving between the lives of a group of Oxford poets, academics, and artisans in 2014, and the historians studying them more than 100 years later, the story explores how the past is interpreted and reconstructed. In the end, the novel leaves the reader wondering: is it ever really possible to know the full truth about the past? (Ellen Friedrichs) 📖 🎧

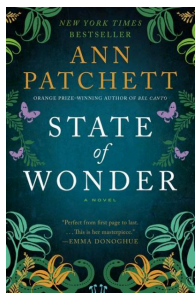
Mizumura, Minae. ***A True Novel*** (Honkaku Shōsetsu). This is a retelling of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* set in Japan. It follows several interrelated families after the war and has all of the romance and sadness of the original while also offering a perspective on late 20th to early 21st century Japanese culture. (Katherine Biers)

Moten, Fred. ***In the Break: The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition***. Theoretical and expansive, connecting the long latitudes of Black Music. (Liam Flaherty)

Nasr, Vali. ***Iran's Grand Strategy: A Political History***. *Iran's Grand Strategy* is an eye-opener at this moment of confusion about the history of this country. As an Iranian, I learned so much I did not know about—the current government's history, the history of militarism, war strategy, and our path to nuclear energy. Vali Nasr's language is clear and concise. (Golnar Adili)

Nguyen, C. Thi. ***The Score***. Nguyen, a philosopher, seems like the best kind of nerd, with deep interests in rock climbing, role-playing, board games, yoga, cooking, yo-yos, and more. He's written widely on the philosophy of games and this book is stuffed with fascinating ideas about how games work and what makes them beautiful. The core tension here is that Nguyen believes that simple scoring systems are at the heart of both games (good) and institutional metrics (oppressive). He ends up exploring a range of topics—agency, the danger of quantitative scores, metrics as a technology of bureaucracy—that I bet will be of interest to anyone involved in a school, especially one without grades. (Michael Pershan) 📖 🎧

Oyamada, Hiroko. ***The Factory***. A surreal novella that engaged me with its spare and skillful characterization in service of themes about life, work, and the existential dread that the two can create when combined. The details of strange days in the strange setting were fantastic. An inspirational resolution (I thought). A pleasantly confusing little escape overall, fun to reread, too. (Ronica Bhattacharya) 📖



Ron Padgett. ***Pink Dust***. Poetic gems. These poems will nourish your spirit. (Marty Skoble) 📖

Patchett, Ann. ***State of Wonder***. This is not a new book (it was published in 2011) but it was one of my favorites of the year. The story follows Marina Singh, a scientist traveling to the Amazon in an attempt to get to the bottom of the mysterious death of her colleague. It's a fantastic story with so many layers. I really enjoyed it. (Elizabeth Sheridan-Rossi) 📖 🎧

Patterson, Orlando. *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament*. Patterson takes a deep look at his native land, with no easy answers given. (Liam Flaherty) 📖

Peters, Torrey. *Stag Dance*. I am not usually a short story fan but these were so engaging and unique. Set in the past, present, and future, Peters writes about queerness and gender with so much complexity and humor. (Leda Fisher) 📖 🎧

Powers, J.F. *The Stories of J.F. Powers*. Beautiful and precise renderings of many iterations of American sadness. (Liam Flaherty) 📖



Pym, Barbara. *Excellent Women*. Finally getting to read Barbara Pym after many years of hoping to, I was not disappointed. We have an early 1950s London setting; a cautious, likeable, and slightly squeamish narrator, Mildred, still unmarried in her thirties; and a few less prudent characters whose orbit she joins. It's very funny, and it's a good portrait of the time and place. If you like it, move on to *The Sweet Dove Died*, in which Pym does the 1970s. (Michael Donohue) 📖 🎧

Rix, Harriet. *The Genius of Trees: How They Mastered the Elements and Shaped the World*. A wonderful book that, despite being scientifically detailed, is eminently readable. Rix explains the ways in which trees both respond to the environment around them and shape it. While I read it during the winter, I imagine reading it during the summer when you can hear and see the ways that animals, bugs, and humans benefit from the work of trees could be revelatory. (Aidan Thomas) 📖

