

The View From Vis Blog (www.visitation.net/campus-life/blog) The Fifth Annual Visitation Book Blog

Merry Christmas! In keeping with what has become a special reading tradition here at Visitation, I am pleased to share with you the fifth annual book blog – a list of book recommendations by our school’s faculty and staff.

I love this annual list of books, which offers suggestions for everyone from kids through adults, and I am looking forward to picking up some of these awesome recommendations, especially since my own reading this year has included works that ranged from modern political issues to best practices in school leadership. Sadly, I didn’t find much to recommend to the Vis community from that stack. But I know that during this long winter, I will be curling up with several of these books – and I can’t wait to read some of the children’s book suggestions to my own granddaughter.

On December 14 and 15, we all will have the chance to purchase these books at a special holiday book boutique, hosted by Wild Rumpus Bookstore of Minneapolis. Wild Rumpus will be here from 2-5 p.m. in the Heart both days so that families can shop for books that are featured on this list. The Peddler School Store will also host extended hours that day. I look forward to seeing you there.

Merry Christmas and happy reading!

Rene Gavic
Visitation Head of School

Books for Children:

***Bread and Roses, Too* by Katherine Paterson.** I would have missed this historical novel by the author of beloved books from my youth (*Bridge to Terabithia*, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* and *Jacob Have I Loved*) were it not for our librarian, Lucy Foley. *Bread and Roses, Too* is set in Massachusetts in 1912, and tells the story of Rosa, an Italian immigrant living in a tenement with her widowed mother, her older sister, Anna, and her baby brother, Ricci. Rosa’s mother and older sister work at the textile mills in Lawrence, where unfair practices are being protested by the workers. Soon, Rosa’s mother and sister are singing union songs and joining in a strike. Rosa’s teacher is anti-union and calls the strikers rabble-rousers; Rosa is afraid her mother and Anna will be jailed and her family will be separated. As the strike makes life dangerous in the city, arrangements are made for the children of striking workers to be sent away to be fostered by families in Barre, Vermont. On the train, Rosa finds a stowaway boy she recognizes from Lawrence. Jake begs Rosa to pretend he is her older brother and convince her foster family to take him in, too. Rosa does so, reluctantly, sensing that Jake is hiding something. Based on true events and including real historical figures, this fictional tale is an accessible introduction for young readers to the early American immigrant

experience, to unfair labor practices and the hardship they created, and to the birth of the labor movement and unions. I loved this book. Recommended for ages 10 and up by Jeanne Scanlan Doyle.

***Chicks and Salsa* by Aaron Reynolds.** My young daughters and I have thoroughly enjoyed reading this book together. The animals on Nuthatcher farm are tired of eating chicken feed and slop. So the rooster takes it upon himself to remedy the situation by raiding the farmer's vegetable garden. The illustrations are vibrant and humorous. My children and I have just as much fun describing the pictures as we do reading the book. A bonus: there are some fun and easy Mexican food recipes at the end of the book!

Recommended by Amanda Rosas.

Set during an era of propaganda and suspected spies, ***Cloud and Wallfish* by Anne Nesbet** is the author's avenue for sharing what life was like on the other side of the Wall in East Berlin in 1989. Secret Files, fitting for the time period, are interspersed throughout the novel and provide the reader with historical context and explanations. The story, though, is about the friendship of Noah Keller (or Jonah Brown as he is called in East Berlin), an American boy with an "astonishing stutter," and a little German girl named Claudia. (You may ask why this boy has two names. Good question. Keep asking why.) A unique take on the common theme of loyalty, *Cloud and Wallfish* is recommended for 5th-8th grade boys and girls. Recommended by Lucile Foley.

There is a special place in heaven for the authors of high/low books. These books are geared towards reluctant readers and are of high interest yet low reading level. **Chris Kreie** is one of these special authors. He has written *The Jake Maddox* series of sports books and a few titles for the *Sports Illustrated Kids Graphic Novels*. Our favorite is the scary story of ***The Curse of Raven Lake*** – the perfect introduction to spooky storytelling for children in grades 2-4. Recommended by Tracey Joyce.

***Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan.** My daughter Maia loves cultural artifacts – all my children do, in fact – but it was Maia who asked for the old-fashioned typewriter she received for her birthday one year and who loves to hear stories about “the olden days” when I was her age (I mean, really! I’m not that old!). What does this have to do with Ryan’s novel about a 13-year old girl whose fortunes change during the Mexican Revolution and a flight to the border that leaves her fatherless and poverty-stricken in a foreign country? Everything! Once again, through the power of a novel, my 10-year old was able to learn about a time in history that can seem illusory and alien to children of her day and age who have no experience with immigration, poverty and political uprisings. Young Esperanza loses her father, her wealth and social class—even her family home and country—through the machinations of bandits and a corrupt uncle. Fleeing to the United States, Esperanza and her mother must begin a new life in very different circumstances: as migrant workers in a California valley during the Great Depression. Story sound familiar? It might remind you of Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, but Ryan bases her narrative on the actual life of her grandmother, Esperanza Ortega Muñoz, who did some of the very things our fictional Esperanza does. Ryan tells her own family stories, allowing young readers to experience a sometimes

forgotten and often-ignored world as well as gain empathy for another person across socio-economic borders. A beautiful and captivating read. Recommended by Nicole Sutton.

***Hired Girl* by Laura Amy Schlitz** will appeal to adolescent, historical fiction enthusiasts. Joan Skraggs, a fourteen-year old girl, runs away from her father's farm to work for a wealthy, Jewish family in Baltimore. Even though she pretends to be older than she is, Jane's young teenage voice comes through in her diary entries. We see her experiencing the conveniences of city-life in 1911, falling in love for the first time, and learning about the Jewish customs of the family she serves. I definitely recommend this book! Recommended by Lucile Foley.

***I'm in Charge of Celebrations* by Byrd Baylor and illustrated by Peter Parnall.** This story truly takes St. Jane's words to heart as the young girl in the book takes notice of all the wonder in nature that surrounds her and celebrates these special moments. "You can tell what's worth a celebration because your heart will POUND and you'll feel like you're standing on top of a mountain and you'll catch your breath like you were breathing some new kind of air." Rainbow Celebration Day is celebrated after the young girl believes herself to be the only one in the world who has shared watching the magic of a rainbow alongside a standing rabbit. Along the way, the young girl celebrates 108 special celebrations (not including school closings) that will take your breath away. Recommended by Steve Wright.

***Interrupting Chicken* by David Ezra Stein.** This 2011 Caldecott Honor book is the perfect book to read with my second-grade son, who is a reluctant reader. He doesn't really like to read, but he *loves* to interrupt, so as we partner-read this story, he enthusiastically reads his "interrupting chicken" parts! The story begins as the dad has agreed to read a bedtime story to his son under the condition that the son does not interrupt him while he reads. Of course, chicken cannot help but interrupt with hilarious endings to the bedtime tales dad is reading, and hilarity ensues. Recommended by Tracey Joyce.

***The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick.** My daughter loved reading about Hugo, a boy who lives within the walls of a train station in Paris. She described the book as "the kind of book you keep reading in the dark even though you should be sleeping." I'm not sure I could give a better endorsement. This book weaves beautiful illustrations in with the text and would be a wonderful Christmas gift. Recommended by Sarah Patterson.

***Iron Hearted Violet* by Kelly Barnhill.** Ms. Barnhill's young adult literature is fun for anyone over the age of 12. Ms. Barnhill, author of *The Mostly True Story of Jack* and *The Witch's Boy*, has created another empowering, well-written and engaging read. She turns the princess/dragon/magic stories upside down by creating characters that are clever, funny and brave. Violet is a princess who isn't beautiful, but she is pretty adventurous and very smart. After finding the "forbidden book," Violet, her friend Demetrius, and

an old dragon embark on an important mission that changes an entire kingdom. This book is perfect for all those princesses who love dancing in the rain, making mud cakes, and sharing their extensive storytelling skills. Recommended by Randi Rexroth.

Our family's favorite book is ***Kiss the Cow*, written by Phyllis Root and illustrated with amazing and delightful detail by Will Hillenbrand**. The main character, Annalisa, is a strong-willed little girl who is a little bit naughty. Luella is the beautiful, big-eyed cow that provides for Annalisa and her large number of siblings. Recommended by Clare Bluhm.

