

Reading Together Book Suggestions for 2006

Titles are grouped by genre and listed in this order:

- (1) memoir
- (2) fiction
- (3) non-fiction
- (4) authors with several works
- (5) group of books on a single topic
- (6) suggested titles that do not meet the Reading Together criteria as listed below:

- treatment of universal social issues that are relevant to our diverse community;
- quality writing which fosters an appreciation of literature;
- availability of the title in alternative formats such as: large print, audio, foreign language translation, online, and film/play versions;
- reading level, vocabulary, and subject matter appropriate for and appealing to adults as well as high school and college students.

Memoir

An Hour Before Daylight : Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood, Jimmy Carter (2001)

The former president tells the story of his rural boyhood, and paints a sensitive portrait of America before the civil rights movement. Carter describes the joys of walking barefoot ("this habit alone helped to create a sense of intimacy with the earth"), taking naps with his father on the porch after lunch, and hunting with slingshots and boomerangs with his playmates--all of whom were black. Carter was in constant contact with his black neighbors; he worked alongside them, ate in their homes, and often spent the night in the home of Rachel and Jack Clark, "on a pallet on the floor stuffed with corn shucks," when his parents were away. However, this intimacy was possible only on the farm. When young Jimmy and his best friend, A.D. Davis, went to town to see a movie, they waited for the train together, paid their 15 cents, and then separated into "white" and "colored" compartments. Once in Americus, they walked to the theater together, but separated again, with Jimmy buying a seat on the main floor or first balcony at the front door, and A.D. going around to the back door to buy his seat up in the upper balcony. After the movie, they returned home on another segregated train. "I don't remember ever questioning the mandatory racial separation, which we accepted like breathing or waking up in Archery every morning."

Available in: large print, audio CD, audio cassette, digital book

Community read in: Huntsville-Madison, AL (2004), Columbus, GA (2003), Flint, MI (2003)

Angela's Ashes: A Memoir, Frank McCourt (1996)

"Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood," writes Frank McCourt in *Angela's Ashes*. "Worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." Welcome, then, to the pinnacle of the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. Born in Brooklyn in 1930 to recent Irish immigrants Malachy and Angela McCourt, Frank grew up in Limerick after his parents returned to Ireland because of poor prospects in America. It turns out that prospects weren't so great back in the old country either--not with Malachy for a father. A chronically unemployed and nearly unemployable alcoholic, he appears to be the model on which many of our more insulting clichés about drunken Irish manhood are based. Mix in abject poverty and frequent death and illness and you have all the makings of a truly difficult early life. Fortunately, in McCourt's able hands it also has all the makings for a compelling memoir.

Available in large print, audio cassette, film

Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years, Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany, with Amy Hill Hearth (1993)

In this remarkable and charming oral history, two lively and perspicacious sisters, aged 101 and 103, reflect on their rich family life and their careers as pioneering African American professionals. Brief chapters capture Sadie's warm voice ("Now, I was a 'mama's child' ") and Bessie's fiestiness ("I'm alive out of sheer determination, honey!"). The unmarried sisters, who live together, tell of growing up on the campus of a black college in Raleigh, N.C., where their father was an Episcopal priest, and of being too independent for the men who courted them. With parental influence far stronger than that of Jim Crow, they joined professions--Sadie teaching domestic science, Bessie practicing dentistry. In 1920s Harlem they mixed with black activists and later were among the first to integrate the New York City suburb of Mount Vernon. While their account of the last 40 years is sketchy, their observations about everything from black identity to their yoga exercises make them worthwhile company. Freelancer Hearth, who wrote an initial story on the sisters in the New York Times in 1991, has deftly shaped and contextualized their reflections.

Available in large print, audio cassette, play, and TV film

Community read in: District of Columbia (2002), Lawrence, KS (2000)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou (1969)

In this first of five volumes of autobiography, poet Maya Angelou recounts a youth filled with disappointment, frustration, tragedy, and finally hard-won independence. Sent at a young age to live with her grandmother in Arkansas, Angelou learned a great deal from this exceptional woman and the tightly knit black community there. These very lessons carried her throughout the hardships she endured later in life, including a tragic occurrence while visiting her mother in St. Louis and her formative years spent in California--where an unwanted pregnancy changed her life forever.

Available in audio cassette, audio CD, film

Community read in: Forsyth County, NC (2004)

Travels with Charley: In Search of America, John Steinbeck (1962)

In September 1960, John Steinbeck and his poodle, Charley, embarked on a journey across America. This chronicle of their trip reflects on the American character, racial hostility, loneliness, and the unexpected kindness of strangers that are a very real part of our national identity. It rings true today as much as when the book was written.

Available in large print, audio CD

Community read in: North Reading, MA (2003), Virginia, MN (2005), Nashua, NH (2004), Long Island, NY (2005)

Fiction:

Atonement, Ian McEwan (2001)

The major events of this Booker Prize winner's novel occur one day in the summer of 1935. Briony Tallis, a precocious 13-year-old with an overactive imagination, witnesses an incident between Cecilia, her older sister, and Robbie Turner, son of the Tallis family's charwoman. Already startled by the sexual overtones of what she has seen, she is completely shocked that evening when she surreptitiously reads a suggestive note Robbie has mistakenly sent Cecilia. It then becomes easy for her to believe that the shadowy figure who assaults her cousin Lola late that night is Robbie. Briony's testimony sends Robbie to prison and, through an early release, into the army on the eve of World War II. Gradually understanding what she has done, Briony seeks atonement first through a career in nursing and then through writing, with the novel itself framed as a literary confession it has taken her a lifetime to write. Moving deftly between styles, this is a compelling exploration of guilt and the struggle for forgiveness.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital book

The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger (1951)

Since his debut in 1951 as *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield has been synonymous with "cynical adolescent." Holden narrates the story of a couple of days in his sixteen-year-old life, just after he's been expelled from prep school, in a slang that sounds edgy even today and keeps this novel on banned book lists. It begins, "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them." His constant wry observations about what he encounters, from teachers to phonies (the two of course are not mutually exclusive) capture the essence of the eternal teenage experience of alienation.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, digital book

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Mark Haddon (2003)

Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, Christopher is autistic. Everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning for him. Routine, order and predictability shelter him from the messy, wider world. Then, at fifteen, Christopher's carefully constructed world falls apart when he finds his neighbor's dog, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork, and he is initially blamed for the killing. Christopher decides that he will track down the real killer and turns to his favorite fictional character, the impeccably logical Sherlock Holmes, for inspiration. But the investigation leads him down some unexpected paths and ultimately brings him face to face with the dissolution of his parents' marriage. As he tries to deal with the crisis within his own family, we are drawn into the workings of Christopher's mind. And herein lies the key to the brilliance of Mark Haddon's choice of narrator: The most wrenching of emotional moments are chronicled by a boy who cannot fathom emotion. The effect is dazzling, making for a novel that is deeply funny, poignant, and fascinating in its portrayal of a person whose curse and blessing is a mind that perceives the world literally.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Santa Barbara, CA (2004), North Attleborough, MA (2005), North Reading, MA (2005), Central Valley, NY (2005), West Boylston, MA (2005), Wake County, NC (2005), Salt Lake City, UT (2005)

The Education of Little Tree, Forrest Carter (1976)

This story has entranced readers of all ages since it was first published twenty-five years ago. *The Education of Little Tree* tells of a boy orphaned very young, who is adopted by his Cherokee grandmother and half-Cherokee grandfather in the Appalachian mountains of Tennessee during the Great Depression. "Little Tree" as his grandparents call him is shown how to hunt and survive in the mountains, to respect nature in the Cherokee Way, taking only what is needed, leaving the rest for nature to run its course. Little Tree also learns the often callous ways of the white businessmen and tax collectors, and how Granpa, in hilarious vignettes, scares them away from his illegal attempts to enter the cash economy. Granma teaches Little Tree the joys of reading and education. But when Little Tree is taken away for schooling by whites, we learn of the cruelty meted out to Indian children in an attempt to assimilate them and of Little Tree's perception of the Anglo world and how it differs from the Cherokee Way. A classic of its era, and an enduring book for all ages, *The Education of Little Tree* has now been completely re-designed for this twenty-fifth anniversary edition.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, digital

A Fine Balance, Rohinton Mistry (1996)

In mid-1970s urban India—a chaos of wretchedness on the streets and slogans in the offices—a chain of circumstances tosses four varied individuals together in one small flat. Stubbornly independent Dina, widowed early, takes in Maneck, the college-aged son of a more prosperous childhood friend and, more reluctantly, Ishvar and Om, uncle and nephew tailors fleeing low-caste origins and astonishing hardships. The reader first learns the characters' separate, compelling histories of brief joys and abiding sorrows, then watches as barriers of class, suspicion, and politeness are gradually dissolved. Even more affecting than Mistry's depictions of squalor and grotesque injustice is his study of friendships emerging unexpectedly, naturally. The novel's coda is cruel and heart-wrenching but deeply honest.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, digital

The Five People You Meet in Heaven, Mitch Albom (2003)

Part melodrama and part parable, it weaves together three stories, all told about the same man: 83-year-old Eddie, the head maintenance person at Ruby Point Amusement Park. As the novel opens, readers are told that Eddie, unsuspecting, is only minutes away from death as he goes about his typical business at the park. Albom then traces Eddie's world through his tragic final moments, his funeral, and the ensuing days as friends clean out his apartment and adjust to life without him. In alternating sections, Albom flashes back to Eddie's birthdays, telling his life story as a kind of progress report over candles and cake each year. And in the third and last thread of the novel, Albom follows Eddie into heaven where the maintenance man sequentially encounters five pivotal figures from his life (a la *A Christmas Carol*). Each person has been waiting for him in heaven, and, as Albom reveals, each life (and death) was woven into Eddie's own in ways he never suspected. Each soul has a story to tell, a secret to reveal, and a lesson to share. Through them Eddie understands the meaning of his own life even as his arrival brings closure to theirs.

