Summer reading in the High School is designed to promote pleasure in reading, enabling students both to explore intellectual interests related to their course work 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-12](https://tinyurl.com/usn-srl-12)

Advanced Placement courses, intended to be more rigorous than courses in the regular curriculum, may require additional summer assignments—see the separate AP Summer Reading page.

English Department Summer Reading List for Twelfth Grade

Students who plan to take AP English should read at least one starred book. Titles followed by a + are plays or collections of poems—please read two of these selections in lieu of a novel. We strongly urge you to investigate as many of these books as possible through your favorite library, bookstore or website. Enjoy.

**Classics of World Literature**
- Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*
- *Austen, Sense and Sensibility*
- Borges, *Labyrinths*
- *Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita*
- Camus, *The Plague*
- Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard +
- *Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment*
- Dumas (fils), *Camille*
- *Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury*
  - *Absalom, Absalom!*
- *Flaubert, Madame Bovary*
- *García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude*
- Goethe, *Faust, Part 1*
- Ibsen, *The Wild Duck +
- *Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
- Kafka, *The Trial*
- Lispector, *Family Ties*
- Lorca, *The Gypsy Ballads +
- Lorde, *The Black Unicorn +*
- Mahfouz, *Fountain and Tomb*
- *Nabokov, Speak, Memory*
- *Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas*
- Neruda, *Residence on Earth +*
- O’Brien, *The Third Policeman*
- Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author +*
- Rilke, *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus +*
- Rimbaud, *Illuminations +*
- Soseki, *Botchan*
- *Sterne, Tristram Shandy*

**Contemporary Voices in World Literature**
- Adiga, *The White Tiger*
- Amichai, *Selected Poetry +*
- Amis (Martin), *Time’s Arrow*
- *Atwood, Oryx and Crake*
- *Barker, Regeneration*
- Beattie, *The Burning House*
- Boland, *New Collected Poems +*
- Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden +*
- Flanagan, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*
- Foer, *Everything is Illuminated*
- Gyasi, *Homegoing*
- Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*
- Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*
- Mikhail, *The War Works Hard +*
- *Mitchell, The Bone Clocks*
- *Morrison, Beloved*
- Murakami, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*
- Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
- Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*
- Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- Ruiz Zafón, *The Shadow of the Wind*
- *Rushdie, The Ground Beneath Her Feet*
- Saramago, *Blindness*
- Smith, *Swing Time*
- Szymborska, *View with a Grain of Sand +*
- Tsukiyama, *The Samurai’s Garden*
- Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
General Summer Reading List for Twelfth 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.

Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams
In a book which is less an autobiography than a cultural, scientific, and political history of the times in which he lived, Adams describes changes during his life and explains what one must do to be successful in the rapidly changing modern world. Adams is the grandson and great-grandson of American presidents. (Steve Robins)

Tamar Adler, An Everlasting Meal: Cooking with Economy and Grace
Julia Sullivan ’01 describes this book as “a modern-day home economics that speaks to cooking and eating seasonally and sustainably with economy and grace.” She recommends it in order “to encourage the younger generation to explore food issues and to think about the cost of food” as well as to “bring them back to the kitchen and the table.” (Julia Sullivan ’01)

Natalie Angier, The Beauty of the Beastly

Aimee Bender, The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake
In this recent novel, Bender imagines that her narrator, Rose Edelstein, can taste the feelings that were present as everything she eats was created. This magical realist LA tale is at turns quirky, engaging and funny. (Freya Sachs)

Bill Bryson, A Short History of Nearly Everything
After interviewing scientists in a number of fields, Bryson wrote this engaging overview of scientific understanding of our world, intended for the general reader. His framework follows the history of the earth, but along the way he touches on fields like quantum physics and astronomy as well as the natural sciences. This book is filled with interesting scientific facts and the history of their discoveries. As Mr. Slovenski read this book he found something on nearly every page that made him say, “I can’t believe I didn’t know that, and I’m so glad I now do.” (Steve Slovenski and Ann Wheeler)

Italo Calvino, Cosmicomics
Amazon.com calls these inter-related short stories “enchanting stories about the evolution of the universe, with characters that are fashioned from mathematical formulae and cellular structures.” (Richard Swor ’09)

