Summer reading in the High School is designed to promote pleasure in reading, enabling students both to explore intellectual interests related to their coursework and to discover books and subjects they might not otherwise encounter.

To accomplish these goals, each student is asked to read three books from the lists for his or her grade level next year. At least one of these books must be chosen from the English list; the other two books may be chosen from either the general list or the English list. You can learn more about these books from our library catalog at this link: https://tinyurl.com/usn-srl-9

English Department Summer Reading List for Ninth Grade

We strongly urge you to investigate as many of these books as possible through your favorite library, bookstore, or website. Enjoy.

Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*
Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*
Bronte, *Jane Eyre*
Brunt, *Tell The Wolves I’m Home*
Cronn-Mills, *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*
Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*
Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*
Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
Hersey, *Hiroshima*
Hesse, *Siddhartha*
Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*
Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*
Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees*
Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*
Lahiri, *The Namesake*
Marchetta, *Jellicoe Road*
McBride, *The Color of Water*
Mishima, *The Sound of Waves*
Orwell, 1984
Potok, *The Chosen*
Quinn, *Ishmael*
Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*
Thomas, *The Hate U Give*
Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*
Wilson, *Alif the Unseen*
Yi, *Our Twisted Hero*
Yoon, *The Sun Is Also a Star*
General Summer Reading List for Ninth Grade

Several years ago, we broadened USN’s summer reading lists by adding this general list, comprised of suggestions from the entire high school faculty, to the English Department list. In the spring of 2010, a student from the class of 2008 who fondly remembers his experience with summer reading suggested that alumni might also make interesting contributions to the lists. We welcomed this idea. Therefore, in the list below, you will find suggestions for summer reading from both faculty and alumni.

Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie
Albom spends time with his chronically ill former teacher and in doing so learns important lessons about courage and life. (Betty White)

John Berger, Pig Earth
For the past twenty years Berger—novelist, painter, and art historian—has lived in a small village in the French Alps. Fascinated by the traditions and endangered way of life of the mountain people, he has written about them in both his fiction and his nonfiction. Set in a small village in the French Alps, Pig Earth relates the stories of skeptical, hard-working men and independent women. (Delia Seigenthaler)

Lawrence Block, The Burglar Who Liked to Quote Kipling or The Burglar Who Painted Like Mondrian
Murder mysteries in the Bernie Rhodenbarr series. Just one, please! (Robin Lynn Clinard)

Daniel James Brown, The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics
As Chowning Johnson Aguilera ’01 says, “If you haven’t read it, it’s one of my all-time top 10 books about the U.S. gold medal Olympic team during the buildup to World War II. Fantastic writing, story and peek into world and American history.” (Chowning Johnson Aguilera ’01)

Matthew Crawford, Shop Class as Soulcraft
Crawford is dissatisfied with the degree to which higher education trains us to be workers who deal only in the language of ideas, and he presents a dichotomy between doing work that relies on thinking (the abstract) and work that relies on doing (the concrete). If you’ve ever asked the question, “When am I actually going to use [insert academic subject here],” this might be a great read for you. (Justin Karpinos)

David Epstein, The Sports Gene
This book would make a great corollary to Gladwell’s Outliers (also on the list). Epstein investigates some of the genetic explanations for athletic genius. Epstein is less reliant on anecdotes than Gladwell is, so the “book-club” appeal is less, but the source material is arguably better. A fascinating read for anyone interested in understanding more about what 21st-century science can (and cannot) reliably say about human performance. (Justin Karpinos)

Darcy Frey, The Last Shot
This book follows three inner-city boys from Coney Island through their high school years, as they hope that basketball will give them a way out of the ghetto. Chris Meadors ’00 writes, “For any sports lovers, the preface will make them shiver and they won’t be able to put it down.” (Chris Meadors ’00)

Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers
Outliers is about how uncontrollable environmental factors have profound effects on our world. Ned Hildebrand ’06 finds this book “very interesting and a great nonfiction read.” (Ned Hildebrand ’06)

