



Summer Reading List for Staff - 2009

Created by Library Media Specialists from the Howard County Public School System and Librarians from Howard County Library



BIOGRAPHY



Allende, Isabel. *The Sum of Our Days*. Allende gathers her tribe-like

family physically and emotionally close to her heart. This memoir recounts the happenings after the tragic death of her adult daughter, Paula. With family permission, she lets the reader in on their eccentric lives. Her strength is exceptional prose that conveys wisdom with humor. Sandy Gaffigan

Suskind, Ron. *A Hope in the Unseen*. Suskind, a journalist, tells the story of one African-American youth's rise from poverty-stricken Anacostia, in southeast Washington D.C., to the ivied halls of Brown University. In 1995, Suskind won a Pulitzer Prize for two articles he wrote for the Wall Street Journal on Cedric Jennings, an African-American student at one of the poorest schools in the capital, whose studiousness and ambition earn him a place in MIT's summer program for minority youth. Suskind's book expands on that story, extending it to Cedric's admission to Brown University and first year there. *Kirkus Reviews*

FICTION



Atkinson, Kate. *Case Histories*.

A missing toddler, a murdered daughter, and a husband killed with an axe are three unrelated cases taken on by private detective Jackson Brodie. He gets himself caught up in his clients' lives and nearly pays with his life. Atkinson serves up multiple mysteries with comedy, tragedy and surprising conclusions. Sandy Gaffigan

Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*. Atwood fictionalizes the true story of 16-year-old housemaid Grace Marks, sentenced to life in a sensational 1843 trial for murdering her employer and his mistress. This Victorian novel creates a psychological portrait of working-class girls victimized by society and the judicial and prison systems of the time. Sandy Gaffigan

Brennert, Alan. *Moloka'i*. Brennert's novel tracks the grim struggle of a Hawaiian woman who contracts leprosy as a child in Honolulu during the 1890s and is deported to the island of Moloka'i, where she grows to adulthood at the quarantined settlement of Kalaupapa. Leprosy may seem a macabre subject, but Brennert transforms the material into a touching, lovely account of a woman's journey as she rises above the limitations of a devastating illness. *Publishers Weekly*

Davidson, Andrew. *The Gargoyle*. Strange and fascinating, *The Gargoyle* wanders from a contemporary burn ward to medieval Europe. Marianne Engle, who claims to be over 700 years old, tells the narrator (who's recovering from severe burns) of the love they have shared over the centuries, stopping only to disappear from the hospital for days at a time while she carves her grotesques and gargoyles in her basement. *AudioFile*

De Rosnay, Tatiana. *Sarah's Key*. De Rosnay fictionalizes the 1942 Paris roundups and deportations, in which thousands of Jewish families were arrested, held at the Vélodrome d'Hiver outside the city, then transported to Auschwitz. Julia Jarmond moved to Paris when she was 20 and is married to the arrogant, unfaithful Bertrand Tézac. Julia learns that the apartment she and Bertrand

plan to move into was acquired by Bertrand's family when its Jewish occupants were dispossessed and deported 60 years before. She resolves to find out what happened to the former occupants. The more Julia discovers, the more she uncovers about Bertrand's family, about France and, finally, herself. *Publishers Weekly*

Gavalda, Anna. *Hunting and Gathering*.

Gavalda's comically implausible and comfortably predictable novel of misfits is a Gallic charmer anchored by breezy and poignant storytelling. *Publishers Weekly*

Hensher, Philip. *The Northern Clemency*. In

1974, the Sellers family relocates from London to Sheffield, in the north of England, so that Bernie Sellers can take a new job with "the Electric." With him are his wife Alice and their two children, Sandra and Francis. They move into a house directly across the street from Katherine and Malcolm Glover and their three children. In a tale filled with humor, pathos, and unexpected twists, we follow the lives of these nine people over the course of the next two decades. *Roberta Rood*

Jacobs, Kate. *Friday Night Knitting Club*.

