

2009

Grown-Ups Summer Reading List

Please note: When there is a call number in the initial left-hand corner of the bibliographic information, it means that our library has the book. If it does not, we recommend that you either borrow it from your local public library or purchase it. Happy summer reading everyone!

F A235 Aravind, *The White Tiger*. 2009 (Winner of the Mann Booker Prize)

This first novel by Indian writer Adiga depicts the awakening of a low-caste Indian man to the degradation of servitude. While the early tone of the book calls to mind the heartbreaking inequities of Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, a better comparison is to Frederick Douglass's narrative about how he broke out of slavery. The protagonist, Balram Halwai, is initially delighted at the opportunity to become the driver for a wealthy man. But Balram grows increasingly angry at the ways he is excluded from society and looked down upon by the rich, and he murders his employer. He reveals this murder from the start, so the mystery is not what he did but why he would kill such a kind man. The climactic murder scene is wonderfully tense, and Balram's evolution from likable village boy to cold-blooded killer is fascinating and believable. Even more surprising is how well the narrative works in the way it's written as a letter to the Chinese premier, who's set to visit Bangalore, India.

333.958 B244L Barcott, Bruce. *The Last flight of the Scarlet Macaw: One Woman's Fight to Save the World's Most Beautiful Bird*. 2008.

Belize is a small Central American country, justifiably famous for its dense forestation. Sharon Matola is an expatriate American, proprietor of the Belize Zoo, the country's most visited attraction and a scientific research station. The scarlet macaw is a stunning parrot, threatened with extinction throughout Central America (Belize's population hovers around 200). Fortis, an international energy company, wanted to build a dam that would flood one of Belize's most teeming river valleys, home to jaguars, tapirs, and a rare subspecies of scarlet macaw. Barcott (*The Measure of a Mountain*, 1997) brings these four elements together in a riveting account of one woman's fight to save one of the last bastions of an endangered species, as Matola takes on a powerful corporation and the government of her adopted country. Accompanying Matola as she studied the birds in their imperiled forest home, cared for the animals at her zoo, and fought the good fight, Barcott writes of international politics, ecology and endangered species, and human relations with equal facility. This real page-turner of narrative nonfiction is hard to put down.

Shaw, Catherine. *The Library Paradox*. 2006. (paperback)

Young mother and former teacher Vanessa Weatherburn is unable to resist when three professors, aware of her previous success as an amateur sleuth, ask her to look into the murder of a colleague, a famous—and famously anti-Semitic—scholar. Stumped for a suspect, the police have arrested the most convenient person, who happens to be a young Hasidic Jew. Set in 1896, *The Library Paradox* offers a fascinating window onto England's nineteenth-century Jewish community. The "paradox" part of the title comes from a famous puzzle in mathematical logic that was originally posed by Bertrand Russell—who shows up as a character in the novel!

Barry, Sebastian. *The Secret Scripture*. 2009.

With this work, renowned Irish playwright Barry furthers his reputation as a great novelist as well. Set in a Roscommon mental hospital, the novel centers on 100-year-old Roseanne McNulty, who secretly records her life in a hidden journal. In sometimes painful detail, she describes a heartbreaking childhood in Sligo, affected triumphantly and tragically by events unfolding in the world beyond: two world wars, the emergence of the Irish Republic, and the often devastating influence of the Catholic Church on the lives of people in need. Her entries alternate with the writings of Dr. William Grene, a kindly if distant psychiatrist attempting to assess Roseanne's mental health. For both, writing is revelatory. Their stories beautifully unfold like blooming roses, breathtakingly revealing the ties that bind them. The prose is rich, and Barry's gift for description and especially dialog are considerable.

Williams, Marjorie. *Reputation :Portraits in Power*. 2008.