Available in: large print, Spanish translation, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Pico Rivera, CA (2004), Clayton, OH (2004)

The Giver, Lois Lowry (1993)

In a world with no poverty, no crime, no sickness and no unemployment, and where every family is happy, 12-year-old Jonas is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memories. Under the tutelage of the Elders and an old man known as the Giver, he discovers the disturbing truth about his utopian world and struggles against the weight of its hypocrisy. With echoes of *Brave New World*, in this 1994 Newberry medal winner, Lowry examines the idea that people might freely choose to give up their humanity in order to create a more stable society. Gradually Jonas learns just how costly this ordered and pain-free society can be, and boldly decides he cannot pay the price.

Available in: large type, Braille, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Middletown, CT (2003), Valparaiso, IN (2003), Southwest MI (2003), Rochester, MN (2005), Central Valley, NY (2002), La Crosse, WI (2002), Waukesha, WI (2002)

The Haj, Leon Uris (1984)

Leon Uris returns to the land of his acclaimed best-seller *Exodus* for an epic story of hate and love, vengeance and forgiveness and forgiveness. The Middle East is the powerful setting for this sweeping tale of a land where revenge is sacred and hatred noble. Where an Arab ruler tries to save his people from destruction but cannot save them from themselves. When violence spreads like a plague across the lands of Palestine--this is the time of *The Haj*.

Available in: large type, Spanish translation, audio cassette

The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros (1991)

Simultaneously heartbreaking and deeply joyous, this is the coming-of-age story of Esperanza Cordero, whose Chicago neighborhood is one of harsh realities and harsh beauty. While Esperanza's friends, family, and neighbors wander in and out of her stories, through them all Esperanza sees, learns, loves and dreams of the house she will someday have, her own house, not on Mango Street. Acclaimed by critics, beloved by children, their parents and grandparents, taught everywhere from inner-city grade schools to universities across the country, this is a portrait of U.S. Latino life.

Available in: Spanish translation, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Arkansas (2004), Los Angeles, CA (2003), Pico Rivera, CA (2002), Multnomah County, OR (2005), Milwaukee, WI (2003)

The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini (2003)

In his debut novel, Hosseini manages to provide an educational and eye-opening account of a country's political turmoil--in this case, Afghanistan--while also developing characters whose heartbreaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers long after the last page has been turned over.

The Kite Runner follows the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, the boys are inseparable. They spend idyllic days running kites and telling stories of mystical places and powerful warriors until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted. Even after Amir and his father flee to America, Amir remains haunted by his cowardly actions and disloyalty. In part, it is these demons and the sometimes impossible quest for forgiveness that bring him back to his war-torn native land after it comes under Taliban rule. ("...I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded, not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night.") Some of the plot's turns and twists may be somewhat implausible, but Hosseini has created characters that seem so real that one almost forgets that *The Kite Runner* is a novel and not a memoir. At a time when Afghanistan has been thrust into the forefront of America's collective consciousness ("people sipping lattes at Starbucks were talking about the battle for Kunduz"), Hosseini offers an honest, sometimes tragic, sometimes funny, but always heartfelt view of a fascinating land. Perhaps the only true flaw in this extraordinary novel is that it ends all too soon.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Pasadena, CA (2005), Santa Monica, CA (2005), Eastern CT (2004), Winnetka-Northfield, IL (2005), Cambridge, MA (2005), Midcoast Maine (2005), Chelsea, MI (2005), Nashua, NH (2005), Saratoga Springs, NY (2005), Pittsboro, NC (2004), Cincinnati, OH (2005), Rhode Island (2005)

A Lesson Before Dying, Ernest Gaines (1993)

This is the story of two African-American men struggling to attain manhood in a small prejudiced Cajun community in the late 1940s. It concerns Jefferson, a mentally slow, barely literate young man, who, though an innocent bystander to a shootout between a white store owner and two black robbers, is convicted of murder and sentenced to die, and the sophisticated, educated man, Grant Wiggins, who comes to his aid. As Grant struggles to impart a sense of pride to Jefferson before he must face his death, he learns an important lesson as well: heroism is not always expressed through action—sometimes the simple act of resisting the inevitable is enough.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Miami, FL (2003), Peoria, IL (2002), Bloomington, IN (2002), Northwest IN (2002), Lafayette, LA (2002), New Orleans, LA (2004), Jackson, MS (2003), Albuquerque, NM (2005), Washoe County, NV (2002), Buffalo, NY (2000), Rochester, NY (2000), Syracuse, NY (2001-2002), Greensboro, NC (2002), Watauga County, NC (2001), Cincinnati, OH (2002), Multnomah County/Portland, OR (2003), College Station-Bryan, TX (2005), Houston, TX (2002), Waco, TX (2002), Richmond, VA (2002), Seattle, WA (1999)

The Life of Pi, Yann Martel (2002)

A fabulous romp through an imagination by turns ecstatic, cunning, despairing and resilient, this novel is an impressive achievement "a story that will make you believe in God," as one character says. The peripatetic Pi (n the much-taunted Piscine) Patel spends a beguiling boyhood in Pondicherry, India, as the son of a zookeeper. Growing up beside the wild beasts, Pi gathers an encyclopedic knowledge of the animal world. His curious mind also makes the leap from his native Hinduism to Christianity and Islam, all three of which he practices with joyous abandon. In his 16th year, Pi sets sail with his family and some of their menagerie to start a new life in Canada. Halfway to Midway Island, the ship sinks into the Pacific, leaving Pi stranded on a life raft with a hyena, an orangutan, an injured zebra and a 450-pound Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. After the beast dispatches the others, Pi is left to survive for 227 days with his large feline companion on the 26-foot-long raft, using all his knowledge, wits and faith to keep himself alive. The scenes flow together effortlessly, and the sharp observations of the young narrator keep the tale brisk and engaging. Martel's potentially unbelievable plot line soon demolishes the reader's defenses, cleverly set up by events of young Pi's life that almost naturally lead to his biggest ordeal. This richly patterned work, Martel's second novel, won Canada's 2001 Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction. In it, Martel displays the clever voice and tremendous storytelling skills of an emerging master.

Available in: large print, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Arizona (2004), Santa Barbara, CA (2004), Santa Clarita, CA (2005), Naperville, IL (2005), Bangor, ME (2004), Traverse City, MI (2003-04)

The Man in My Basement, Walter Mosley (2004)

In this stand-alone literary tale, themes are in the forefront as Mosley abandons action in favor of a volatile, sometimes unspoken dialogue between Charles Blakey and Anniston Bennet. Blakey, descended from a line of free blacks reaching back into 17th-century America, lives alone in the big family house in Sag Harbor. Bennet is a mysterious white man who approaches Blakey with a strange proposition-to be locked up in Blakey's basement-that Blakey comes to accept only reluctantly and with reservations. The magnitude of Bennet's wealth, power and influence becomes apparent gradually, and his quest for punishment and, perhaps, redemption, proves unsettling-to the reader as well as to Blakey, who finds himself trying to understand Bennet as well as trying to recast his own relatively purposeless life. The shifting power relationship between Bennet and Blakey works nicely, and it is fitting that Blakey's thoughts find expression more in physicality than in contemplation; his involvements with earthy, sensual Bethany and racially proud, sophisticated and educated Narciss reflect differing possibilities. The novel, written in adorned prose that allows the ideas to breathe, will hold readers rapt; it is Mosley's most philosophical novel to date, as he explores guilt, punishment, responsibility and redemption as individual and as social constructs. While it will be difficult for this novel to achieve the kind of audience Mosley's genre fiction does, the author again demonstrates his superior ability to tackle virtually any prose form, and he is to be applauded for creating a rarity, an engaging novel of ideas.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Ragtime, E. L. Doctorow (1975)

Ragtime changed our very concept of what a novel could be. An extraordinary tapestry, *Ragtime* captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century and the First World War. The story opens in 1906 in New Rochelle, New York, at the home of an affluent American family. One lazy Sunday afternoon, the famous escape artist Harry Houdini swerves his car into a telephone pole outside their house. And almost magically, the line between fantasy and historical fact, between real and imaginary characters, disappears. Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J. P. Morgan, Evelyn Nesbit, Sigmund Freud, and Emiliano Zapata slip in and out of the tale, crossing paths with Doctorow's imagined family and other fictional characters, including an immigrant peddler and a ragtime musician from Harlem whose insistence on a point of justice drives him to revolutionary violence.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, musical, film

The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd (2001)

Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily's fierce-hearted "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the town's fiercest racists, Lily decides they should both escape to Tiburon, South Carolina--a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. There they are taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sisters who introduce Lily to a mesmerizing world of bees, honey, and the Black Madonna who presides over their household. This is a remarkable story about divine female power and the transforming power of love--a story that women will share and pass on to their daughters for years to come.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital

Community read in: Montgomery County, IN (2004), Rhode Island (2004), Pittsboro, NC (2003), Chattanooga, TN (2003)

A Separate Peace, John Knowles (1959)

Gene was a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas was a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happened between them at school one summer during the early years of World War II is the subject of *A Separate Peace*. The volatile world of male adolescence provides the backdrop for John Knowles' engrossing tale of love, hate, war, and peace. Sharing a room at Devon, an exclusive New England prep school, in the summer prior to World War II, Gene and Phineas form a complex bond of friendship that draws out both the best and worst characteristics of each boy and leads ultimately to violence, a confession, and the betrayal of trust. A great bestseller for over thirty years--one of the most starkly moving parables ever written of the dark forces that brood over the tortured world of adolescence.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, digital, video

Community read in: Grosse Pointe/Harper Woods, MI (2002)

The Shadow of the Wind, Carlos Ruiz Zafon (2004)