Georgia Walker's entire life is wrapped up in running her knitting store, Walker and Daughter, and caring for her 12-year-old daughter, Dakota. With the help of Anita, a lively widow in her seventies, Georgia starts the Friday Night Knitting Club, which draws loyal customers and a few oddballs. The yarn picks up steam as it draws to a conclusion, and an unexpected tragedy makes it impossible to put down. *Booklist*

Lamb, Wally. *The Hour I First Believed*. Lamb's

third novel tackles the Columbine High School shooting head on as he places his fictional protagonists into the horrific events of April 1999. *Publishers Weekly*

Livesey, Margot. *The House on Fortune Street*.

Thwarted desire, illicit desires, the fumbling search for lasting love, the sabotaging of happiness, both one's own and that of others, deceit and self-justification, the thirst for exoneration and redemption - all these elements compete for primacy in Margot Livesey's vivid novel of life in today's Britain. *Roberta Rood*

Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. Morrison's novella is a small gem of a story that is, at once, a kind of prelude to *Beloved* and a variation on that earlier book's exploration of the personal costs of slavery. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

Nemirovsky, Irene. *Suite Française*. Composed in 1941-42 by an accomplished writer who had published several well-received novels, *Suite Française*, her last work, was written under the tremendous pressure of a constant danger that was to catch up with her and kill her before she had finished. *The Washington Post Book World*

Rash, Ron. *Serena*. In 1929, newlyweds George and Serena Pemberton set out to establish a timber empire. Rash's masterful balance of violence and beauty yields a riveting novel that, at its core, tells of love both honored and betrayed. From the publisher

Rees, Matt Benyon. *The Collaborator of Bethlehem: An Omar Yussef Mystery*. British journalist Rees humanizes the struggle of the West Bank, where Omar Yussef, a modest 56-year-old schoolteacher

in the Dehaisha Palestinian refugee camp, becomes an unlikely detective amid the uncertainties and violence of modern Bethlehem. *Publishers Weekly*

Schlink, Bernhard. *The Reader*. Michael Berg, a fifteen-year-old in postwar Germany, is helped by Hanna, an older woman who becomes his lover. She disappears only to reappear when he is a law student - on trial for Holocaust crimes. This is much more than an erotic love story; it is rich with blame and guilt, honesty and horror. Sandy Gaffigan

Shaffer, Mary Ann and Barrow, Annie. *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*.

The letters comprising this small charming novel begin in 1946, when single, 30-something author Juliet Ashton writes to her publisher to say she is tired of covering the sunny side of war and its aftermath. When Guernsey farmer Dawsey Adams finds Juliet's name in a used book and invites articulate—and not-so-articulate—neighbors to write Juliet with their stories, the book's epistolary circle widens, putting Juliet back in the path of war stories. *Publishers Weekly*

Shreve, Anita. *Testimony*. Recounting a student sex scandal at a prestigious Vermont private academy, this explosive novel is more transfixing than a multicar pileup on the interstate. Told from the perspectives of the students involved, the school administrator, the parents, and numerous bystanders, the story keeps unraveling as it slingshots back and forth in time. *Library Journal*

Stein, Garth. *The Art of Racing in the Rain (A Dog's Eye View)*. If you've ever wondered what your dog is thinking, Stein's novel offers an answer. This is a heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story. *Molly Kelley*

Stott, Rebecca. *Ghostwalk*. Elizabeth Volgesang dies mysteriously while working on a controversial book about the life of Isaac Newton. When Lydia Brook, her son's former lover, is called upon to complete it, connections between the long ago murders of Newton's contemporaries and present day killings eerily unfold within the timeless world of Cambridge, England. An intelligent, unusual thriller, this novel will haunt the reader long after the story ends. *Kathryn Manley*

Strout, Elizabeth. *Olive Kitteridge*. Set on the coast of Maine, thirteen short stories are linked by one character - Olive Kitteridge, a retired math teacher. Olive is overbearing and sometimes downright mean. But she has an ability to connect with others and to empathize in a brutally honest way. Strout explores guilt, parent-child relationships, and the universal need to be understood. Sandy Gaffigan