***Ladybug Girl Says Goodnight* by Jacky Davis**. My daughters love all of the Ladybug Girl books, probably because “Bingo” the dog looks just like our dog! But *Ladybug Girl Says Goodnight* is one of our favorites. It is short and wonderfully sweet. The title says it all—Ladybug Girl takes a bath, puts on pajamas, snuggles into bed with Bingo and goes to sleep. The perfect book for bedtime! Recommended for ages 0-5 by Amanda Rosas.

***The Midnight Library* by Kazuno Kohara** is a sweet picture book about a young librarian who takes care of a library with the aid of three little owls. During the course of an evening, the librarian and her assistants help a band of squirrels find the activity room, read a book to a wolf, teach a tortoise how to check out a book, and guide the neighborhood wildlife through a night of reading. The illustrations are darling; recommended for ages 3-5 by Elizabeth Arnstein.

***Moon Over Manifest* by Clare Vanderpool** won the 2011 Newbery Medal and was one of my favorite books over the summer. During the Depression, Abilene Tucker is sent to live in Manifest, Kansas, where she tries to learn about her father's past from the various small-town folks who knew him. The book had my attention from the beginning, and I couldn't wait to read what would happen next. It's a story of community, loss and a young girl finding her father. Recommended for children in 5th-8th grades by Lucile Foley.

***Mother Bruce* by Ryan T. Higgins**. Bruce the bear finds himself in quite the predicament when the eggs he intends to eat for supper turn out to be live goslings. Bruce tries his hardest to get rid of this gaggle of geese, but what is a bear to do when they are convinced you are their mother? My two-year-old loved this book the first time I read it to him, and he can't get enough of looking at the pictures. It is also an entertaining story for the adult reading it with the child. Recommended by Andrea Hofland.

***My Dog, Bob* by Richard Torrey**. Mimi thinks her dog Truffles is the best dog ever – much better than Bob the Dog, because Truffles can sit, speak and fetch sticks. As Mimi proudly shows off Truffles' talents and then swaggers away, Bob and his owner (and the reader) get the last laugh because, as it turns out, Bob

can cook, drive and play golf with Dad. This is a sweet book about humility, hidden gifts and a family's love for their dog. Recommended for ages 3-5 by Elizabeth Arnstein.

***Rad American Women A-Z* and *Rad Women Worldwide* by Kate Schatz and illustrated by Miriam Klein Stahl.** From the well-known to the unsung heroes, Schatz tells the stories of awesome women in these two books. The woodcut illustrations by Stahl are colorful works of art. I met new women and learned more about those I already knew: Hatshepsut and Malala Yousafzi to Poly Styrene and Liv Arnesen and Ann Bancroft to the Grimké sisters and Sonia Sotomayor. Not familiar with these names? Then you need to read these books! "In past generations, a globe was an essential gift for any child, a way for her/him/them to sense the wide, round scope of the world without even having to travel. *Rad Women Worldwide* is this moment's equivalent of the globe—a gift that will help every child understand the world they share with powerful women everywhere." - Sarah Jones, Tony-Award winning performer, poet, and UNICEF ambassador. Recommended for kindergarteners through adults by Jennifer Arriola and Amanda Rosas.

***Red: A Crayon's Story*, written and illustrated by Michael Hall.** This picture book could be the perfect tonic after a divisive presidential election. The book celebrates being true to our convictions, even when the pencil sharpener tells you that you are not sharp enough or Steel Gray crayon tells you to apply yourself more. The takeaway is that differences are not only okay, differences are a gift we should all celebrate. Recommended by Steve Wright.

***The Table Where Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor and illustrated by Peter Parnall.** Ever feel that you are the only sensible one in your family? Mountain Girl calls a family meeting to discuss money and the fact that she believes they don't have enough. During the course of this meeting, the family makes a list of all the special ways they get *paid*. Sunsets, sleeping under the stars, all the animals each family member has seen out in the wild—not in a zoo; soon their list grows into the millions, and Mountain Girl begins to change her way of thinking. Maybe she is sitting at a table where rich people sit. Recommended by Steve Wright.