Ruiz Zafón's novel, a bestseller in his native Spain, takes the satanic touches from *Angel Heart* and stirs them into a bookish intrigue à la Foucault's *Pendulum*. The time is the 1950s; the place, Barcelona. Daniel Sempere, the son of a widowed bookstore owner, is 10 when he discovers a novel, *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Julián Carax. The novel is rare, the author obscure, and rumors tell of a horribly disfigured man who has been burning every copy he can find of Carax's novels. The man calls himself Laín Coubert—the name of the devil in one of Carax's novels. As he grows up, Daniel's fascination with the mysterious Carax links him to a blind femme fatale with a "porcelain gaze," Clara Barceló; another fan, a leftist jack-of-all-trades, Fermín Romero de Torres; his best friend's sister, the delectable Beatriz Aguilar; and, as he begins investigating the life and death of Carax, a cast of characters with secrets to hide. Officially, Carax's dead body was dumped in an alley in 1936. But discrepancies in this story surface. Meanwhile, Daniel and Fermín are being harried by a sadistic policeman, Carax's childhood friend. As Daniel's quest continues, frightening parallels between his own life and Carax's begin to emerge. Ruiz Zafón strives for a literary tone, and no scene goes by without its complement of florid, cute and inexact similes and metaphors (snow is "God's dandruff"; servants obey orders with "the efficiency and submissiveness of a body of well-trained insects"). Yet the colorful cast of characters, the gothic turns and the straining for effect only give the book the feel of para-literature or the Hollywood version of a great 19th-century novel.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, Spanish original

Siddhartha, Hermann Hesse (1951)

In the shade of a banyan tree, a grizzled ferryman sits listening to the river. Some say he's a sage. He was once a wandering shramana and, briefly, like thousands of others, he followed Gotama the Buddha, enraptured by his sermons. But this man, Siddhartha, was not a follower of any but his own soul. Born the son of a Brahmin, Siddhartha was blessed in appearance, intelligence, and charisma. In order to find meaning in life, he discarded his promising future for the life of a wandering ascetic. Still, true happiness evaded him. Then a life of pleasure and titillation merely eroded away his spiritual gains until he was just like all the other "child people," dragged around by his desires. Like Hermann Hesse's other creations of struggling young men, *Siddhartha* has a good dose of European angst and stubborn individualism. His final epiphany challenges both the Buddhist and the Hindu ideals of enlightenment. Neither a practitioner nor a devotee, neither meditating nor reciting, Siddhartha comes to blend in with the world, resonating with the rhythms of nature, bending the reader's ear down to hear answers from the river.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, digital

The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien (1990)

A series of stories about the Vietnam experience, based on the author's recollections. O'Brien begins by sharing the talismans and treasures his select small band of young soldiers carry into battle. The tales, ranging from a paragraph to 20 or so pages, reveal one truth after another. Sometimes the author tells the same story from different points of view, revealing the lingering, sometimes consuming, effect war leaves on the soul. In the end, readers are left with a mental and emotional sphere of mirrors, each reflecting a speck of truth about the things men carry into and out of war. In addition to leisure reading, this collection offers potential for history classes studying war, for English classes doing units on short stories, and perhaps for sociology or psychology assignments.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, audio download

Community read in: Chicago, IL (2003), Valparaiso, IN (2005), St Peter, MN (2003), Watauga County, NC (2002), Philadelphia, PA (2005), Richmond, VA (2003)

The Time Traveler's Wife, Audrey Niffenegger (2003)

This clever and inventive tale works on three levels: as an intriguing science fiction concept, a realistic character study and a touching love story. Henry De Tamble is a Chicago librarian with "Chrono Displacement" disorder; at random times, he suddenly disappears without warning and finds himself in the past or future, usually at a time or place of importance in his life. This leads to some wonderful paradoxes. From his point of view, he first met his wife, Clare, when he was 28 and she was 20. She ran up to him exclaiming that she'd known him all her life. He, however, had never seen her before. But when he reaches his 40s, already married to Clare, he suddenly finds himself time travelling to Clare's childhood and meeting her as a six-year-old.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, audio download

Timeline, Michael Crichton (1999)

Crichton's novel is as cinematic as they come, a shiny science-fantasy adventure powered by a superior high concept: a group of young scientists travel back from our time to medieval southern France to rescue their mentor, who's trapped there. The novel's complex action, as the scientists are swept into the intrigue of the Hundred Years War, can be confusing on the page (though a supplied map, one of several graphics, helps), and most of its characters wear hats (or armor) of pure white or black. Crichton remains a master of narrative drive and cleverness. From the startling opening, where an old man with garbled speech and body parts materializes in the Arizona desert, through the revelation that a venal industrialist has developed a risky method of time-travel (based on movement between parallel universes; as in Crichton's other work, good, hard science abounds), there's not a dull moment. When elderly Yale history prof Edward Johnston travels back to his beloved 15th century and gets stuck, and his assistants follow to the rescue, excitement runs high, and higher still as Crichton invests his story with terrific period detail and as castles, sword-play, jousts, sudden death and enough bold knights-in-armor and seductive ladies-in-waiting to fill any toystore's action-figure shelves appear. There's strong suspense, too, as Crichton cuts between past and present, where the time-travel machinery has broken: Will the heroes survive and make it back? The novel has a calculated feel but, even so, it engages as no Crichton tale has done since Jurassic Park, as it brings the past back to vigorous, entertaining life.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD, digital.

When the Emperor Was Divine, Julie Otsuka (2002)

Otsuka's commanding World War II novel paints a portrait of a California Japanese internment camp unlike any we have ever seen. With crystalline intensity and precision, Otsuka uses a single family to evoke the deracination—both physical and emotional—of a generation of Japanese Americans. In five chapters, each flawlessly executed from a different point of view—the mother receiving the order to evacuate; the daughter on the long train ride to the camp; the son in the desert encampment; the family's return to their home; and the bitter release of the father after more than four years in captivity—she has created a small tour de force, a novel of unrelenting economy and suppressed emotion.

Available in: large print, audio CD, audio download

Community read in: Carmel, IN (2004), Shawnee County, KS (2005), St. Peter, MN (2004), Seattle, WA (2005)

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, Gregory Maguire (1995)

Elphaba, the future Wicked Witch of the West, has gotten a bum rap. Her mother is embarrassed and repulsed by her bright-green baby with shark's teeth and an aversion to water. At college, she experiences disapproval and rejection by her roommate, Glinda, a silly girl interested only in clothes, money, and popularity. Elphaba is a serious and inquisitive student. When she learns that the Wizard of Oz is politically corrupt and causing economic ruin, Elphaba finds a sense of purpose to her life--to stop him and to restore harmony and prosperity to the land. A Tin Man, Cowardly Lion, Scarecrow, and an unknown species called a "Dorothy" appear in very small roles... The story presents Elphaba in a sympathetic and empathetic manner--readers will want her to triumph! The conclusion, however, is the same as L. Frank Baum's. The book has both idealism and cynicism in its discussion of social, religious, educational, and political issues present in Oz, and, more pointedly, present in our day and time. The idealism is whimsical and engaging; the cynicism is biting. Sometimes the earthy language seems appropriate and adds to the sense of place; sometimes the four-letter words and sexual explicitness distract from the charm of the tale. The multiple threads to the plot proceed unevenly, so that the pace of the story jumps rather than moves steadily forward. *Wicked* is not an easy rereading of *The Wizard of Oz*. It is for good readers who like satire, and love exceedingly imaginative and clever fantasy.

Available in: large type, audio cassette, audio CD, digital, musical score

Non-Fiction:

The Other Side of the River, Alex Kotlowitz (1999)

(visited Three Rivers spring 2005)

The gripping story of a mysterious death in southwest Michigan. A black teenager surfaces in the St. Joseph River, drowned. How did he get there? The towns of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, divided by both race and the river, grapple with the possibilities in this maddeningly difficult case. Alex Kotlowitz puts his sharp reporting skills to good work here, describing in detail everything that is known about Eric McGinnis's short life and untimely death. But the book is best at plumbing the racial psychology of these mutually suspicious communities. *The Other Side of the River* has that can't-put-it-down quality found in the best narrative nonfiction, and it speaks to issues affecting all of America.

Available in audio cassette, digital

Mountains Beyond Mountains, Tracy Kidder (2003)

(visiting KVCC 10/24-25/05)

This powerful and inspiring book shows how one person can make a difference, as Kidder tells the true story of a gifted man who is in love with the world and has set out to do all he can to cure it. Doctor, Harvard professor, renowned infectious-disease specialist, anthropologist, the recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, world-class Robin Hood, Paul Farmer was brought up in a bus and on a boat, and in medical school found his life's calling: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most. This magnificent book shows how radical change can be fostered in situations that seem insurmountable, and it also shows how a meaningful life can be created, as Farmer—brilliant, charismatic, charming, both a leader in international health and a doctor who finds time to make house calls in Boston and the mountains of Haiti—blasts through convention to get results. *Mountains Beyond Mountains* takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia as Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that "the only real nation is humanity" - a philosophy that is embodied in the small public charity he founded, Partners In Health. He enlists the help of the Gates Foundation, George Soros, the U.N.'s World Health Organization, and others in his quest to cure the world. At the heart of this book is the example of a life based on hope, and on an understanding of the truth of the Haitian proverb "Beyond mountains there are mountains": as you solve one problem, another problem presents itself, and so you go on and try to solve that one too.

Available in: large print, digital

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference, Malcolm Gladwell (2000)

"The best way to understand the dramatic transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life," writes Malcolm Gladwell, "is to think of them as epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do." Although anyone familiar with the theory of memetics will recognize this concept, Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* has quite a few interesting twists on the subject.

For example, Paul Revere was able to galvanize the forces of resistance so effectively in part because he was what Gladwell calls a "Connector": he knew just about everybody, particularly the revolutionary leaders in each of the towns that he rode through. But Revere "wasn't just the man with the biggest Rolodex in colonial Boston," he was also a "Maven" who gathered extensive information about the British. He knew what was going on and he knew exactly whom to tell. The phenomenon continues to this day--think of how often you've received information in an e-mail message that had been forwarded at least half a dozen times before reaching you.