Yates, Richard. *Revolutionary Road*. In the 1950s outside New York City, April and Frank Wheeler, a young couple with two children, are both dissatisfied with the boring sameness of suburban life; both think greatness has eluded them. On many levels they betray each other, bringing a tragic end to their family. Yates' portrait of this doomed couple is crystal clear and compassionate. Sandy Gaffigan



MYSTERY

Bayard, Louis. *The Pale Blue Eye.* Superintendent Thayer of West Point finds himself dealing with the

apparent suicide of a cadet. A bizarre series of events swiftly follows, causing Thayer to call upon the services of Gus Landor, a retired New York City policeman who lives nearby. Landor in his turn requires help from another cadet, whose powers of ratiocination have deeply impressed him. The cadet's name: Edgar Allan Poe. Roberta Rood

Beaton, M. C. *The Skeleton in the Closet.*

Fellworth Dolphin is forty when his mother dies. Fell feels no sadness in his loss but does wonder how his miserly parents could leave him a sizable inheritance. He teams up with kind, plain Maggie to uncover the source of his riches. They discover more than one mystery, danger they hadn't bargained for, and unexpected romance. Sandy Gaffigan

Block, Lawrence. *Hit Parade.* In veteran crime writer Lawrence Block's new and deliciously subversive series, John Keller flies all over the country carrying out various commissions while Dot, his business partner, stays home in White Plains. It's a business much like any other - except that Keller is a professional hit man! Roberta Rood

Box, C. J. . *Blue Heaven.* Siblings Annie and William Taylor, ages 12 and 10, witness a gruesome murder in the woods outside the small Idaho town of Kootenai Bay, nicknamed Blue Heaven for its abundance of retired LAPD officers. Annie and William make a run for it after they're spotted by the killers, a group of crooked LAPD cops who retired to Idaho eight years earlier after pulling a complicated heist in California that left a man dead. Rancher Jess Rawlins becomes the children's only hope of survival after they take refuge in his barn. Jess must stay one step ahead of the killers, who have volunteered to help the local authorities investigate the children's disappearance. *Publishers Weekly*

Edwards, Martin. *Waterloo Sunset.* Few events can be as unnerving as reading your own obituary. Liverpool solicitor Harry Devlin is appropriately unnerved when he comes upon just such a notice intended for himself. At the same time, Harry finds himself drawn into an investigation of the recent deaths of several young women. Among its other virtues, this novel serves to remind readers that there is more - much more - to Liverpool than the Beatles! Roberta Rood

Ferraris, Zoe. *Finding Nouf.* In contemporary Saudi Arabia, Nouf ash-Shrawi, a 16-year-old girl disappears into the desert three days before her marriage and is found dead, several weeks pregnant. Palestinian Nayir al-Sharqi who lives in Jeddah and works occasionally for the rich Shrawi family, is asked to investigate Nouf's death discreetly. Nayir, a conservative Muslim and an outsider because of his nationality, his class and his large stature, is wary of traversing the wide gulf between Saudi men's and women's worlds, and is encouraged by his friend Othman, an adopted son of the Shrawis, to seek out the help of Katya Hijazi, Othman's fiancée. As a mystery, it's fairly well-turned, but it's the characters and setting that sparkle. *Publishers Weekly*

Gerritsen, Tess. *The Bone Garden.* Not for the faint of heart, this medical mystery interweaves 19th century Boston with the present. When Julia Hamill starts

digging a garden behind her home, she discovers the skeleton of a murder victim. Her present day search for the murderer leads to a past of grave robbers illicitly supplying cadavers to Boston Medical College, Irish girls who lived in poverty and served the Brahmins, and medical students searching for the cause of childbed fever. Sandy Gaffigan

Krueger, William Kent. *Thunder Bay.* In Minnesota's Iron Range, a land of lakes and boreal forests, there remains a strong Native American presence. When Henry Meloux of the Ojibwe tribe is taken ill, he asks Cork O'Connor, formerly the sheriff and now a private investigator, to journey north with him to Canada in search of Meloux's long lost son. The Cork O'Connor series should appeal to readers who enjoy the Native American elements in Tony Hillerman's novels of the Southwest. Roberta Rood