***The Three Questions*. Written and illustrated by Jon Muth** and adapted from a story by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. Nikolai is a young boy on a quest to do good things, but doesn't know how. During the story, Nikolai discovers that once he answers three questions he'll have the answers he needs to do good: *What is the best time to do things? Who is most important? What is the right thing to do?* On his journey, he is helped by his friends: a heron, a monkey and a dog. In the end, Nikolai learns that the answers to these key questions are not only the key to his happiness but also a key for how to live a selfless life. Recommended by Steve Wright.

***Vincent Paints His House* by Tedd Arnold.** Vincent van Gogh needs to paint his house, but he is having trouble deciding what color to choose. The little critters who also live in Vincent's house – the spider, the butterfly, the bird, and more – all of have very strong opinions of what color Vincent should use, and each tries to persuade him. In addition to having great illustrations, this book also teaches children the fancier names for colors, like crimson, cerulean, emerald, and ebony. Our youngest child liked this book so much that we had to check it out of the library three times in a row! Recommended for ages 3-5 by Elizabeth Arnstein.

***The War That Saved My Life* by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley.** Meet Ada. She is extraordinary. I will let you discover why, but I am confident that you will rejoice in her boldness, mist at her resolve, and quite possibly have the urge to bang your head against the wall at her sheer stubbornness. Set in wartime England, this Newbery Honor-winning novel tells the story of a resourceful young girl, Ada, and her little brother, Jamie, as they escape both the dangers of their life at home and the bombs of the London Blitz. *The War That Saved My Life* weaves adventure, historical drama and family turmoil into the page-turning tale of a girl and her brother that you can't help rooting for (and marveling at)! It is my top juvenile book choice for 2016, and we have read it in our 6th Grade Book Club both spring and fall this year. It is resoundingly and immediately beloved by both my 6th grade boys and girls. Many students are unable to put it down and end up reading it in one or two sittings! Meet Ada, and you'll never forget her. Perfect for 4th-6th graders, but enjoyed by all. Recommended by Sarah Ritzenthaler

***Zoobreak (Swindle #2)* by Gordon Korman.** My kids loved the audiobook of this story! Griffin Bing and his group of friends formulate a plan to save Savannah's pet monkey, who has been stolen by a visiting traveling zoo. As you'd imagine, they encounter setbacks and obstacles along the way. My kids could not wait to hear if Griffin and his gang would succeed. Recommended by Sarah Patterson

Nonfiction:

***Becoming Dr. Q: My Journey from Migrant Farm Worker to Brain Surgeon* by Alfredo Quinones-Hinojosa and Mim Eichler Rivas.** *Becoming Dr. Q* is the story of an inspirational young man who left Mexico when his sister died, realizing that the only hope his family had was a life in the United States. It is the story of Alfredo Quiñones-Hinojosa, who, as an undocumented farm worker, picked vegetables with the very hands that today perform cutting-edge research and surgery to cure brain cancer. It is a story of persistence, hard work, family and the power of the spirit. Today Dr. Q is the head neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital, continuing to inspire hope in those he mentors. Recommended by Francie Cutter Sullivan.

Breaking Through: Catholic Women Speak for Themselves is a collection of essays written by various Catholic women and edited by Helen M. Alvaré. The essays speak to many real and relevant topics. What I appreciated most was each woman's honesty in recounting her experience, thoughts and struggles with a particular topic. I think this is a good book to spark discussions or personal reflection about what it means to be a Catholic woman in today's culture. Recommended for 9th graders to adults by Lucile Foley.

***The Good Good Pig* by Sy Montgomery.** Author Sy Montgomery is a naturalist and animal enthusiast. I recently went to hear her speak after reading a glowing review in the *Pioneer Press* about her latest book *The Soul of an Octopus* about octopuses. (She clarified that the correct pluralization is NOT “octopi.” It’s a word of Latin origin, not Greek. In her charming presentation, she spoke with true affection about a relationship she had with an octopus called Athena. She often said that she relates better to animals than to humans. But I digress...) One of her early books is about a sickly pig she brought home in a shoebox and raised on her New England farm. Without giving much more away, the adventures she, her relatives, her neighbors, and the townfolks have with Christopher Hogwood (the pig was named after the conductor!) are sweet and hilarious. I will be eagerly reading her other books: *Search for the Golden Moon Bear*, *Journey of the Pink Dolphins*, and others over the winter. These are easy yet touching reads! Recommended by Ann Mattson

***If the Oceans Were Ink: An Unlikely Friendship and a Journey to the Heart of the Quran* by Carla Power.** As I strive to know and accept others in our global community, this book not only helped me better understand the teachings of the Koran, but confirmed for me that it is in relationships that we truly come to appreciate the beauty and richness of our diverse experiences of God and of the world. Recommended for mature adolescents and adults by Renee Genereux.