Gladwell develops these and other concepts (such as the "stickiness" of ideas or the effect of population size on information dispersal) through simple, clear explanations and entertainingly illustrative anecdotes, such as comparing the pedagogical methods of *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues*, or explaining why it would be even easier to play Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon with the actor Rod Steiger. Although some readers may find the transitional passages between chapters hold their hands a little too tightly, and Gladwell's closing invocation of the possibilities of social engineering sketchy, even chilling, *The Tipping Point* is one of the most effective books on science for a general audience in ages. It seems inevitable that "tipping point," like "future shock" or "chaos theory," will soon become one of those ideas that everybody knows--or at least knows by name.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, digital

True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall, Mark Salzman (2003)
(visiting KVCC 4/10-11/2006)

Salzman (*Lying Awake; Iron & Silk*) volunteered to teach creative writing at Central Juvenile Hall, a Los Angeles County detention facility for "high-risk" juvenile offenders. Most of these under-18 youths had been charged with murder or other serious crimes, and after trial and sentencing many would end up in a penitentiary, some for life. Sister Janet Harris, of the Inside Out Writers program, convinced Salzman that in spite of his reservations-about teaching writing, about being a white liberal offering "art" to darker-skinned ghetto boys-these children needed to be encouraged to express themselves in writing instead of acting out, needed to feel they mattered to someone. So Salzman started coming twice a week to meet with three boys, although their number quickly grew. He tried to structure each session with a half hour for writing followed by each boy reading his work aloud, although after a lockdown or a class member's trial, he had to loosen the routine. While their writing themes are somewhat predictable-their anger and violent impulses, their relationships with parents and gangs, plus a tedious dose of "pussy, bullets, and beer"-the discussions these essays provoked were personal and often explosive. As productive as these classes were, everyone was always aware of the painful truth that students would soon be shipped out to more brutal facilities. Salzman doesn't dwell on that, concluding that "a little good has got to be better than no good at all." Indeed, his account's power comes from keeping its focus squarely on these boys, their writing and their coming-to-terms with the mess their lives had become.

Available in: audio cassette, audio CD, digital

The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, Thomas Friedman (2005)

Thomas L. Friedman is not so much a futurist, which he is sometimes called, as a presentist. His aim, in his new book, *The World Is Flat*, as in his earlier, influential *Lexus and the Olive Tree*, is not to give you a speculative preview of the wonders that are sure to come in your lifetime, but rather to get you caught up on the wonders that are already here. The world isn't going to be flat, it *is* flat, which gives Friedman's breathless narrative much of its urgency, and which also saves it from the Epcot-style polyester sheen that futurists--the optimistic ones at least--are inevitably prey to.

What Friedman means by "flat" is "connected": the lowering of trade and political barriers and the exponential technical advances of the digital revolution have made it possible to do business, or almost anything else, instantaneously with billions of other people across the planet. This in itself should not be news to anyone. But the news that Friedman has to deliver is that just when we stopped paying attention to these developments--when the dot-com bust turned interest away from the business and technology pages and when 9/11 and the Iraq War turned all eyes toward the Middle East--is when they actually began to accelerate. Globalization 3.0, as he calls it, is driven not by major corporations or giant trade organizations like the World Bank, but by individuals: desktop freelancers and innovative startups all over the world (but especially in India and China) who can compete--and win--not just for low-wage manufacturing and information labor but, increasingly, for the highest-end research and design work as well. (He doesn't forget the "mutant supply chains" like Al-Qaeda that let the small act big in more destructive ways.) Friedman tells his eye-opening story with the catchy slogans and globe-hopping anecdotes that readers of his earlier books and his *New York Times* columns will know well, and also with a stern sort of optimism. He wants to tell you how exciting this new world is, but he also wants you to know you're going to be trampled if you don't keep up with it. His book is an excellent place to begin.

Available in: large print, audio cassette, audio CD

Authors with Several Works:

(In this case, Reading Together would select an author and encourage the reading of any/all of her/his books)

David Baldacci (Huntsville, AL 2005)

Absolute Power

Casting the president of the United States as a crazed villain isn't a new idea, but in this sizzler of a first novel, Baldacci, a D.C. attorney, proves that the premise still has long legs. The action begins when a grizzled professional cat burglar gets trapped inside the bedroom closet of one of the world's richest men, only to witness, through a one-way mirror, two Secret Service agents kill the billionaire's trumpy young wife as she tries to fight off the drunken sexual advances of the nation's chief executive. Running for his life, but not before he picks up a bloodstained letter opener that puts the president at the scene of the crime, the burglar becomes the target of a clandestine manhunt orchestrated by leading members of the executive branch. Meanwhile, Jack Graham, once a public defender and now a high-powered corporate attorney, gets drawn into the case because the on-the-lam burglar just happens to be the father of his former fiancée, a crusading Virginia prosecutor. Embroidering the narrative through assorted plot whorls are the hero's broken romance; his conflict over selling out for financial success; the prosecutor's confused love-hate for her burglar father; the relentless investigation by a northern Virginia career cop; the dilemma of government agents trapped in a moral catch-22; the amoral ambitions of a sexy White House Chief of Staff; and the old burglar's determination to bring down the ruthless president. Meanwhile, lurking at the novel's center like a venomous spider is the sociopathic president. Baldacci doesn't peer too deeply into his characters' souls, and his prose is merely functional. In both respects, he's much closer to Grisham than to, say, Forsyth; but he's also a first-rate storyteller who grabs readers by their lapels right away and won't let go until they've finished his enthralling yarn.

Hour Game Available in large print

Baldacci's last book, *Split Second*, was a relatively weak offering from this bestselling author, sunk by a cartoonish villain and absurd plot. But it did introduce two of Baldacci's (*Absolute Power*, etc.) most memorable characters, former Secret Service agents Sean King and Michelle Maxwell, in business together as private investigators in smalltown Wrightsburg, Va. Baldacci is back in form, and King and Maxwell reappear in this utterly absorbing, complex mystery-thriller that spins in unexpected directions. The novel starts as a serial-killer thriller, for there's a murderer at work in Wrightsburg whose selection of victims appears random but whose modus operandi, differing from kill to kill, mimics the work of a notorious serial killer—the Zodiac killer, John Wayne Gacy, etc. The fifth victim is local resident and international tycoon Robert E. Lee Battle. King and Maxwell have already been tangling with the gothic horror show of a dysfunctional Southern family that is the Battles, as they've been hired to help prove the innocence of a Battle handyman accused of stealing from the family.

Then that handyman is murdered, and the duo (along with a clueless local sheriff and an obnoxious FBI agent) must race to figure out if the same killer is behind all the murders and, if so, why. There are terrific action sequences sprinkled throughout, and plenty of suspense, and the King/Maxwell relationship, while not romantic, emits sparks. It's Baldacci's portrayal of small-town Southern life, however, and his sharp characterizations of the Battles, from the bombastic Bobby and his regal widow to his weird extended family, that give the novel texture and depth: this is Baldacci's most accomplished tale since his nonthriller *Wish You Well*, and it rivals that novel in its social commentary. Despite fair clues, few if any readers will ID the villain (villains?) before they're revealed, and a snappy surprise ending will have Baldacci's many fans remembering why they love this author so much.

Wish You Well (All America Reads, 2002; Rhode Island 2003; Lynchburg, VA 2005) Available in large print

Baldacci is writing what? That waspish question buzzed around publishing circles when Warner announced that the bestselling author generally esteemed more for his plots than for his characters or prose was trying his hand at mainstream fiction, with a mid-century period novel set in the rural South, no less. Shades of John Grisham and *A Painted House*. But guess what? Clearly inspired by his subject--his maternal ancestors, he reveals in a foreword, hail from the mountain area he writes about here with such strength--Baldacci triumphs with his best novel yet, an utterly captivating drama centered on the difficult adjustment to rural life faced by two children when their New York City existence shatters in an auto accident. That tragedy, which opens the book with a flourish, sees acclaimed but impecunious writer Jack Cardinal dead, his wife in a coma and their daughter, Lou, 12, and son, Oz, seven, forced to move to the southwestern Virginia farm of their aged great-grandmother, Louisa. Several questions propel the subsequent story with vigor. Will the siblings learn to accept, even to love, their new life? Will their mother regain consciousness? And--in a development that takes the narrative into familiar Baldacci territory for a gripping legal showdown--will Louisa lose her land to industrial interests? Baldacci exults in high melodrama here, and it doesn't always work: the death of one major character will wring tears from the stoniest eyes, but the reappearance of another, though equally hanky-friendly, is outright manipulative. Even so, what the novel offers above all is bone-deep emotional truth, as its myriad characters--each, except for one cartoonish villain, as real as readers' own kin--grapple not just with issues of life and death but with the sufferings and joys of daily existence in a setting detailed with finely attuned attention and a warm sense of wonder.

Chris Crutcher

The Sledding Hill Available in large print.

This clever, spirited post-modern meta-narrative is a quick read that is bound to be controversial. It has no profanity, sexual acts, drug or alcohol use, or bloody violence but takes dead aim at censors who can't get past counting swear words or the notion of a gay character who is still alive at the end of a book. Eddie Proffit, 14, is a prototypical Crutcher protagonist, a misunderstood teen who in quick succession has lost his father and best friend, Billy, in accidents. And he must deal with Mr. Tartar, who is both a feared English teacher at school and the minister to a flock of Protestant fundamentalists at the Red Brick Church. However, the author's approach to these familiar themes is fresh and fun, beginning when Billy, recently deceased, opts to keep his newly omniscient eye on Eddie, taking advantage of opportune "windows" to communicate, initially scaring Eddie into voluntary mutism but eventually working with him to bring about...the climax of the book. This centers around the use of Crutcher's faux novel, *Warren Peece*, in class and the community-wide uproar over it. The author's obvious delight in writing himself into the story (complete with e-mail address) does not diminish its effectiveness, though he occasionally gets his religious icons confused. Crutcherisms such as "When something seems mysterious and magical, it's because we don't have enough information" meld neatly with upbeat metaphysical speculation to give teen readers an involving story and plenty to think about.

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

Such superlatives as "riveting" and "powerful" can only hint at the craftsmanship on display in this transcendent story of love, loyalty and courage. While probing such issues as friendship, free speech and moral values, Crutcher tells a tale whose mordant humor, poignancy and suspense pack a breathtaking wallop. A social outcast in junior high due to his excessive weight, narrator Eric Calhoun found a kindred spirit in Sarah Byrnes, whose face and hands were hideously disfigured in a childhood accident. Now a senior and considerably slimmed down through competitive swimming (though still aptly called "Moby"), Eric remains fiercely devoted to his friend, whose caustic tongue is her only protection from life's inequities. When Sarah abruptly stops talking and is committed to a mental ward, Eric is compelled to take action to help her, but quickly finds that he is in over his head. He risks their friendship by breaking his vow of secrecy and enlisting others' aid--help that comes from such unlikely quarters as a former bully, Eric's swim coach and, most surprisingly, his mother's seemingly wimpy boyfriend. A subplot centering on a self-righteous teammate drives home the point that nothing is as it appears on the surface, and leads to Eric being caught between his menacing vice-principal and the even more malevolent Mr. Byrnes--with spine-tingling results. Superb plotting, extraordinary characters and crackling narrative make this novel one to be devoured in a single unforgettable sitting.