Journalist Marjorie Williams wrote profiles of powerful men and women for *Vanity Fair* and the *Washington Post*, and before her death in 2005 she developed a reputation for extraordinary perception. The first posthumous collection of her writing, *The Woman at the Washington Zoo*, became a *New York Times* bestseller. *Reputation*, a new collection of her writing, is what her widower and her books' editor, Timothy Noah, calls "the rest of Marjorie's best." Here, she illuminates how the media shaped George H. W. Bush's path to the White House and revealingly probes Colin Powell's universal appeal, among other feats. She paints portraits of photographic realism via words, and her style is seductive—as is the wealth of Washington gossip that makes up at least a part of each profile.

152 H188 Hallinan, Joseph T. *Why We Make Mistakes*. 2009.

What an eye-opener! If you're someone who has trouble remembering the names of people (or common objects), if you seem to forget things almost immediately after you learn them, if your memory of past events frequently turns out to be drastically at odds with the facts, relax: you're

not alone. It's a truism that we all make mistakes, but Hallinan is more interested in why we make them, in what quirks of our mental makeup allow and even frequently encourage us to misremember important events, forget passwords, mistake strangers for friends, buy more groceries than we actually need, fall for optical illusions, and so on. Turns out these aren't signs of illness. Just the opposite: our minds behave this way because our brains are wired this way. Hallinan cites numerous studies and experts (there is a lengthy bibliography), but he keeps the book from becoming a stodgy recitation of facts and statistics through the frequent use of illustrative examples and snappy prose. He also throws in a few big surprises, such as the revelation that multitasking is a myth (we don't do several things at once we switch between various tasks without really focusing on any of them). A vastly informative, and for some readers vastly reassuring, exploration of the way our minds work.

Magnan, Pierre. *Death in the Truffle Wood: A Mystery in Provence*. 2008. (paperback)

Strange things are going on in the woods of Banon and people are disappearing. When Commissaire Laviolette arrives in the Provençal village to investigate, he finds a mystery shrouded in centuries-old superstition and local secrets. To end the disappearances, he will have to contend with elusive hippies, laconic truffle hunters, and a headstrong pig named Roseline. Both clever and atmospheric, *Death in the Truffle Wood* brings the unique people and landscape of Provence to sensual life—and, while it is no sunlit romp, it is surely a pleasure to read. This is the first of Pierre Magnan's Commissaire Laviolette mysteries, and the first of the acclaimed writer's novels to be available in the United States.

Vreeland, Susan. *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. 2007. (Paperback)

How did Pierre-Auguste Renoir feel during the months he planned and painted the *Luncheon of the Boating Party*? What was it like to be an Impressionist—to be part of the community of artists at that time in Paris? What compelled them to paint? Susan Vreeland writes fiction but uses both extensive research and her considerable imagination to bring alive the passions of Renoir, Gustave Caillebotte, and the other fascinating people connected to the painting of this masterpiece. *Luncheon of the Boating Party* is a richly evocative and deeply satisfying novel. Hint: This book might make a nice gift for a wonderful French teacher who is famous for her *Tableau Vivants*.

Herz, Rachel. *The Scent of Desire: Discovering Our Enigmatic Sense of Smell*. 2007. (paperback)

The Scent of Desire is packed with charming anecdotes and fascinating information about the human olfactory system. You'll learn about the connection between scents and emotions, the reason it's harder to conjure up a smell than a sound or an image, and why salt actually makes a grapefruit taste sweeter. You'll discover mind-boggling olfaction experiments (like one that showed mothers can identify their newborns by smell alone). You'll even get a glimpse of amazing technology that's currently under development (including "Smell-O-Vision"). If you've ever thought of your nose as anything less than dazzling, you should read this illuminating tribute to "our enigmatic sense of smell."

F Mue Mueenuddin, Daniyal. In *Other Rooms Other Wonders*. 2009.