Sean Carroll, The Particle at the End of the Universe: How the Hunt for the Higgs Boson Leads Us to the Edge of a New World
This is a great review of the discovery of the Higgs Boson. The author describes what the silly thing is, its scientific importance, and the extremely protracted and costly search for it. (Will Mason ’85)

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring
In Rachel Carson’s seminal environmental text, she explores issues with DDT and its environmental impact. This book, scientifically fascinating and intriguingly written, helped launch the environmental movement. (Freya Sachs)

Ha-Joon Chang, Economics: The User’s Guide
Unlike the authors of Freakonomics (also on this list), Chang is adamant that economics is not a study of everything. He delivers an engaging and concise description of a modern economy. This book is an excellent introduction to different schools of economic thought and to why some countries are rich and others are poor. (Bill Wilson)
Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family’s Century of Art and Loss*
Nonfiction, but so fascinating it reads like fiction. When Edmund de Waal inherited a collection of netsuke—tiny Japanese wood and ivory carvings—he wanted to know more about the family members who had owned them, and how the collection had managed to survive, as most of the older generation of his family was killed or vanished in the Holocaust. Only his paternal uncle lived, ending up in Tokyo. De Waal starts there, with his uncle, and his search for his lost family history takes him on to Vienna, London and finally Odessa, Russia, where his great-grandfather and great-grand-uncle had a huge grain empire. (Kiki Forsythe ’68)

John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*
A classic text of political and educational theory, *Democracy and Education* is the masterwork of the greatest American philosopher of the 20th century. Dewey shows the intimate and interwoven relationship between democracy and education, challenging the reader to think carefully about the meaning of these concepts. This book is a great read for the philosophically minded student interested in thinking deeply and critically about the duties of democratic citizenship and the challenges that remain for education. (Jeff Edmonds)

David James Duncan, *The Brothers K*
A moving portrayal of four brothers and their conflicted parents as they passionately navigate the politics of the 1960s, religion, and their dreams of professional baseball. (Liz Mask)

Sylvia Earle, *The World is Blue*
Earth is an ocean planet; it looks blue from space, with only bits of brown and green where continents are located. Oceanographer Sylvia Earle has spent a lifetime learning about the ocean firsthand, and she collects in this book the wisdom she’s gained. Earle explains the roles the oceans play in our planet’s biosphere, how humans are changing the ocean, and what we can do to protect and preserve the vital functions the ocean fulfills for our own continued ability to call Earth our home. (Freya Sachs)

Jean Echenoz, *1914*
This brief, lyrical French novel tells the story of five boys from the same village who go off together to the First World War. (Ann Wheeler)

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*
This book documents the story of Lia Lee, the severely epileptic daughter of Hmong refugees in Merced, California. The views of the Hmong and Lia’s Western doctors are completely at odds with regard to what her condition is and how to care for her. The story that unfolds is one of misunderstandings and clashing cultures. Ian Trupin ’09 writes, “I read this book for an introductory course in medical anthropology, and it had a huge impact on how I think about health, illness, and medicine in the context of culture…. What Lia’s family and doctors have to go through, and the extent to which they are talking past each other on the subject of Lia’s condition, made me aware of the cultural construction and the subjectivity of health and illness for the first time in my life.” (Ian Trupin ’09)

Hans Fallada, *Every Man Dies Alone*
A remarkable fictionalized study of the psychology of resistance in Nazi Germany, particularly recommended for students enrolled in Social Conscience. (Matthew Haber)

Tana French, *In the Woods*
Rob Ryan is a detective on Dublin’s murder squad—but, unknown to most of his colleagues, he also has a mystery in his own past: when he was twelve years old, two of his best friends disappeared and he was found alone in the woods, wearing blood-covered shoes. He has never been able to remember what happened. In the book, as he (along with his professional partner and best friend, Cassie Maddox) investigates the murder of a young girl, he also begins to revisit the puzzle of his own past. (Ann Wheeler)

Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, 3.0 (3rd edition)*
According to Amazon.com, “The World Is Flat 3.0 is an essential update on globalization, its opportunities for individual empowerment, its achievements at lifting millions out of poverty, and its drawbacks—environmental, social, and political—powerfully illuminated by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Lexus and the Olive Tree.” (Eliot Goldfarb ’11)
Robert Galbraith, *The Cuckoo’s Calling*
In Robert Galbraith’s debut novel, Cormoran Strike, a private detective who lost his leg in the Afghanistan war, investigates the apparent suicide of a world-famous supermodel. A little while after the initial publication of the novel, readers were surprised and intrigued to learn that “Robert Galbraith” is really a pseudonym for J. K. Rowling. Although her style and approach to storytelling are very different in this novel than in the Harry Potter series, the characters are equally compelling. (Ann Wheeler)