Whale Talk

Crutcher's gripping tale of small-town prejudice delivers a frank, powerful message about social issues and ills. Representing one-third of his community's minority population ("I'm black. And Japanese. And white"), narrator T.J. Jones voices a darkly ironic appraisal of the high school sports arena. Despite his natural athletic ability (at 13, he qualified for the Junior Olympics in two swimming events), T.J. has steered away from organized sports until his senior year, when Mr. Simet, a favorite English teacher, implores him to help form a swim team for the school (and thereby help the teacher save his job). T.J. sees an opportunity to get revenge on the establishment and invites outcasts to participate on the team; he ends up with "a representative from each extreme of the educational spectrum, a muscle man, a giant, a chameleon, and a psychopath." As might be expected, he accomplishes his mission: his motley crew of swimmers is despised by more conventional athletes (and coaches). The swimmers face many obstacles, but their dedication to their sport and each other grows stronger with every meet. The gradual unfolding of characters' personal conflicts proves to be as gripping as the evolution of the team's efforts. Through T.J.'s narration, Crutcher offers an unusual yet resonant mixture of black comedy and tragedy that lays bare the superficiality of the high school scene. The book's shocking climax will force readers to re-examine their own values and may cause them to alter their perception of individuals pegged as "losers."

King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography

For those who want to know the real poop behind this popular author's characters (and, to some extent, his character), this is the book you've been waiting for. The cover photo tells it all: a white picket fence in the background, for all the world as straight and orderly and stereotypically 1950s proper as the author's maddeningly rational father, "Crutch," wanted things to appear. But looming in the foreground is toothy, smiling Chris, the short-fused emotional time bomb who regularly exploded into anger and tears. Protective of his alcoholic mom and at almost constant odds with his strict and demanding dad, Crutcher describes incidents and telling episodes from his formative years. His signature wit was sharpened in response to both his feelings of inadequacy and his competitive nature, honed by participation in high school and college sports. He addresses issues about his use of profanity in his writing for teens. Tough and tender reminiscences focus primarily on family, social, and school conflicts, but lessons derived from his career as a teacher, therapist, and writer are also described. Hyperbole lightens the mood as the author portrays himself as a young crybaby, academic misfit, and athletic klutz, utterly without self-aggrandizement. Abrupt transitions, some convoluted sentences, and nonlinear progression may challenge some readers, but the narrative holds undeniable appeal for the author's fans and demonstrates the power of writing to help both reader and writer heal emotional/psychic wounds.

Athletic Shorts

If the stereotype of the "bonehead jock" is ever to be defeated, it will be at Crutcher's hands. In these six short stories, he and his athlete protagonists take

on such weighty issues as racism, homophobia, sexism and the teenager's essential task of coming to terms with his parents. At the same time the author makes the world of sports compelling enough to engage even the most sedentary readers. Three of the stories revolve around characters featured in Crutcher's *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*, including the memorable eccentric known as Telephone Man. Also starring in his own story is Lionel Serbousek, the orphaned artist and swimmer of Stotan! In the book's final tale, Louie Banks (from *Running Loose*) is befriended by a young man with AIDS and must cope once again with the untimely death of a loved one. The stories' locales--mostly small towns in Montana and Idaho--are vividly evoked, and make a satisfying change from the well-known big cities and bland suburbs where so many YA novels are set.

Ironman

Crutcher reassembles some of the character types he used to riveting effect in his stellar *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*: a teenage misfit narrator enduring grueling athletic training; a tough heroine with a tragic past; a right-wing authoritarian heavy; enlightened teachers; and a sadistic father. At its best, the narrative crackles along in the author's inimitable style. Beauregard Brewster, a would-be Ironman triathlete, chronicles the events that ensue after he insults an oppressive teacher and is forced to take an anger-management class with other troubled students. But Crutcher's message sometimes overwhelms the cast and the story line. Beau's stern father, who has to be right at all costs-even if it means stacking the deck against his son-is one of the few fully fleshed-out characters. Many are either saintly multiculturalists (Beau's gay swimming coach, earlier met in Stotan; "Mr. Nak" the Japanese cowboy anger-management teacher; the black female high school principal) or, in the case of the offensive teacher, outright villains. In spite of these flaws, Crutcher achieves many memorable moments-exchanges between the students in the anger-management class, for example, are idealized but often deeply moving.

Christopher Paul Curtis

The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963 (South Portland, ME 2004; Flint/Genesee County, MI 2002; Lansing MI 2005; Muskegon MI 2003; St. Paul MN 2003; Norfolk VA 2002) Available in large print

The year is 1963, and self-important Byron Watson is the bane of his younger brother Kenny's existence. Constantly in trouble for one thing or another, from straightening his hair into a "conk" to lighting fires to freezing his lips to the mirror of the new family car, Byron finally pushes his family too far. Before this "official juvenile delinquent" can cut school or steal change one more time, Momma and Dad finally make good on their threat to send him to the deep south to spend the summer with his tiny, strict grandmother. Soon the whole family is packed up, ready to make the drive from Flint, Michigan, straight into one of the most chilling moments in America's history: the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church with four little girls inside. Christopher Paul Curtis's alternately hilarious and deeply moving novel blends the fictional account of an African American family with the factual events of the violent summer of 1963. Fourth grader Kenny is an innocent and sincere narrator; his ingenuousness lends authenticity to the story and invites readers of all ages into his world, even as it changes before his eyes.

Bud, Not Buddy Available in large print

A 10-year-old boy in Depression-era Michigan sets out to find the man he believes to be his father. "While the harshness of Bud's circumstances are authentically depicted, Curtis imbues them with an aura of hope, and he makes readers laugh even when he sets up the most daunting scenarios," said PW in our Best Books citation.

Bucking the Sarge Available in large print

Luther's mother, "the Sarge," runs an empire of Flint, MI, slums and halfway houses, and has a loan-sharking business. At age 15, Luther manages one of her halfway houses, drives the residents around in a van with an illegal license, and readies the homes of evicted tenants for the Sarge's next desperate victims. In exchange, she puts his earnings in a college fund, threatens him into submission, and primes him to take over the business. All Luther wants to do is win the school science fair, think deep thoughts, find some action for the vintage condom in his wallet, and do something honest with his life. Curtis tells the teen's story with his usual combination of goofy humor, tongue-in-cheek corniness, and honest emotion. Accordingly, Luther narrates the absurd, embarrassing details of his life with both adult sensitivity and teen crassness. The dialogue between Luther and Sparky, his "womb to tomb" best friend, is at turns hilarious and touching. The Sarge herself is so convincingly sharp-tongued, shrewd, and despicable that she's the novel's juiciest character. The plot unfolds slowly at first, and teens may lose patience with Luther's tendency to feel sorry for himself. However, once his confidence begins to build, the story keeps a quickening pace with his character arc. His final revenge on the Sarge is so deftly constructed and the novel's resolution so satisfying that it makes up for the occasional lag in the

lead-up. Any teen who's ever wanted to stick it to the man (or woman) will love this story

Mr. Chickee's Funny Money (new hardcover released October 2005)

Curtis tries something new in this book, which begins the Flint Future Detective series. Mostly mystery with a touch of fantasy, the story introduces Steven, a bright kid, whose adventure begins after he receives a quadrillion dollar bill from Mr. Chickee, a blind neighbor that Steven helps out. The money's signature feature is a picture of soul singer James Brown. After Steven discovers that the money is legit, he finds himself pitted against Treasury Agent Foondoo, which leads to a chase in which Zoopy, a dog belonging to Russell, Steven's partner in crime, is seemingly killed. But all's well that ends well when the money is returned, rewards are given, and Zoopy reappears unharmed. There's plenty of action, and the humor is high--though much of it, unfortunately, is at the expense of Steven's father. Curtis' writing style, fast-paced and full of improbable happenings, may be too stylized for some readers, but many kids will enjoy the heady mix of conspiracies and everyday happenings. The explanation of how Brown's picture landed on the quadrillion dollar bill is a hoot.

Books on a Single Topic

Afghanistan/Middle East:

Adult: **The Kite Runner**, Khaled Hosseini (Afghanistan)

Hosseini's stunning debut novel starts as an eloquent Afghan version of the American immigrant experience in the late 20th century, but betrayal and redemption come to the forefront when the narrator, a writer, returns to his ravaged homeland to rescue the son of his childhood friend after the boy's parents are shot during the Taliban takeover in the mid '90s. Amir, the son of a well-to-do Kabul merchant, is the first-person narrator, who marries, moves to California and becomes a successful novelist. But he remains haunted by a childhood incident in which he betrayed the trust of his best friend, a Hazara boy named Hassan, who receives a brutal beating from some local bullies. After establishing himself in America, Amir learns that the Taliban have murdered Hassan and his wife, raising questions about the fate of his son, Sohrab. Spurred on by childhood guilt, Amir makes the difficult journey to Kabul, only to learn the boy has been enslaved by a former childhood bully who has become a prominent Taliban official. The price Amir must pay to recover the boy is just one of several brilliant, startling plot twists that make this book memorable both as a political chronicle and a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our adult lives. The character studies alone would make this a noteworthy debut, from the portrait of the sensitive, insecure Amir to the multilayered development of his father, Baba, whose sacrifices and scandalous behavior are fully revealed only when Amir returns to Afghanistan and learns the true nature of his relationship to Hassan. Add an incisive, perceptive examination of recent Afghan history and its ramifications in both America and the Middle East, and the result is a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium.