Laura Hillenbrand, Unbroken
During the Second World War, Louie Zamperini’s plane crashed into the ocean. According to Amazon.com, “Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater.” Michael Rosen ’82 says the book is about “the resolve of an individual whose plane is shot down over the ocean and survives insurmountable risks and dangers. It is also about inner strength and forgiveness.” (Michael Rosen ’82)
Christian Jacq, *Ramses, Volume 1: The Son of Light*

The author, a French Egyptologist, takes some basic historical facts about the Pharaoh Ramses and adds a healthy dose of imagination and speculation, creating an almost but not quite believable story in five volumes. This first volume introduces the reader to Ramses, Moses, Homer and assorted other historical figures as Ramses’ father tests his young son’s ability to rule. (Penny Phillips)

Roger Kahn, *The Boys of Summer*

“At a point in life when one is through with boyhood, but has not yet discovered how to be a man, it was my fortune to travel with the most marvelously appealing of teams.” The first sentence of this masterpiece of sporting literature sets its tone. The team is the mid-20th-century Brooklyn Dodgers, the team of Robinson and Snyder and Hodges and Reese, a team of great triumph and import. (Trent Boysen)

Sam Kean, *The Disappearing Spoon*

Science writer Kean takes readers through the most interesting parts of the periodic table of the elements, discussing how various elements were created, discovered, or used. From college pranks (like the disappearing spoon) to mind-bending experiments (like the creation of the Bose-Einstein condensate, an entirely new state of matter), from nefarious purposes (poisons, nuclear war) to medical miracles (X-rays, sulfam drugs), the elements take on a life of their own in this engaging and fascinating book. (Pamela Malinowski)

Christina Baker Kline, *Orphan Train*

This novel describes the lives of two girls raised by families other than their own. One girl grew up in the Midwest at the time of the Great Depression and one is growing up in Maine in contemporary times. Their paths cross when one is elderly and the other is in high school, trying to stay out of “Juvie.” An unlikely but important friendship develops, changing both women. The two women are interesting and compelling characters. Their lives are heart-wrenching and their friendship is heart-warming. The historical accounts of the social programs initiated early in the 1900s to relocate orphaned children from Northeast cities like NYC to rural communities in the Midwest are fascinating. (Debbie Van Slyke)

Beryl Markham, *West With the Night*

Beryl Markham’s family moved from England to Kenya when she was just a child. In this memoir, she writes about learning to hunt with the Maasai while growing up and then about her experiences as a bush pilot when she became an adult. Jesse Fleisher ’94, who worked in Africa as a member of the Peace Corps for several years, says this is one of his favorite Africa books. (Jesse Fleisher ’94)

Christopher McDougall, *Born to Run*

This book is a tall tale that happens, incredibly, to be a true story. In vivid and energetic language, McDougall explores our human history, discusses why people run ultramarathons, and introduces us to the Tarahumara tribe, which incorporates distance running into its cultural practices. Especially recommended for cross-country runners—it will inspire you to run more this summer than ever before. (Jeff Edmonds)

James A. Michener, *Mexico*

This book tells the story of an American journalist who travels to Mexico to report on a bullfight between two great matadors and, while there, discovers the history of his Mexican ancestors. (Rhonda Prater)

Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf*

Mowat’s account of the summer he lived alone in the frozen tundra observing the wolves is a remarkable tale. Through his studies he developed a deep affection for these wild creatures, which are of no threat to the caribou or man. (Tamara Berthel)

Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime*

Comedian and “Daily Show” host Trevor Noah grew up in a sharply divided South Africa, in which neither his white father nor his black mother could safely be seen in public with their biracial child. Noah doesn’t hesitate to describe the difficulties of living under apartheid (which formally ended when he was still a child), but he also invites the reader to laugh at the absurdities of life in South Africa and at his childhood adventures. (Kate Pritchard)
Lillian Rogers Parks (with Frances Spatz Leighton), *My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House*