I heard or read somewhere that Mother Theresa carried with her on her travels a copy of **Fulton J. Sheen’s *Life of Christ***. That tidbit was reason enough for me to find a copy of the book, and I can see why a saintly woman would carry such a book. Archbishop Sheen follows the life of Christ episode by episode, adding research and insight into the most significant (and overlooked) moments of the life of Jesus Christ. Sheen’s central theme is how the cross, the mission of the Messiah, cast its shadow on every moment of Christ’s life on earth. I highly recommend Sheen’s *Life of Christ* for those desiring to transform their spiritual reading into quiet meditative prayer. Recommended by Christine Malovrh.

***Lots of Candles, Plenty of Cake*. Anna Quindlen** is known for her nonfiction work, and this book is one to recommend. In marvelous writing, Quindlen writes about marriage, motherhood, professional life and getting older. Her viewpoints are clever and convincing – the kind of nonfiction that any reader would appreciate. Recommended by Rita Speltz.

***Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town* by Jon Krakauer.** This book is an important read, but also a disturbing one. In order to change the way sexual assault victims are viewed and

treated, we must look deep into our institutional laws, practices and language. This book helps us do just that, with the hope that the culture of rape that currently prevails will radically change. Recommended for adults by Amanda Rosas.

***A Mother's Reckoning: Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy* by Sue Klebold.** This is a raw and powerful work written by the mother of Dylan Klebold, one of the two boys behind the Columbine High School shooting, as she tries to make sense of what her son did and how to live with the consequences of his actions. Her search for what went wrong, what she missed and what she dismissed as teenage angst pulled at my heartstrings. I felt her pain – her “what if I just tried more often or harder,” her feeling of being on that teenage roller-coaster of emotions – and could relate as a parent. She takes you on her journey, her days and years of utter despair, the disbelief that this act was done at the hands of her son, as well as her inability to comprehend that she didn't know her own child. I felt part of her journey as she struggled to mourn the loss of her baby while witnessing him being played out as an unimaginable monster. After experiencing this piece of honest, tragic life, I vowed never to judge another person. Everyone has a story and history that needs to be shared, and I need to walk in their shoes before I express any difference. Recommended by Vickey Dudley.

As I read ***Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky**, I felt as if I were on a world tour across civilizations and cultures as I learned the value of salt as a life-sustaining substance. I loved the virtual tour of the salt works in ancient China, through Egyptian dynasties, into the Bavarian mountains and Italian settlements. The author traces the procurement of salt and its availability as having power in establishing trade routes, building settlements and causing both turf battles and scientific advancement. I will never again consider salt just a necessary table condiment alongside my pepper grinder. Recommended by Anne Williams.

***Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat* by Hal Herzog.** This book examines our relationship with the animals in our lives. “Some we love” focuses on our pets – our dogs and cats and how we choose our special buddies and how they choose us. “Some we hate” are the pests in our lives, including rats, spiders and even bats. We are given an insight into their lives and how they survive in their world and in ours. “Some we eat” is the food on our table. We learn of the life that chickens and cows and pigs live before they become our sustenance. This book is an eye opener and makes you think before you buy those chicken nuggets from McDonald's. It's an enjoyable and very informative read. Recommended for older students and adults by Cleo Layer.

***Tribe* by Sebastian Junger.** Perhaps the Western World has entered into an intellectual moment, which could be called the Paleo moment as biologists, nutritionists, ecologists *et alia* examine life before the industrial age. Within the context of this moment, Sebastian Junger takes a critical look at post-industrial

societies and the collapse of small communities, or rather, our tribes. This essay was born from an article he wrote chronicling his experience with PTSD after his work as a war correspondent in Afghanistan. His research uncovered the startling fact that more veterans exhibit the symptoms of PTSD upon returning home than the actual number of soldiers who experienced direct combat. As he investigated the possible reasons for the statistical disparity, he took his lens away from the war and applied it to modern society. *Tribes: On Homecoming and Belonging* provides a challenge to readers to evaluate the necessity of community. This book is recommended for all readers high school and above. Recommended by Christine Malovrh.