Roy, Arundhati. *Mother Mary Comes to Me*. I loved listening to this book as it is about a very complicated mother, and the life of an extraordinary person, Roy herself, in an old culture in the contemporary age. Her reading is phenomenal, she laughs and she cries! (Golnar Adili) 📖

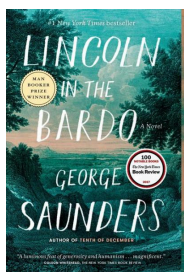
Roy, Arundhati. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. As you can see, I'm obsessed. This novel was like a moving painting to me, thick and rich, and about marginal people who occupy a graveyard, the liminal zone between them and us, and taking place in Kashmir, another contested zone where the occupied and the occupier are both oppressed. (Golnar Adili) 📖 🎧



Rudnick, Paul. *What Is Wrong with You?* Apparently, a lot, if you're one of the many slightly-to-incredibly absurd characters in this very fun novel. An eccentric tech billionaire is getting married on a private island and the highly-anticipated wedding draws quite a crowd (sound familiar?). A former TV superhero, two dentists who might be stalking each other, a power-hungry sensitivity associate at a publishing company.... just a few of the highlights in this comedy of errors that had me genuinely laughing. At its core, though, it's a story about love (lost, found, unrequited, reunited) and is surprisingly touching. (Molly Sissors) 📖



Ruhl, Sarah. *Becky Nurse of Salem (or After The Witches: A Comedy about Tragedy)*. "I'm Becky Nurse, and I'll be your tour guide," the play opens. We are at The Salem Witch Museum. Becky is the great-great-great-great granddaughter of Rebecca Nurse who was infamously executed for witchcraft. Hovering brilliantly between post-election 2016 and an imagined 1692, the play covers much intellectual and political ground: feminism, *The Crucible*, the opioid crisis, wayfinding, narrativizing our collective past. In 2022, I saw the Lincoln Center production. I re-read this winter in preparation for a trip to Salem and Boston, part of a self-study to (try to) comprehend how the USA got to the place it is today. Read it aloud! (Laura Barnett) 📖


Sanbonmatsu, John. *The Omnivore's Deception: What We Get Wrong about Meat, Animals, and Ourselves*. Yes, in case you're wondering, the title is a response to a very successful book from the aughts, but this is a very



different book! *The Omnivore's Deception* is one of the most important books I've ever read. It's beautifully written by a philosophy professor and I found it hard to put down. I highly recommend it for everyone but I think it's especially relevant for anyone who answers yes to any of the following questions: Are you opposed to fascism? Do you care about people and the planet? Do you think animal abuse is wrong? Are you open to the possibility that you might be misinformed about animal agriculture? If anyone wants to borrow my copy, let me know! It's also available at the Brooklyn Public Library. I checked it out from the library to start but then I had Books Are Magic order it for me when I realized I wanted to have it forever. You can read some essays by the author at johnsanbonmatsu.com. (Ginna Triplett)





Saunders, George. *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Life and its brutal reality, pain and grief, regret and guilt, our memories, defeats, hopes. All of this is intertwined in the story told in the span of one night in 1862 at the site of Lincoln's 11-year-old son's burial site through the voices of characters both real and fictional. The unorthodox structure of this novel gives you permission to take the reins and concoct your own take on the narrative. And, of course, there are ghosts! Some of its images are still coming back powerfully to my mind in places and moments I don't expect them to. (Larissa Tokmakova)  


Shattuck, Ben. *The History of Sound*. Twelve interwoven stories set in New England: contemporary Nantucket; a 17th century utopian community in Massachusetts; a 19th century New Hampshire forest; the Harvard Peabody Museum; a Vermont border town; Bowdoin, Maine. For anyone who has traveled in these states. Or is interested in music. Or ghosts. Strong characters, perspectives and stylistic shifts (one chapter a diary entry, one a transcript from Radiolab). Melancholy and resonant. Thank you, Emily Eagen, for recommending the film of the same title which led to this book! (Laura Barnett)  