In eight beautifully crafted, interconnected stories, Mueenuddin explores the cutthroat feudal society in which a rich Lahore landowner is entrenched. A complicated network of patronage undergirds the micro-society of servants, families and opportunists surrounding wealthy patron K.K. Harouni. In "Nawabdin Electrician", Harouni's indispensable electrician, Nawab, excels at his work and at home, raising 12 daughters and one son by virtue of his cunning and ingenuity qualities that allow him to triumph over entrenched poverty and outlive a robber bent on stealing his livelihood. Women are especially vulnerable without the protection of family and marriage ties, as the protagonist of "Saleema" learns: a maid in the Harouni mansion who cultivates a love affair with an older servant, Saleema is left with a baby and without recourse when her lover must honor his first family and renounce her. Similarly, the women who become lovers of powerful men, as in the title story and in "Provide, Provide", fall into disgrace and poverty with the death of their patrons. Mueenuddin's story collection is a remarkably confident debut.

363.7 F899 Friedman, Thomas L. *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: How We Need a Green Revolution – And How It Can Renew America*. 2008.

Three-time Pulitzer Prize winner Friedman mapped the level economic playing field created by digital technology and global free-market capitalism in *The World Is Flat* (2005). He now adds two crucial elements to his galvanizing analysis of the state of the world: climate change and the population explosion. We're trapped in a catastrophic vicious circle: burning fossil fuels accelerates global warming as the human population increases and the global economy grows, so, too, does oil consumption. Add the malevolence of mega-rich petrodicatorships and America's precipitous decline, and the need for change is urgent. Backed by flotillas of facts and observations gathered on his investigative journeys to the Middle East, China, India, and beyond, Friedman is lashing in his critique of America's failure to face energy and climate realities. Yet his belief in America's capacity for innovation inspires his call for Code Green, a concerted effort to take the lead in developing clean power and energy-efficiency systems and preserving

the natural world. Fluent in business, politics, and science, Friedman cogently explains the complex challenges we face, reminds us of our adaptability, and defines environmentalism as the key to peace and democracy.

PRO 305.235 Hin Hinshaw, Stephen. *The Triple Bind Saving Our Teenage Girls from Today's Pressures*. 2009.

Hinshaw, chair of UC-Berkeley's psychology department and an authority on childhood ADHD, enters a cultural minefield: why do today's teenage girls, despite enormous opportunities, seem crippled by increased rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, violence and suicide? Hinshaw's sweeping diagnosis is the triple bind, or society's expectation that young women possess traditionally feminine attributes such as empathy and selflessness, but also succeed in typically masculine arenas such as competitive sports and cutthroat career paths, and finally, generally conform to a narrow, unrealistic set of standards that allows for no alternative. Hinshaw identifies academic pressures, sexed-up pop culture, Internet voyeurism and girl-on-girl bullying as sources of overwhelming stress and conflicting ideals for girls. Hinshaw's final chapter looks at possible solutions. This balanced, thorough, compassionate title is required reading for teachers, parents, and teens of both genders.

F P362k Pearson, Ridley. *Killer View*. 2008.

"A terrific villain, an appealing protagonist, and breakneck pacing" – *Boston Sunday Globe*. At the start of bestseller Pearson's tension-filled sequel to *Killer Weekend*, (Jove, 2008) a member of Blaine County sheriff Walt Fleming's search and rescue team is shot dead while looking for a missing skier during a snowstorm in Idaho. Soon after this tragedy, Walt's best friend, veterinarian Mark Aker, disappears; someone sexually assaults Aker's assistant; unexplained illnesses strike a nearby water-bottling facility; and hundreds of livestock die mysteriously. Walt realizes almost too late that the perplexing events are all tangentially tied to a masterfully planned domestic terrorist attack and he could have a front-row seat at a Ruby Ridgeline showdown. The conflict between the two worlds Walt serves, the obscenely affluent residents of Ketchum/Sun Valley and the locals who provided services for them, provides an ideal backdrop. Pearson's relentless sense of pacing and serpentine plot will have you furiously turning pages until the end.