***The Warmth of Other Suns : The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson.**

Last summer, the Visitation faculty and staff read *The Warmth of Other Suns*, an engaging, exploration of what became known as the Great Migration, the exodus of over six million African Americans from the deep South to destinations north and west in the twentieth century. At first, I felt some trepidation about the 1000+ page piece of non-fiction, even though it was a National Book Critics Circle Award Winner and a *New York Times* best seller. Once I began reading though, I could not put it down and finished in five days. It's that good. Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, cleverly hooks readers' interest by tracing the actual migration stories of three individuals--Ida Mae Brandon Gladney, George Swanson Starling, and Robert Joseph Pershing Foster—against the facts and figures of this massive social movement in pursuit of the American Dream. The vivid details of the three protagonists' struggles and their single-minded, determined pursuit of better lives can inspire us all. In a time when the racial divide still persistently tears at the fabric of American society, this book draws understanding and compassion out of its readers. Gorgeous writing, compelling stories, and eye-opening reality: All combine to make one of the best reads of the year. Recommended by Kathryn Hagerty.

***When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi.** I read this book just months after my own brother died, so it was especially poignant for me. And unexpectedly, though I knew that the end of the journey of the author was death, this book remains one of the most inspirational, moving and literarily beautiful memoirs I've ever read. I recommend it for adults and mature adolescents. Following is an excerpt from a *New York Times* review: "When Dr. Paul Kalanithi sent his best friend an email in May 2013 revealing that he had terminal cancer, he wrote: 'The good news is that I've already outlived two Brontës, Keats and Stephen Crane. The bad news is that I haven't written anything.' It was a jokey way of dealing with the unthinkable but also an indication of Dr. Kalanithi's tremendous ambition. He had led a fascinating life and was not about to leave it unchronicled. The bittersweet news is that in the 22 months left to him, Dr. Kalanithi, who died at 37, went on to write a great, indelible book, *When Breath Becomes Air*." Recommended by Renee Genereux.

Fiction:

***Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje.** Set in Sri Lanka, this story follows two people who examine the dead bodies found in the refuse caused by a civil war in the country. The author, who also wrote *The English Patient*, is from Sri Lanka and writes elegantly about this man and woman who are passionate about finding clues to ending the longtime war between factions within Sri Lanka. Recommended by Rita Speltz.

***Animal Dreams* by Barbara Kingsolver.** This is one of the few books I continuously return to and read over and over again. It is nourishment for the soul and spirit. Cody returns to her small hometown and childhood home after breaking up with her boyfriend to care for her sick father. She takes a job teaching science at the high school and begins confronting and reconnecting with events and people from her past. Barbara Kingsolver beautifully creates characters in the book that resemble women from my own life experience growing up in the Southwest. I highly recommend this book for ages 16 and up. Recommended by Amanda Rosas.

***Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh.** The story opens with Charles Ryder, a captain in the British Army in the 1940s, being billeted at the Brideshead estate. In flashbacks, he reminisces about his many years associated with the Flyte family: Lord and Lady Marchmain and their four adult children. Charles, from a middle class family, is enamored with Sebastian, a beautiful, young man whom he met in his first year at Oxford in 1922. Sebastian lives the decadent, wild life that Charles has always yearned for. Sebastian invites Charles to live with them at Brideshead the summer after freshman year. Charles falls in love with Julia, Sebastian's sister, a clever, self-indulgent young heiress. He soon realizes that their world is not as it seems, and Charles watches helplessly as it implodes beyond repair. Recommended for high school and adults by Cleo Layer.

***Cane River* by Lalita Tademy.** In this book, the author creates a novelized history of her family, depicting the lives of four generations of her slave ancestors. For me, *Cane River* served as a somber reminder of the grave injustices that African-Americans faced both during slavery and in the post-Civil War Reconstruction era. Tademy succeeds in depicting the complicated relationships between slaves and their owners, where both parties needed each other for survival. With depictions of four strong women, this book brings the harsh realities of slave women to life. Recommended by Sarah Patterson.