See, Lisa. *The Island of the Sea Women*. Historical novel about the women sea divers of Jeju Island in Korea. The novel begins in the 1930's and follows two close friends. After hundreds of dives and years of friendship, forces outside their control push their relationship to the breaking point. Circumstances and relationships are what this book is about. (Jackie Henderson) 



Shuāng-zǐ, Yáng. *Taiwan Travelogue*. Told in chapters dedicated to different dishes, this book tells the story of a Japanese writer in the 1930s exploring Taiwan with a Taiwanese translator. I loved reading about their intense and delicate relationship as they shifted between employer/employee, coworkers, friends, and colonized subject and colonizer. Winner of the international Booker prize! (Leda Fisher)  

Tartt, Donna. *The Secret History*. I read this riveting, atmospheric thriller just after college, where I, like the book's protagonists, was under the influence of some very charismatic professors. I couldn't put it down. You might have extra fun with it if you're an aspiring classicist, but that's not a prerequisite for enjoying this very fun and absorbing book! (Liz Fodaski) 


Twilley, Nicola. *Frostbite: How Refrigeration Changed our Food, our Planet, and Ourselves*. Fascinating and eye-opening journey through the "cold chain" that connects farm to table. How are we able to have a vast cornucopia of safe food through the year? Here is your answer. Super engaging and interesting. (Jackie Henderson) 

Vuong, Ocean. *The Emperor of Gladness*. Another take on "who can survive America." No one does sadness more beautifully. (Marty Skoble) 



Walter, Jess. ***The Cold Millions***. The faculty book club introduced me to Jess Walter through *So Far Gone*. I loved the humor of his satirical writing, so I picked up *The Cold Millions*. Set in Spokane, Washington in 1909 during the labor struggles, this novel traces the choices of two brothers, Rye and Gig. There is a great fictionalized portrait of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (real life labor leader, communist party member, and one of the founders of the ACLU), and many political and philosophical arguments that feel very relevant today. Love, betrayal, corruption... what more could you want? (Kristin Fiori)  



Walter, Jess. ***So Far Gone***. On Thanksgiving of 2016—weeks after the presidential election—ex-journalist Rhys Kinnick hauls off and punches his daughter’s husband; he just can’t listen to the guy spout his dumb conspiracy theories for another second. He then hits the road, trashes his cell phone, and moves into a crumbling cabin in remote Eastern Washington state, where he lives like a hermit. Seven years later his two grandchildren (now 13 and 9) show up at his door. Their mother has disappeared and their father may have joined a right-wing Christian militia. Violent and heartwarming. Also hilarious. My favorite book of last summer. (Denise Rinaldo)  



Wang, Sarah. ***New Skin***. This novel centers on a Chinese-American woman in her twenties who returns home to an unrecognizable parent after years of being a spectator to her mother's obsession with cosmetic surgeries. When her mother decides to go on a reality television show about botched surgeries to win a reconstructive surgery that will fix it all, their relationship shifts in surprising ways. (Jen En) 

White, E.G. ***Here is New York***. Now published in book form, this 1949 portrait of the city was originally a *Holiday* magazine article, which the author wrote as a bit of a favor to his stepson, Roger Angell, then an editor at the magazine. (Don't skip Angell's introduction.) White was already nostalgic about the city when he returned from Maine during a New York heatwave to report the piece. It's said by many to be the best thing ever written about New

York. Just read it; description lessens it. I was inspired to re-read the book after devouring *The Gods of New York* by Jonathan Mahler (which I read after seeing Mike Donohue's recommendation of it for this list), about NYC in the very turbulent 1980s. It's fascinating and moving to me, a "settler"—one of three White-defined New York City types—to see how the energy of the city that White captured in 1949 lived on through the 80s and survives, for good and ill, to this day. (Not to mention the utter perfectness of his every sentence.) (Denise Rinaldo)  

Williams, John. ***Stoner***. Novel that follows the life of a man who was born poor and becomes an English professor. He experiences a life of academic and personal disappointments, yet finds meaning in literature and his work. A very moving book about the quiet dignity of an ordinary life. (Jackie Henderson)  

Ypi, Lea. ***Free: A Child and A Country at the End of History***. It's an easy read and thought provoking! (Yael Magnes) 

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