Teen/Adult: **Persepolis**, Marjane Satrapi (Iran)

Satrapi's autobiography is a timely and timeless story of a young girl's life under the Islamic Revolution. Descended from the last Emperor of Iran, Satrapi is nine when fundamentalist rebels overthrow the Shah. While Satrapi's radical parents and their community initially welcome the ouster, they soon learn a new brand of totalitarianism is taking over. Satrapi's art is minimal and stark yet often charming and humorous as it depicts the madness around her. She idolizes those who were imprisoned by the Shah, fascinated by their tales of torture, and bonds with her Uncle Anoosh, only to see the new regime imprison and eventually kill him. Thanks to the Iran-Iraq war, neighbors' homes are bombed, playmates are killed and parties are forbidden. Satrapi's parents, who once lived in luxury despite their politics, struggle to educate their daughter. Her father briefly considers fleeing to America, only to realize the price would be too great. "I can become a taxi driver and you a cleaning lady?" he asks his wife. Iron Maiden, Nikes and Michael Jackson become precious symbols of freedom, and eventually Satrapi's

rebellious streak puts her in danger, as even educated women are threatened with beatings for improper attire. Despite the grimness, Satrapi never lapses into sensationalism or sentimentality. Skillfully presenting a child's view of war and her own shifting ideals, she also shows quotidian life in Tehran and her family's pride and love for their country despite the tumultuous times. Powerfully understated, this work joins other memoirs-Spiegelman's *Maus* and Sacco's *Safe Area Goradze*-that use comics to make the unthinkable familiar.

Youth/Middle School: **Habibi**, Naomi Shihab Nye (Israel)

An important first novel from a distinguished anthologist and poet. When Liyana's doctor father, a native Palestinian, decides to move his contemporary Arab-American family back to Jerusalem from St. Louis, 14-year-old Liyana is unenthusiastic. Arriving in Jerusalem, the girl and her family are gathered in by their colorful, warmhearted Palestinian relatives and immersed in a culture where only tourists wear shorts and there is a prohibition against boy/girl relationships. When Liyana falls in love with Omer, a Jewish boy, she challenges family, culture, and tradition, but her homesickness fades. Constantly lurking in the background of the novel is violence between Palestinian and Jew. It builds from minor bureaucratic annoyances and humiliations, to the surprisingly shocking destruction of grandmother's bathroom by Israeli soldiers, to a bomb set off in a Jewish marketplace by Palestinians. It exacts a reprisal in which Liyana's friend is shot and her father jailed. Nye introduces readers to unforgettable characters. The setting is both sensory and tangible: from the grandmother's village to a Bedouin camp. Above all, there is Jerusalem itself, where ancient tensions seep out of cracks and Liyana explores the streets practicing her Arabic vocabulary. Though the story begins at a leisurely pace, readers will be engaged by the characters, the romance, and the foreshadowed danger. Poetically imaged and leavened with humor, the story renders layered and complex history understandable through character and incident. *Habibi* succeeds in making the hope for peace compellingly personal and concrete...as long as individual citizens like Liyana's grandmother Sitti can say, "I never lost my peace inside."

Children:**The Breadwinner**, Deborah Ellis (Afghanistan)

Ellis (*Looking for X*) bases her contemporary novel on refugee stories about the oppressive rule of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Eleven-year-old Parvana must masquerade as a boy to gain access to the outside world and support her dwindling family. Parvana's brother was killed years earlier by a land mine explosion and, for much of the story, her father is imprisoned, leaving only her mother, older sister and two very young siblings. The Taliban laws require women to sheathe themselves fully and ban girls from attending school or going out unescorted; thus, Parvana's disguise provides her a measure of freedom and the means to support her family by providing a reading service for illiterates. There are some sympathetic moments, as when Parvana sees the effect on her mother when she wears her dead brother's clothes and realizes, while reading a letter for a recently widowed Taliban soldier, that even the enemy can have feelings. However, the story's tensions sometimes seem forced (e.g., Parvana's

own fear of stepping on land mines). In addition, the narrative voice often feels removed "After the Soviets left, the people who had been shooting at the Soviets decided they wanted to keep shooting at something, so they shot at each other" taking on a tone more akin to a disquisition than compelling fiction. However, the topical issues introduced, coupled with this strong heroine, will make this novel of interest to many conscientious teens.

Suggestions that do not meet RT criteria:

1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus, Charles C. Mann (2005)

1491 is not so much the story of a year, as of what that year stands for: the long-debated (and often-dismissed) question of what human civilization in the Americas was like before the Europeans crashed the party. The history books most Americans were (and still are) raised on describe the continents before Columbus as a vast, underused territory, sparsely populated by primitives whose cultures would inevitably bow before the advanced technologies of the Europeans. For decades, though, among the archaeologists, anthropologists, paleolinguists, and others whose discoveries Charles C. Mann brings together in *1491*, different stories have been emerging. Among the revelations: the first Americans may not have come over the Bering land bridge around 12,000 B.C. but by boat along the Pacific coast 10 or even 20 thousand years earlier; the Americas were a far more urban, more populated, and more technologically advanced region than generally assumed; and the Indians, rather than living in static harmony with nature, radically engineered the landscape across the continents, to the point that even "timeless" natural features like the Amazon rainforest can be seen as products of human intervention.

Mann is well aware that much of the history he relates is necessarily speculative, the product of pot-shard interpretation and precise scientific measurements that often end up being radically revised in later decades. But the most compelling of his eye-opening revisionist stories are among the best-founded: the stories of early American-European contact. To many of those who were there, the earliest encounters felt more like a meeting of equals than one of natural domination. And those who came later and found an emptied landscape that seemed ripe for the taking, Mann argues convincingly, encountered not the natural and unchanging state of the native American, but the evidence of a sudden calamity: the ravages of what was likely the greatest epidemic in human history, the smallpox and other diseases introduced inadvertently by Europeans to a population without immunity, which swept through the Americas faster than the explorers who brought it, and left behind for their discovery a land that held only a shadow of the thriving cultures that it had sustained for centuries before.

[Any Miss Marple book], Agatha Christie

The Apple Grower: Guide for the Organic Orchardist, Michael Phillips (1998)

The demand for high-quality, organically grown food is skyrocketing with people's gradual understanding of the health risks and dangers of chemical pesticides and "industrialized" farming, yet good organic apples are still hard to find in many places. Phillips has employed hard work and keen observation of nature to make the best use of our great-grandparents' experiences and techniques. He then examines the latest scientific knowledge of apple pests and their life cycles to produce a thorough guide to growing wonderful, delicious varieties of apples in an orchard that is safe for animals, birds, and children playing under its tree branches. Each chapter has practical advice for the backyard fruit grower, and while this book is filled with useful facts and tactics, Phillips also adds a gentle, Earth-friendly, philosophical writing style that makes for quite an enjoyable read.

Bad News : The Decline of Reporting, the Business of News, and the Danger to Us All, Tom Fenton (2005)

What makes this discourse on the current state of broadcast news such a gripping read is not that it critiques the establishment—it's the specific nature of Fenton's complaint. The author, who's been reporting for CBS News for 34 years, accuses the industry not just of having a political bias, but of being supremely lazy and incompetent. Fenton shares his own opinions, but buttresses them with sharp interviews from the Big Three (Brokaw, Rather, Jennings) and elder statesman Cronkite, who, not surprisingly, is most forthcoming, admitting he doesn't even watch the *CBS Evening News* anymore: "Nothing there but crime and sob sister material." Fenton lays out the hows and whys of what he sees as the problems present in today's news media (largely broadcast news) with exacting logic. After the end of the Cold War, an unfortunate confluence of factors—including the lack of a pervasive threat that might keep audiences attuned to foreign news, a growing herd mentality within the media, and "cutbacks, bottom-line fever, and CEO-mandated news criteria"—resulted in an industrywide dumbing-down and a decline in ratings. Along with this well-structured explanation of what's wrong and how to fix it, Fenton also provides a convenient guide to the biggest underreported stories and why they're important.

Paperback due November 2005; no audio or large print.

Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto (not available in alternative formats)

Can't Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, Martin Torgoff (2005)

Torgoff challenges what he calls America's "cultural amnesia" about recreational drug use during the last half-century, staking out a rhetorical middle ground that acknowledges both the pervasive cultural influence and the costs of overindulgence. The problem with his panoramic account is its focus on celebrities, especially among the creative classes, whose stories have already been told. That makes for a series of often stunning images--Charlie Parker in the grip of heroin addiction, Wavy Gravy confronting Charles Manson, John Belushi snorting cocaine on live TV--especially given Torgoff's skills as an interviewer (and the good fortune of getting to talk with key figures like Herbert Huncke and Timothy Leary before their deaths), but at the expense of discovering what happened once various drugs made their way to ordinary folks in the suburbs. Torgoff (who won an ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for *American Fool*, about John Cougar Mellencamp) does touch on that by opening with his own early drug use on '60s Long Island and closing with a poignant encounter with an aged homeless junkie, and the book could have used more stories like that. The discussion of the government's "war on drugs" is somewhat scattershot; though detailed on President Carter's flirtation with relaxing the laws and the militancy of the "Just Say No" era, there's nothing about Nixon's policies--a particularly stunning omission since the DEA was created during his administration. Torgoff creates compelling juxtapositions, and he's not afraid to ask difficult questions, but he hasn't truly broken new ground.

Confessions of an Economic Hit Man, John Perkins (2004)

(Paperback available December 2005; no audio available)

John Perkins started and stopped writing *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* four times over 20 years. He says he was threatened and bribed in an effort to kill the project, but after 9/11 he finally decided to go through with this expose of his former professional life. Perkins, a former chief economist at Boston strategic-consulting firm Chas. T. Main, says he was an "economic hit man" for 10 years, helping U.S. intelligence agencies and multinationals cajole and blackmail foreign leaders into serving U.S. foreign policy and awarding lucrative contracts to American business. "Economic hit men (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars," Perkins writes. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* is an extraordinary and gripping tale of intrigue and dark machinations. Think John Le Carré, except it's a true story.

Crossing the River, Caryl Phillips (1994)

A brilliantly imagined novel of the African diaspora, it begins in 18th-century Africa as three children--Nash, Martha, and Travis--are sold into slavery. What follows are "their" life stories along with excerpts from the logbook of the slave ship's captain. Nash returns to Africa as a Christian missionary in the 1830s. Martha is a former slave whom we meet as she lays dying in Denver, having failed to reach California and find her only child, taken from her years before. Travis is reincarnated as an American GI stationed in England in 1943; his story is poignantly told by the British woman he marries. Bold in its design, beautiful in its language, compelling because of its characters, this grand novel of ideas--short-listed for the 1993 Booker Prize--explores issues of identity, displacement, and the lasting legacy of slavery.