Steven Galloway, *The Cellist of Sarajevo*
The core of this novel of the siege of Sarajevo in 1992 is the truly remarkable action of a cellist who witnesses a mortar killing twenty-two people standing in a breadline. For twenty-two days the cellist plays in the crater to memorialize their deaths. The novel examines the stories of four people and their attempts to survive and keep hold of their humanity during the longest siege of a capital city in modern warfare. (Pat Miletich)

Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien Años de Soledad*
A Latin American classic, this novel is a fictional account of the lives of the Buendía family. (It may be read in Spanish by AP students; the English translation, found on the “Classics of World Literature” list, also counts as a selection for senior English courses.) (Rhonda Prater)

Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That*
A British scholar and poet’s autobiography of his youth and experience in World War I. (Mackey Luffman)

Robert Grudin, *Time and the Art of Living*
Robert Grudin writes about the way we experience time: about the quality of our attention to the moments of our lives, about various ways to think about the way we spend our time—generally about how to live well. The book invites slow, thoughtful reading. This book is out of print, but used copies can be found online. (Ann Wheeler)

David Halberstam, *The Children*
In this book, David Halberstam tells the story of the college students who spearheaded the Nashville sit-ins in 1960 and went on to become leaders in the national Civil Rights movement. Every page of this massive book is fascinating, but you may choose to read only the section concerned with events in Nashville (Book 1, also titled “The Children,” through page 234). (Ann Wheeler)

Kent Haruf, *Plainsong*
In the small town of Holt, Colorado, a high school teacher is confronted with raising his two boys alone after their mother retreats first to the bedroom, then altogether. A teenage girl—her father long since disappeared, her mother unwilling to have her in the house—is pregnant, with nowhere to go. And out in the country, two brothers, elderly bachelors, work the family homestead. (Cindy Crenshaw)

Derrick Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*
Mr. Hubbell writes that “no book has made me think more deeply about how humans choose or avoid choosing how to organize themselves. Reading this book feels like a conversation between a group of people that disagree about many things but have a common purpose for their discussion—to take no way of being (or of thinking) for granted.” (Wilson Hubbell)

Adam Johnson, *The Orphan Master’s Son*
This book tells the winding tale of an orphan who, alternating between criminality and heroism, finds his way through the ranks of North Korean society. It’s part love story, part horrifying exploration of life under Kim Jong-il’s repressive totalitarian regime. (Matthew Haber)

Jon Katz, *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*
Journalist Katz follows the lives of two alienated small-town high school boys—both “geeks”—looking to escape social constraints and create satisfying lives. (Steve Robins)
John Keegan, The Face of Battle
This classic of military history is a short, accessible survey of three battles in Western Europe that had major consequences for their survivors and subsequent political events. It skillfully weaves together factors like psychology, animal behavior, technology and the impact of organizations to explain what the experience of battle was like then. In turn, this approach helps us understand why people in the past chose some actions over others. (Mackey Luffman)

Tony Kushner, Angels in America
This Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play in two parts (Millennium Approaches and Perestroika—be sure to read both) explores life in America during the 1980s, as the AIDS crisis escalates. According to Amazon.com’s review, the play “mixes magical realism with political speeches, high comedy with painful tragedy, and stitches it all together with a daring sense of irony and a moral vision that demands respect and attention.” (Catherine Coke)

David Laskin, The Family: Three Journeys into the Heart of the Twentieth Century
In this book, Laskin tells the true story of his family, beginning with his mid-1800s ancestors in the Pale of Settlement and the choices they made that changed their lives. Essentially, Jews in the Pale (western Russia) at some point chose between making Aliyah to Israel, escaping to America or remaining in Europe. The author does a nice job of piecing together the highly variable fates of his family members. (Ben Doochin ’78)

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx
A decade-long study of one family and the problems engendered by poverty. (Katie Greenebaum)