***The Couple Next Door* by Shari Lapena.** It's every parent's worst nightmare: Anne and Marco Conti return home from a dinner party across the street to find their front door open and their infant daughter missing. As the book progresses, the reader (along with the detective on the kidnapping case) is pulled in

different directions in search of a suspect. You will be captivated by *The Couple Next Door*, an exciting read all the way to the very last plot twist. Recommended by Liz Hewitt.

***Cowboys and East Indians* by Nina McConigley.** Set in Wyoming and India, the stories in *Cowboys and East Indians* explore both sides of the immigrant experience. The stories are fictional, but Ms. McConigley draws from her own childhood in Casper, Wyoming, with her sister, Indian mother and Irish father. The book includes stories about an oil-rig worker, a thieving babysitter, and a young woman trying to find her Indian identity; and the characters in these stories are so different and beautiful in their own way. Ms. McConigley navigates each character's story with ease. Feel free to read the stories out of order or the whole book from cover to cover. *Cowboys and East Indians* is well-written and thought-provoking. Recommended by Randi Rexroth.

This summer I read ***A Dog's Journey* by W. Bruce Cameron**; it is the sequel to the book *A Dog's Purpose*. I think this fiction book is for anyone –teens to adults. It follows Buddy, a dog whose mission is to fulfill his purpose with his family. If you have a love of dogs and want a well-written story of a family and their pet's adventures through their lives, this book is a must read, although it was quite the tear-jerker. Recommended by Jayme Simon.

***The Four Seasons* by Laura Corona.** Two sisters, one a baby and one barely three years old, are left at the front door of the Ospedali della Pieta (Hospital of Mercy) in Venice in the 1700s. *The Four Seasons* follows the sisters as they grow up in the most famous music schools of the 18th century, headed by the most respected composer of the time, Antonio Vivaldi. The Ospedali della Pieta is an orphanage where young girls and babies who were the product of the dalliances of aristocrats and the elite were dropped off and given a home. This safe haven and music school trained and produced some of the most skilled singers and instrumentalists of the day. Although this novel is historical fiction, the facts surrounding this era of music history are fascinating. Recommended by Randi Rexroth.

***Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse* by Faith Sullivan.** Set in Harvester, Minnesota, and written by Minnesota author Faith Sullivan, *Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse* is the story of recently widowed Nell Stillman, who now must raise her baby boy alone. While the book is a story of friendship and community, it is also about the power of a good book, for each night Nell ends her day reading her favorite author, P. G. Wodehouse. This, too, is the story of an ordinary life lived during the early 1900s, which takes us through both World Wars and examines many of life's struggles, joys and challenges. I missed Nell for days after finishing this book. Recommended by Francie Cutter Sullivan.

***A Great Reckoning* by Louise Penny.** In the 12th book in this series about Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, Penny again transports the reader to the tranquil, secret town of Three Pines in southern

Québec. You must read the series from the beginning (*Still Life* - 2005) to truly appreciate the development of the characters in Penny's series. Gamache is the embodiment of the Salesian virtue of Gentle Strength; a truly kind, thoughtful man who is deeply affected by the dark side of life that he must explore in his job. He is surrounded by the fascinating, quirky people of Three Pines and his colleagues in the Sûreté du Québec - not all of whom have his well-being in mind. *A Great Reckoning* has won many awards this year and was a bittersweet project for Penny. Her beloved husband, Michael, died shortly after the book's publication from complications of Alzheimer's Disease. Recommended by Jennifer Arriola.

***The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows.**

The World War II German invasion of Guernsey Island in the English Channel is a story told through letters. The main character is an author who decides to write a book about this story, living there to get to know and interview those who survived this miserable time. Once the reader gets used to this letter-style, the writing and the characters are all delightful. Recommended by Rita Speltz.

***Hag-Seed* by Margaret Atwood.** If you love Shakespeare, you will love this take on *The Tempest*. It is a play within a novel. Felix Phillips is ousted from his position as artistic director of a theater festival by his scheming assistant. Twelve years after the disruption of his plans for an epic staging of *The Tempest*, Felix's opportunity for retribution presents itself within his new position as the teacher of a Literacy Through Theatre class in a prison. With the help of his original Miranda and his creative cast and crew, will Felix heal himself while finding his revenge? Atwood perfectly syncs the Shakespearean characters with their modern-day counterparts. No need to read the original play before taking up this novel; Atwood provides a thorough summary. Recommended by Jennifer Arriola.