Community read in: Cincinnati, OH (2005)

Dead Cities: And Other Tales, Mike Davis (2003)

Both human-made and natural disasters threaten Earth's survival, and journalist and author Davis (*City of Quartz*; *Ecology of Fear*) here explores many variables that have led, and will continue to lead, to the death of many urban areas and ecosystems. A writer for the *Nation*, *Sierra*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, Davis states that many prophecies of urban doom have already come true (e.g., H.G. Wells in 1907 predicted that New York City would burn as a result of attacking airships). He worries about the future of humankind and urban life in light of terrorism, global warming, globalization, and the effects of changing weather patterns. Early chapters provide a thorough and often insightful account of governmental nuclear testing in the Western United States, documenting the fate of "Downwinders," the unwitting victims of fallout. Most of the rest of the book discusses the urban plight of Los Angeles. Davis provides a wealth of information but relies heavily on newspaper articles for his references. Despite Davis's apocalyptic vision, this may have appeal.

The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions,
Sister Helen Prejean (2005)

Since the 1993 publication of her memoir *Dead Man Walking* and the 1995 film it inspired, Sister Helen Prejean has become a powerful and articulate presence in the fight against the death penalty in America. In *The Death of Innocents*, Prejean focuses her argument on the ways in which an unjust system may be killing innocent people. She tells the story of two inmates she came to know as a spiritual adviser. Dobie Williams, a poor black man with an IQ of 65 from rural Louisiana, was executed after being represented by incompetent counsel and found guilty by an all-white jury based mostly on conjecture and speculation. Joseph O'Dell was convicted of murder after the court heard from an inmate who later admitted to giving false testimony for his own benefit. O'Dell received neither an evidentiary hearing nor potentially exculpatory DNA testing and was executed, insisting on his innocence the whole while. Besides exploring the shaky cases against them, Prejean describes in vivid detail the thoughts and feelings of Williams and O'Dell as their bids for clemency fail and they are put to death. The second part of the book details "the machinery of death," the legal process that Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, dismayed at the inequities of the death penalty, cited as his reason for resigning and that current justice Antonin Scalia has boasted of being a part of. Prejean is impassioned as she describes what she sees as an arrogant attitude by both Scalia and the contemporary judicial system. Her chance confrontation with Scalia at an airport is a gripping collision of disparate worlds. In recent years, DNA testing has overturned the convictions of scores of prisoners, including many on death row. As the death penalty is increasingly called into question, Sister Helen Prejean will surely be a force in that debate.

Paperback due January 2006, no audio or large print.

The Great American Jobs Scam, Greg LeRoy

Founder and director of the nonprofit center Good Jobs First, LeRoy offers a parade of damning case studies showing why communities should not woo corporations with subsidies. Corporate tactics, he finds, include quickly shuttered subsidized facilities, union busting and jobs that pay below the poverty line. Rewritten tax codes, which focus on sales taxes but ignore payroll and property taxes, as well as other tax abatements, undermine schools; most stadiums and convention centers further bleed public monies. Moreover, subsidies generally support suburban sprawl rather than accessibility to public transit used by the poor. Some corporate location consultants work both for companies and governments—"a sad reflection" of a disorganized public sector. On the corporate minus side, tax incentives to relocate, he shows, are dwarfed by labor, transport and utility costs. The upshot? Corporations are paying 28% less in state and local taxes than 20 years ago. LeRoy's suggested reforms include greater disclosure about subsidy deals; money-back guarantees if companies don't fulfill their pledges; requiring subsidized jobs to meet local average wages; closing corporate loopholes; and making sure every deal is approved by elected officials rather than appointed ones.

The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community, Ray Oldenburg (1999)

Examines gathering places and reminds us how important they are. People need the 'third place' to nourish sociability.

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life, Parker Palmer (2004)

In *A Hidden Wholeness*, Parker J. Palmer reveals the same compassionate intelligence and informed heart that shaped his best-selling books *Let Your Life Speak* and *The Courage to Teach*. Here he speaks to our yearning to live undivided lives -- lives that are congruent with our inner truth -- in a world filled with the forces of fragmentation. Mapping an inner journey that we take in solitude and in the company of others, Palmer describes a form of community that fits the limits of our active lives. Defining a "circle of trust" as "a space between us that honors the soul," he shows how people in settings ranging from friendship to organizational life can support each other on the journey toward living "divided no more." Inspired by Palmer's writing and speaking -- and challenged by the conditions of twenty-first century life -- people across the country, from many walks of life, have been coming together in circles of trust to reclaim their integrity and help foster wholeness in their workplaces and their world. For over a decade, the principles and practices in this book have been proven on the ground -- by parents and educators, clergy and politicians, community organizers and corporate executives, physicians and attorneys, and many others who seek to rejoin soul and role in their private and public lives. *A Hidden Wholeness* weaves together four themes that its author has pursued for forty years: the shape of an integral life, the meaning of community, teaching and learning for transformation, and nonviolent social change. The hundreds of thousands of people who know Parker J. Palmer's books will be glad to find the journey continued here -- and readers new to his work will be glad they joined that journey.

No audio or large print.

House Made of Dawn, N. Scott Momaday (1968)

House Made of Dawn, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969, tells the story of a young American Indian named Abel, home from a foreign war and caught between two worlds: one his father's, wedding him to the rhythm of the seasons and the harsh beauty of the land; the other of industrial America, a goading him into a compulsive cycle of dissipation and disgust.

Available in: audio cassette

I Sailed with Magellan, Stuart Dybek (2003)

Whenever Perry Katzek's much loved Uncle Lefty takes him up on the roof of his building to see the pigeon coop and the great grid of Chicago, he says, "Welcome to Dreamsville," which could serve as an alternative title for this magical suite of linked stories. In his first book since the unforgettable *Coast of Chicago* (1990), Dybek writes of his hometown with the poignant realism of Henry Roth, the mythic intensity of Leon Forrest, and the poetic otherworldliness of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Eleven perfectly formed and exquisitely sensual tales--each so saturated with personality, event, and revelation they feel like novels--illuminate transforming moments in Perry's life. Imaginative, adventurous, and romantic, Perry falls in love and loses loved ones, witnesses violence and experiences transcendence, while Dybek masterfully and tenderly conjures the edgy ambience of Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods and the great divide between the bucolic North Side and the broken-glass-strewn, tavern-spiked industrial South Side, where bravado, musical gifts, and witty repartee are highly valued. Set in a chimerical world of ice and flowers, soul-bruising hard work and sweet dreams, ruthless mobsters and die-hard friends, Dybek's mesmerizing tales coalesce into an epic of survival and spiritual growth that is, by turns, gritty, surreal, hilarious, tragic, and bittersweet.

Not available in alternative formats.

The Infinite Plan, Isabelle Allende (1993)

This novel by renowned Chilean author Allende (*House of Spirits*) is the story of Gregory Reeves's journey from childhood to middle age and long-sought peace and happiness. Gregory's journey is marked by the contending philosophies of his mother's Bahai faith; his father's personally revealed, metaphysical explanation of the universe, called "The Infinite Plan" (the selling of which provides the family's income); and the traditional Catholicism and sense of nostalgia that permeate the Latin barrio where Gregory lives as a child. Though the book is not provocative and the plot is somewhat predictable, it is held together by a deep interest in the colorful, enchanting characters and their evolving relationships to one another.

Not available in alternative formats.

Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison (1952)

A classic from the moment it first appeared in 1952, *Invisible Man* chronicles the travels of its narrator, a young, nameless black man, as he moves through the hellish levels of American intolerance and cultural blindness. Searching for a context in which to know himself, he exists in a very peculiar state. "I am an invisible man," he says in his prologue. "When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me." But this is hard-won self-knowledge, earned over the course of many years.

As the book gets started, the narrator is expelled from his Southern Negro college for inadvertently showing a white trustee the reality of black life in the south, including an incestuous farmer and a rural whorehouse. The college director chastises him: "Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of an education are you getting around here?" The narrator becomes a spokesman for a mixed-race band of social activists called "The Brotherhood" and believes he is fighting for equality. Once again, he realizes he's been duped into believing what he thought was the truth, when in fact it is only another variation. *Invisible Man* is certainly a book about race in America, and sadly enough, few of the problems it chronicles have disappeared even now. But Ellison's first novel transcends such a narrow definition. It's also a book about the human race stumbling down the path to identity, challenged and successful to varying degrees. None of us can ever be sure of the truth beyond ourselves, and possibly not even there. The world is a tricky place, and no one knows this better than the invisible man, who leaves us with these chilling, provocative words: "And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

Available in: audio cassette

It's a Meaningful Life, It Just Takes Practice, Bo Lozoff

Lozoff, whom the Utne Reader has named one of the nation's 100 Spiritual Visionaries, has written a compelling criticism of the anomic era in which we live. In our age, Lozoff writes, we don't take the time to enjoy everyday pleasures, such as having dinner with family or watching the sun set. "Our civilization," he writes, "is in serious trouble": consumerism runs rampant, and people are increasingly estranged from one another. It is his contention that integrating simple spiritual practices into our daily lives can help make life more satisfying and meaningful. Lozoff does not prescribe certain spiritual practices that he thinks every person ought to undertake. Rather, drawing on a wealth of traditions from Tibetan Buddhism to Hasidic Judaism, the author presents an appealing pastiche of practices from prayers to breathing exercises. Readers will learn about classic mantras (Om mani padme hum, the Tibetan Mantra of Compassion and the Jesus Prayer) and more contemporary ones, such as "No hard feelings." But Lozoff's daily practices are not limited to the obviously spiritual--in his discussion of "living simply," he urges readers to get out of debt, to give away an old book when they buy a new one and to eat more home cooking. Books on how to invest life with spirituality are a dime a dozen, but Lozoff's thoroughgoing and trenchant criticism of contemporary society helps his cry for simplicity stand out in the crowd.

Not available in alternative formats.