Morton, Brian. *Starting Out in the Evening*. 1998. (paperback)

"They had never met, but he picked her out instantly, and he came toward her smiling. Old, fat, bald, leaning awkwardly on a cane. The man of her dreams." This tender, tragicomic novel revolves around three characters: Heather Wolfe (a highly driven, twenty-four-year-old graduate student), Leonard Schiller (a septuagenarian novelist of faded renown who is the subject of

Heather's thesis and her intellectual hero), and Ariel Schiller (Leonard's fortyish daughter, a vulnerable, somewhat aimless aerobics instructor). Heather arranges to meet with Leonard to gather information and resources for her thesis. She becomes more and more personally involved with him, which vexes Ariel. The complex relationships—between Heather and Leonard, between Ariel and Leonard, even between Leonard and his work—are exquisitely drawn. *Starting Out in the Evening* offers an insightful meditation upon literature, devotion, mortality, and the truest measure of a good life.

Lee, Min Jin. *Free Food for Millionaires*. 2008. (paperback)

A wholly absorbing novel, *Free Food for Millionaires* follows a diverse cast of compelling characters in contemporary New York through their searches for success, happiness, and love. The central protagonist, Casey Han, is a twenty-two-year-old Korean-American graduate of Princeton who, having been kicked out of her parents' house after a fight with her father, struggles to reconcile her expensive habits with her lackluster income. As Casey's credit-card debt grows and her relationship with her family falters, the narrative flows seamlessly through the minds of different people in her life. Her overbearing father longs for the respect he enjoyed in his native country, while her shy and sheltered mother despairs when an innocent crush spirals out of control. Ella, Casey's beautiful and seemingly perfect friend, struggles with her duties as a wife and mother after discovering that her husband is having an affair. These intimate perspectives of various people in Casey's life—as well as those of many others, from diverse classes and backgrounds—enrich her own story. Min Jin Lee's sympathy for each of them is apparent in this funny, tender, and insightful debut novel.

Verity, Jo. *Sweets from Morocco*. 2009. (paperback)

It's 1954 and children Tessa and Lewis Swinburne are most unimpressed by the arrival of baby brother Gordon. So much so that Tessa hatches a magic voodoo plot to make him disappear which involves gathering together some Gordon-related items and leaving them with a plasticine replica baby in a distant telephone box (bet they pressed button B while they were in there). To their utter horror some weeks later Gordon disappears from his pram left outside the paper shop by Mr. Swinburne and the family's troubles begin in earnest. Understandably father Dick and mother Peggy are utterly devastated, Tessa and Lewis are wildly confused and frightened and at this point it becomes clear that life may never be the same for the Swinburnes ever again. The tendrils of the tragedy insinuate themselves into the lives of each member of the family as Gordon casts his lengthening shadow of absence and blights the future. Each reacts differently to this 1950s tragedy and it is the historical placement that resonates here. What follows is an exceptionally well-written book, structured around sections, thus moving from events in 1954 and catching up with the family in 1962 in Book II, 1968 in Book III, 1976 in Book IV and so on right up to 2005 in Book VII.

Ryan, Kay. *The Niagara River*. 2005 (paperback)

Ms. Ryan was named the sixteenth Poet Laureate for 2008-2009 by the Library of Congress, but she is also the poet laureate of intangible surfaces and unclassified states of consciousness. A miniaturist in thrall to brevity and pinpoint imagery, she articulates a ghostly and unreal universe where life is -the film/ sandwiched/ between twin/ immensities/ of nothing. - Among her favorite domains are interim states of consciousness, such as the moment between wakefulness and sleep (-“Sometimes before/ going to sleep a person/ senses the give/ behind the last given” -), and the unexplored conceptual territory beneath common expressions (-“Oh if it were/ only the other/ shoe hanging/ in space before/ joining its mate. If the undropped/ didn't congregate/ with the undropped “-). Gently inquiring, modestly rhymed, her poems seem whispered rather than spoken, as if reluctant to disturb the -sourceless texture - of their subjects. She offers enough vivid images (the -doily edges of oceans -) and pithy insights (-“A life should leave/ deep tracks “-) to keep readers moving on to the next poem. Recommended poet of the 2008-2009 NCS Faculty Poetry Circle.

Compiled by K.Craver from various reviews. 4/2009