***In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Álvarez.** This is the extraordinary story of four of the Mirabal sisters, known as *Las Mariposas* — the Butterflies. On November 25, 1960, three of the four sisters were found in their wrecked car at the bottom of a steep cliff in the Dominican Republic, their voices forever silenced. This was the price they paid for opposing the dictatorship of General Rafael Trujillo. Told in the voices of the sisters, Minerva, Patria, María Teresa and the surviving sister, Dede, it is the story of the martyred sisters who stood against a powerful man. By resolution in December 1999, the United Nations General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This date was chosen to commemorate the brutal assassination, ordered by Rafael Trujillo, in 1960, of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic. *In the Time of the Butterflies* is their story. Recommended by Francie Cutter Sullivan.

***The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd.** Sisters Sarah and Nina, growing up in the South, are early abolitionists who could never tolerate their family's ownership of slaves. What is powerful about this story

is that chapters alternate between Sarah's life and beliefs and that of Handful, a slave in their home. Recommended by Rita Speltz.

A Man Called Ove (pronounced oh-vay) **by Fredrik Backman**. This book, written in Sweden, has taken Europe and, now, the U.S. by storm. A curmudgeon of a neighbor, Ove is a negative man who finds the worst in every situation and everybody. After losing his wife, who completed his life and understood his obscure ways, he loses his zest to live, yet he visits his wife's grave once a week to bring her flowers and ask her advice. Nosy, new neighbors have just moved in next door with two rambunctious little girls who will not leave him alone. They need his help, his tools and rides in his car. In return, they bring him food, their problems and their love. Over time, Ove's mundane lifestyle turns into a comical and deeply touching story of an unlikely friendship. Keep a tissue on hand too! You will think of Ove long after you turn the last page. Recommended for high school students and adults by Cleo Layer and Ann Marie Zeimetz.

Outlander **by Diana Gabaldon**. Do you like historical fiction? Do you love a sweeping romance? Are you okay with time travel? Then this is the book for you! (You may have seen the STARZ mini-series of the same name.) *Outlander* follows Claire Beauchamp Randall as she finds herself thrown back in time while on her second honeymoon in Inverness, Scotland. She travels back to 1742 during the Jacobite uprising and becomes part of an exciting and romantic adventure. This is a great read for adults – especially adults who love a good series. There are eight, soon to be nine, books in the *Outlander* series. Recommended by Randi Rexroth.

The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend **by Katarina Bivald**. Sara is a lonely bookseller in Sweden whose only friend is a pen pal from Broken Wheel, Iowa. The only thing they have in common is their love of books. When Sara finally gets up the nerve to visit Amy, she arrives to this broken down, nearly deserted town to find that Amy's funeral guests are just leaving. The few folks left in town insist that the bewildered Sara stay in Amy's house. They set about trying to make her visit comfortable in a town with nothing to do. Little did they know that Sara would start a bookstore, make friends and bring life back to their town and to everyone in it. Even the folks from Hope, a neighboring town, join in on the fun! Recommended for older students and adults by Cleo Layer.

The Secret Keeper **by Kate Morton**. Looking for a quick, engaging read? I sped through this novel, following the protagonist Laurel as she tries to unravel a decades-old family secret. Can she get the information she needs from her mother, who is near death? There is a great reveal at the end, and I finished reading this novel with admiration for the author who wove her story together seamlessly. Recommended by Sarah Patterson.

Children's books range from funny to serious, handling every variety of subject matter in kid-friendly ways. Education Meets Entertainment. From reading to science, there's nothing like the world of children's books to entertain and inform all at once. The Usborne "Look Inside" series is a prime example of an educational book that children will want to read over and over again. Look Inside: Your Body is a persistent bestseller, allowing kids to open up flaps to reveal the surprises of the human body inside. Original children books for free download, in PDF versions or read online, great kids stories for entertainment, author promotion, and improved literacy. 11 Popsicle Stick Crafts for Kids provides lots of fun and simple, easy to do ideas for young children using popsicle sticks and other items you will usually find around the house. Inside this free eBook, you'll find a wide variety of crafts made from Popsicle sticks. There's an entire section of Popsicle stick toys