The Life You Imagine, Derek Jeter with Jack Curry

2000's most valuable player on the All-Star team and a shortstop for the New York Yankees, Jeter would seem to have the perfect life. His skills on the field are stellar, and he's already been compared to some of baseball's most legendary players. Teammates and fans respect and adore him. In this affable volume, Jeter, who says he hopes he can set a good example for young people, shares some of his personal history as he outlines the 10 principles that led to his success. Jeter's life was not always idyllic: his mother is white and his father African-American, and they, along with Jeter and his sister, Sharlee, endured slurs and taunts while growing up in Kalamazoo. Yet Jeter clearly found a bulwark of affection in his parents, who set high standards for him and refused to let him stint on his academic work even as they wholeheartedly supported his athletic pursuits. (In fact, Jeter and his sister had to sign contracts spelling out the daily chores and other work they were expected to do.) Among the lessons his parents helped Jeter learn: set high goals, don't be afraid to fail, find role models and think before you act. For example, in the chapter "Have a Strong Supporting Cast," Jeter discusses the importance of selecting friends who encourage your ambitions and provide frank criticism of your mistakes; he offers many anecdotes of his own friends, including manager Joe Torre and his high school sweetheart, Marisa Novara. Jeter and Curry, a sports reporter for the New York Times, clearly assume the audience for this book will be teenagers who are looking to emulate Jeter's success. In fact, Jeter's story and his genuine concern with "being the best" and "doing the right thing" should motivate readers of all ages.

Not available in alternative formats.

Moyers on America: A Journalist and His Times, Bill Moyers

Award-winning journalist Moyers offers a thoughtful and caustic look at American politics. This first-time collection of Moyers' commentaries begins with his speech "This Is Your Story. Pass It On," read by millions online and applauded for its insights into the troublesome trends in American democracy. Moyers powerfully and eloquently laments the increasing influence of the wealthy at the expense of the poor. In other essays, Moyers recalls a more progressive era in the U.S., when the government played an active role in protecting citizens, and reporters were more vigilant in their scrutiny of corruption. Reflecting on his personal beliefs and observations from his various perches as journalist, Peace Corps organizer, and top assistant to President Lyndon Johnson, Moyers offers a variety of penetrating views on the past 50 years of American politics. He laments the "final fling" of progressive politics in the Johnson administration and rails against heartless conservatism and corporate journalism, trends that he sees threatening the very essence of democracy. But amid the plethora of corporate scandals, shameless materialism, and religious and political chaos afoot in the nation, Moyers sees a battle to renew American democracy. A wide-ranging examination of American politics.

Not available in alternative formats.

My Land and My People : The Original Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet (1962)

Written by the Dalai Lama as a young man in exile, this dignified testament re-creates the miraculous search that identified him as the reincarnated leader of his country. It paints a rare, intimate portrait of Tibetan Buddhism—a way of life that would end with a terrifying foreign invasion surpassing sanity and reason. And it reveals the evolution of a man from gentle monk to a world leader, one struggling to this day to free his country...one able to touch our hearts with the goodness that makes him one of the most beloved men of our time.

Not available in alternative formats.

My Ministry Behind Prison Walls, Oscar Walden Jr. (not available)

The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11, David Ray Griffith (2004)

A philosopher at the Claremont School of Theology, Griffin scrutinizes the time line and physical evidence of September 11 for unresolved inconsistencies. Griffin draws heavily on three similarly skeptical examinations, by Nafeez Ahmed, Paul Thompson and Thierry Meyssan, whose *The Big Lie* was a bestseller in France, and which the *New Republic* has called "thin€"and thinly argued." Based on these sources, Griffin maintains that a full investigation of the events of that tragic day is necessary to answer such questions as whether American Airlines Flight 77 did crash into the Pentagon (though many will find it impossible to doubt this) and how United Airlines Flight 93 was downed. He claims that if standard procedures for scrambling fighter jets had been followed, the hijacked planes should have been intercepted in time, and that structurally, the collapse of the World Trade Center towers most likely was caused by explosives placed throughout the towers, not from the plane crashes. He strongly implies that the Bush administration had foreknowledge of the attack and sought to conceal what Griffin suggests was the Pakistani intelligence agency's involvement in the planning for the attacks. His analysis is undergirded by the theory that a significant external threat, on the scale of Pearl Harbor, was very much in the interest of the Bush administration, which he believes is intent on self-interested aggressive foreign policies. Even many Bush opponents will find these charges ridiculous, though conspiracy theorists may be haunted by the suspicion that we know less than we think we do about that fateful day.

Not available in alternative formats.

Owl in Love, Patrice Kindl

Owl, 14, is charmingly offbeat; she hangs out at night in a tree near the home of her one love--science teacher Mr. Lindstrom. What makes her nocturnal vigils relatively easy is that she's a ``wereowl" whose nightly transformation ruffles her feathers no more than does her diet of rodents. Wereowls run in the family, so Owl is comfortable with her identity, though the efforts demanded by her one-sided love are wearing her a bit ragged. When she observes a boy lurking near Mr. Lindstrom's home, the stage is set for shedding the schoolgirl crush for a more transcendent romance. Owl's perspective is no birdbrained view; readers are soon solidly immersed in her wild, wise, and witty ways. Lofty phrasing, wry self-awareness, and passionate musings frame and fill a delightful first-person narration. Owl's quaint parents play several scenes for humor and have foibles enough to complete Owl's typical teenage alienation. The tidying up at the end is a little overneat and abbreviated; otherwise, an unusually strong and original first novel.

Not available in alternative formats.

Riding the Bus with My Sister: A True Life Journey, Rachel Simon (2002)

This perceptive, uplifting chronicle shows how much Simon, a creative writing professor at Bryn Mawr College, had to learn from her mentally retarded sister, Beth, about life, love and happiness. Beth lives independently and is in a long-term romantic relationship, but perhaps the most surprising thing about her, certainly to her (mostly) supportive family, is how she spends her days riding buses. Six days a week (the buses don't run on Sundays in her unnamed Pennsylvania city), all day, she cruises around, chatting up her favorite drivers, dispensing advice and holding her ground against those who find her a nuisance. Rachel joined Beth on her rides for a year, a few days every two weeks, in an attempt to mend their distanced relationship and gain some insight into Beth's daily life. She wound up learning a great deal about herself and how narrowly she'd been seeing the world. Beth's community within the transit system is a much stronger network than the one Rachel has in her hectic world, and some of the portraits of drivers and the other people in Beth's life are unforgettable. Rachel juxtaposes this with the story of their childhood, including the dissolution of their parents' marriage and the devastating abandonment by their mother, the effect of which is tied poignantly to the sisters' present relationship. Although she is honest about the frustrations of relating to her stubborn sister, Rachel comes to a new appreciation of her, and it is a pleasure for readers to share in that discovery.

Available in: TV movie

Community read in: Alliance, OH (2005)

Soul Mending: The Art of Spiritual Direction, John Chrysavgis (2000)

A series of essays on the nature and experience of spiritual direction and pastoral care in the Orthodox Tradition. Also includes excerpts from patristic sources on the topic.

Not available in alternative formats.

Trainspotting, Irving Welsh (1996)

Irvine Welsh's controversial first novel, set on the heroin-addicted fringe of working-class youth in Edinburgh, is yet another exploration of the dark side of Scottishness. The main character, Mark Renton, is at the center of a clique of nihilistic slacker junkies with no hopes and no possibilities, and only "mind-numbing and spirit-crushing" alternatives in the straight world they despise. This particular slice of humanity has nothing left but the blackest of humor and a sharpness of wit. American readers can use the glossary in the back to translate the slang and dialect--essential, since the dialogue makes the book. This is a bleak vision sung as musical comedy.

Available in film.

What Are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World, William Thomas

In this book, with a nod to popular culture, history, science, and literature, a passionate and persuasive case is made for removing our ageist blinders and seeing old age as a developmental stage of life. William H. Thomas, M.D., is a Harvard Medical School graduate, an author, a geriatrician, a consultant for AARP, and a speaker to diverse health care professionals, academics, and other researchers. He is president of two not-for-profit organizations that promote holistic approaches to aging and elder care. Winner of the America's Award (established by Norman Vincent Peale and sometimes called "The Nobel Prize for Goodness"), the Molly Mettler Award from the Health Promotion Institute, and an award from the Giraffe Project (for sticking his neck out), Bill Thomas most recently has received a three-year fellowship from Ashoka, a global nonprofit organization that searches the world for social entrepreneurs--extraordinary individuals with unprecedented ideas for change in their communities.

Not available in alternative formats.

Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race: A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity, Revised edition, Beverly Daniel Tatum

An insightful exploration of the varieties of Americans' experience with race and racism in everyday life. Tatum, a developmental psychologist with a special interest in the emerging field of racial-identity development, is a consultant to school systems and community groups on teaching and learning in a multicultural context. Not only has she studied the distinctive social dynamics faced by black youth educated in predominantly white environments, but since 1980, Tatum has developed a course on the psychology of racism and taught it in a variety of university settings. She is also a black woman and a concerned mother of two, and she draws on all these experiences and bases of knowledge to write a remarkably jargon-free book that is as rigorously analytical as it is refreshingly practical and drives its points home with a range of telling anecdotes. Tatum illuminates "why talking about racism is so hard" and what we can do to make it easier.

Not available in alternative formats.

Why I Am Not a Muslim, Ibn Warraq (1995)

This is the first book written by a former Muslim to critically consider the major principles of Islam. From the religion's origins and the nature of Mohammed's message and laws to Islamic views of women, politics and society, this provides a strong critical view of the Koran and its associated societies.

Not available in alternative formats.

With God on My Side, Mard Little (2004)

Born in the deep South, the author writes from the pain of loss and the victory of redemption in this moving memoir of her life and her family.

Not available in alternative formats.

The Wounded Land (The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Book 1), Stephen Donaldson

Four thousand years have passed since Covenant first freed the Land from the devastating grip of Lord Foul and his minions. But he is back, and Covenant, armed with his stunning white gold magic, must battle the evil forces and his own despair.... These books have never received the recognition they deserve. It's one of the most powerful and complex fantasy trilogies since *Lord of the Rings*.

Not available in alternative formats.