Charlie LeDuff, Detroit: An American Autopsy
According to Amazon.com, “Back in his broken hometown, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charlie LeDuff searches the ruins of Detroit for clues to his family’s troubled past. Once the richest city in America, the vanguard of America’s machine age—mass-production, blue-collar jobs, and automobiles—Detroit is now its poorest: America’s capital for unemployment, illiteracy, dropouts, and foreclosures. With the steel-eyed reportage that has become his trademark and the righteous indignation only a native son possesses, LeDuff sets out to uncover what destroyed his city. He beats on the doors of union bosses and homeless squatters, powerful businessmen and struggling homeowners and the ordinary people holding the city together by sheer determination.” (Catherine Coke)

Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything
According to Amazon.com, this book shows “that economics is, at root, the study of incentives—how people get what they want or need, especially when other people want or need the same thing.” James Parker ’81 writes that “this very readable book challenges you to look at problems from a different perspective.” (James Parker ’81)

Alan Lightman, The Discoveries: Great Breakthroughs in 20th-Century Science
A book chronicling the greatest scientific discoveries of last century, with summary introductions and the original papers heralding the discoveries. (George Flatau)

Helen Macdonald, H is for Hawk
Remembering her younger self’s fascination with T. H. White’s book The Goshawk, Helen Macdonald decided to raise and train a hawk as an outlet for her grief after her father died. In her book H is for Hawk, she simultaneously tells the story of learning more about the surprisingly complex life of T. H. White (best known as the writer of The Once and Future King), coming to terms with her grief for her father, and—most important—experiencing the fascinating, difficult process of living with and training a hawk. (Ann Wheeler)

Elizabeth Merrick, ed., This Is Not Chick Lit Original Stories by America’s Best Women Writers
The stories in this collection both challenge and subvert the stereotypes and assumptions around women’s fiction. With selections from a wide range of literary talents such as Aimee Bender, Jennifer Egan, and Curtis Sittenfeld, there is much wisdom to be found in these short pieces, as the writers investigate life’s difficult and often uncomfortable questions. Vulnerable and real, the characters encountered here won’t find solace in a Prada bag, and if anything sparkles on these pages it’s the prose itself. The universal subject matter and themes—love, identity, the search for belonging and connection—will appeal to female and male readers alike. (Rachel Levy Howell ’00)
Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*
In this book, Milosz writes from his own experience of living in Poland under Communist rule, explaining both the appeal and the abuses of the Communist system. Matt Kastrinsky ’05 “read this book for a History of Europe class in college and found it very fascinating and an enjoyable read. When Communism and Stalinism are widely demonized in Western history and cultural education, I found a story that explains the allure and reasoning behind intellectuals’ support of Stalinism to be a welcome addition to any well-rounded education, in terms of both cultural and historical trends.” (Matt Kastrinsky ’05)

Lorrie Moore, *Like Life*
Mordant and incredibly perceptive short stories about contemporary women and their tentative forays into real, messy life. (Katie Greenebaum)

Paul Murray, *Skippy Dies*
This is a very funny novel set in a tony but declining Irish boarding school. Whatever you’re thinking, it’s not that. Very contemporary, very large in scope, a little crass, a little sentimental, but always, always compelling. And, yes, Skippy does, in fact, die. (Katie Greenebaum)

Sylvia Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind: The Life of Mathematical Genius and Nobel Laureate John Nash*
A journalist’s moving depiction of John Nash, a leader in the academic world of mathematics who battled schizophrenia through much of his career. (Debbie Davies)

Ann Patchett, *State of Wonder*
In Nashville writer Ann Patchett’s novel, a research scientist travels reluctantly to South America in search of a missing colleague and an elderly mentor. As she travels deeper into the wilderness, her adventures become stranger and stranger. (Rosie Siman ’04)

Jodi Picoult, *Sing You Home*
*Sing You Home* starts with a tragedy that quickly turns into a life change for Zoe, the main character. This book deals with topics of religion, gay rights, suicidal teenagers, in vitro fertilization and parental rights. Once you pick it up, it is very hard to put down. (Robin Lynn Clinard)

Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*
In *The Botany of Desire*, Pollan examines the way that other species have influenced us, including the human desire for sweetness/apples and our desire for beauty/tulips. (Diane Sorrel)