The autobiograph of Lillian Rogers Parks, who was for thirty years a seamstress and hairdresser at the White House. While Parks acknowledges major historical and political events (her career ran from the Hoover administration through to Eisenhower), her primary focus is on the first families as people with the same strengths and frailties we all possess. (Penny Phillips)


A collection of offbeat essays by one of the greatest nature writers. (George Flatau)

Pietra Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*

McKenzie Andrews ’11 writes, “This is the first interesting nonfiction book I read in high school. It follows the life of a T-shirt, beginning with its start as raw materials and continuing until it is manufactured in China, sold in the U.S. and then donated to Africa. It offers insight into the international economy and globalization, while also giving a different perspective on something you see every day. Almost every product around us comes from another country and it’s especially important for us as Americans to understand this global supply chain. It’s also just cool to get a better understanding of how our world works.” (McKenzie Andrews ’11)

Robin Sloan, *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*

Clay Jannon leaves the world of technology to take a job as a clerk in a bookstore, He gradually realizes that he has stumbled into something more than a simple bricks-and-mortar bookstore. The store is a gathering place for a worldwide secret society searching for immortality. Just for fun. (Ann Wheeler)

Sonia Sotomayor, *My Beloved World*

In this recently published memoir, Sonia Sotomayor (a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court) writes about “her life from a Bronx housing project to the federal bench, a journey that offers an inspiring testament to her own extraordinary determination and the power of believing in oneself” (Amazon.com description). Mrs. Davies says, “I liked her discussion of her personal growth and the emphasis on her Hispanic background. It’s also interesting how she persevered in spite of hardships (diabetes, alcoholic father) and discrimination.” (Debbie Davies)

Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store*

An insightful look at the South from the perspective of a child growing up as a member of the only Jewish family in a small Tennessee town. (Steve Robins)

Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters*

On January 15, 2009, Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger had minutes to make the decision of whether to return a stricken plane to the airport for a safe landing or to attempt a risky emergency landing of US Airlines flight 1549 on the Hudson River. This memoir not only describes the details of this event, which became known as the “Miracle on the Hudson,” but also relays the lifetime experiences which led to his interest in becoming a pilot and his fascination with flying. The lively narratives and anecdotes engage readers as they realize that this life-saving decision was the culmination of a myriad of lessons derived from classmates, teachers, parents and colleagues. (Betty White)

Colin M. Turnbull, *The Forest People*

Written in 1961, this book is an anthropological account of the lives of the Mbuti pygmies, hunter-gatherers living in central Africa. Sam Warlick ’08 says that this book is “the most readable, engrossing, and lively anthropological text ever written,” showing us “not just the pygmies’ incredible rainforest lifestyle but also their lives and personalities as individuals, building a nonfiction story with both lovable, funny characters and an eye-opening view of people connected to nature.” (Sam Warlick ’08)


An American girl goes to high school in Chile. (In Spanish) (Rhonda Prater)


Sixteen-year-old Carlos Ayala of Cincinnati, Ohio, goes on a cruise with his family from the U.S. to the Yucatan. (In Spanish) (Rhonda Prater)
Abraham Verghese, *Cutting for Stone*
This novel is a coming-of-age story about twins and the girl they both love, spanning two continents (Africa and North America). The richness of their family story and their dedication to each other is enthralling. The writer, Abraham Verghese, was a doctor in East Tennessee when HIV/AIDS came into our world. (Anita Schmid)

Spencer Wells, *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*
Genetic research like the kind Wells does is revolutionizing human paleoanthropology and rewriting much of humanity’s growth, from a small group of maybe 100 individuals in Africa (50,000-100,000 years ago) to what will soon become our ten-billion-strong human population on Earth. (Steve Smail)

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*
Wright chronicles his childhood and adolescence as a black male in the segregated South. His inspirational journey—from suffering to survival to triumph—highlights larger systemic failures and the remarkable power of reading and finding one’s individual voice. (Dana Mayfield)