Julia Scheeres, *Jesus Land*
Scheeres, who is white, and her adopted black brother, David, suffered cruel abuse as children, first in their strict Calvinist home in Indiana in the 1980s and then when their parents sent them to a fundamentalist reform school (more like a boot camp) in the Dominican Republic. Though their story is often heartbreaking, the tenderness between sister and brother in Scheeres’ memoir is ultimately uplifting and redemptive. (Katie Greenebaum)

Charles Seife, *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*
This quick “biography” traces the history of the number 0 from its inventors, the Babylonians, through its controversial effects on religion and society to its importance in our belief in quantum physics and the Big Bang. This witty book focuses on the ideas behind mathematical concepts and zero’s effect on them. Readers are invited to play along with Seife as he explains the many wonders zero reveals. (Debbie Davies and Nathan Schine ’09)

Carol Shields, *Unless*
Becky Salomon ’04 writes, “This book explores various roles of women in our society and the challenges young adults face as they try to find their paths. Carol Shields wrote it after being diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer; the book was published just before her death in 2003. It is a straightforward book without complicated themes or language, but it is a wonderful defense of ‘mundane’ domesticity.” (Becky Salomon ’04)

Andrew Solomon, *The Noonday Demon*
Solomon discusses the experience of depression, including the disease’s various treatments and the influence of politics and big business on how it is perceived. (Katie Greenebaum)
Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*  
According to Amazon.com, “Only once in a while does a writer come along who defies comparison—a writer so original, he redefines the way we look at the world. Neal Stephenson is such a writer and *Snow Crash* is such a novel, weaving virtual reality, Sumerian myth, and just about everything in between with a cool, hip cybersensibility to bring us the gigathriller of the information age.” Elizabeth Reiland ’07 writes that this book is “well-loved by people in tech fields” and that “it also makes me think about different aspects of the world in ways I might not otherwise have even considered.” (Elizabeth Reiland ’07)

Amy Tan, *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*  
A novel about the relationship between a Chinese-born mother who is losing her memories and her American-born daughter who learns about her mother’s past. (Robin Lynn Clinard)

Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*  
When Theo Decker is thirteen years old, his mother is killed in an explosion while they are visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Stunned and confused, he staggers out with one of the paintings: *The Goldfinch* by Carel Fabritius. As Theo moves from the Park Avenue apartment of a classmate to his father’s house in Las Vegas, as he becomes an art dealer and drug addict, as he gets involved with the Russian mob, he always carries the painting with him. This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is filled with engaging characters and surprising plot twists. (Ann Wheeler)

Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow*  
People, comrades, ladies and, of course, gentlemen: go and obtain a copy of Amor Towles’ *A Gentleman in Moscow*. It is a delightful read and perhaps deceptively so. I might encourage you to read it twice over so that the book’s decadent prose does not blind you to crucial themes—the sanctity of commitment, the link between identity and home (however home is defined), the nobility inherent in change—that emerge from Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov’s remarkable feat of finding fulfillment in confinement, albeit of the most luxurious sort. And, come to think of it, you have my full permission to indulge in each moment of bliss that saturates Towles’ sentences. Rostov’s is a situation in which we could all find ourselves: feeling overwhelmed and restricted by our circumstances. But when faced with such a daunting inevitability, all we need to do is consult the Count. In his grace, you can find your very own resolve to “master your circumstances.” Towles will remind you that, as Montaigne says, “the surest sign of wisdom is constant cheerfulness.” Constructed with aptly elegant language, this ever-capable and suave protagonist will remind you that confinement is only a frame of mind. (Malcolm Moutenot ’13)

James Welch with Paul Stekler, *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians*  
An account of myth-busting and movie-making that helps you understand why, in the words of the bumper sticker, “Custer had it coming.” (Mackey Luffman)

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*  
According to Amazon.com, “In this epic, beautifully written masterwork, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for Northern and Western cities, in search of a better life.” Andrew Zibart ’71 writes that you should read this book because “it’s fascinating…. Never knew there were actually two Bibles (one for white folks, one for black).” (Andrew Zibart ’71)

Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*  
A look at the loss of diversity, its effects, and some solutions. (Tamara Berthel)

Simon Winchester, *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded, August 27, 1883*  
The largest volcanic eruption to hit humankind during the 1800s is only part of a complex story involving the lucrative European spice trade, tsunamis that reverberated around the planet dozens of times over, and possibly the genesis of radical Islam, which defines much of the present global political scene. (Steve Smail)