Martin, Andrew. *The Lost Luggage Porter.* It is 1906, and Jim Stringer has just taken up his position as railway detective in York, in the north of England. Rumor has it that a major heist of railway property is being planned; Jim's assignment is to infiltrate the gang of would-be thieves before they can put their plan into action. Roberta Rood



NONFICTION

Dobbs, Michael. *One Minute to Midnight:*

Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War. Dobbs succeeds brilliantly, marshaling diverse sources to relate an intensely human story of Americans, Russians, and Cubans caught up in what the late historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. termed "the most dangerous moment in human history." It is filled with memorable characters in extraordinary circumstances and exotic settings. James G. Hershberg. *The Washington Post Book World*

Fassihi, Farnaz. *Waiting For An Ordinary Day: The Unraveling of Life in Iraq.* Fassihi (*The Wall Street Journal*) has a reporter's eye, a humanist's heart, and a fierce identification with the people she was assigned to cover. This is not a book about military tactics or political blunders, but of the effects of these things on ordinary Iraqi lives. Geraldine Brooks

Friedman, Thomas. *Hot, Flat, and Crowded.* Verdict: This thought-provoking, accessible look at the impact of wealth transfer from energy-consuming to energy-producing nations, failed policies, environmentalism, conservation, greenness, and a new vision for America should leave readers asking questions and demanding solutions. *Library Journal*

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: the Story of Success.* Gladwell, author and journalist, sets out to provide an understanding of success using outliers, men and women with skills, talent, and drive who do things out of the ordinary. He contends that we must look beyond the merits of a successful individual to understand his culture, where he comes from, his friends and family, and the community values he inherits and shares. *Booklist*

Lee, Min Jin. *Free Food for Millionaires.* 22-year-old Casey Han graduates magna cum laude in economics from Princeton with a taste for expensive clothes and an "enviable golf handicap," but hasn't found a "real" job yet, so her father kicks her out of his house. Lee creates a large canvas, following Casey as she shifts

between jobs, careers, friends, mentors and lovers. Lee's take on contemporary intergenerational cultural friction is wide-ranging, sympathetic and well worth reading. *Publishers Weekly*

Lende, Heather. *If You Lived Here I'd Know Your Name, News from Small Town Alaska .* Lende offers touching stories about neighbors with whom she shares wedding celebrations, potluck dinners, tears for missing fishermen—all the joys and sorrows of family life in a remote town. *Amazon.com*

Myron, Vicki. *Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World.* Myron, the library director, tells the story of how a bedraggled orange fur ball became "Dewey Readmore Books," an enchantingly irresistible library mascot capable of bringing international attention to a small midwestern town and melting the heart of even the most curmudgeonly visitor. *Booklist*

Pink, Daniel. *A Whole New Mind.* Abundance, Asia, and automation. Try saying that phrase five times quickly, because if you don't take these words into serious consideration, there is a good chance that sooner or later your career will suffer because of one of those forces. Pink has crafted a profound read packed with an abundance of references to books, seminars, web sites, and such to guide your adjustment to expanding your right brain if you plan to survive and prosper in the Western world. *Booklist*

Roberts, Paul. *The End of Food.* Armed with astounding facts, Roberts traces how we got to our 21st century global food production system and how it could catastrophically fail us. Food-borne illness, an epidemic of obesity, chemically intensive farming, the declining nutritional quality of our diet: these are the realities staring us in the face. Roberts says we must change before it's too late. Sandy Gaffigan

Viorst, Judith. *Alexander and the Wonderful, Marvelous, Excellent, Terrific 90 Days: An Almost Completely Honest Account of What Happened to Our Family When Our Youngest... Came to Live with Us for Three Months.* Whatever became of Alexander after that famously bad day? Now he's grown and raising three young children, and he's temporarily moved home with his mom and dad while his own home is being renovated. Viorst describes the horror and humor of intergenerational cohabitation. *AudioFile*

Weiner, Eric. *The Geography of Bliss.* Eric Weiner careens all over the globe in search of the world's happiest people. From Switzerland to Bhutan, Iceland to Qatar, he engages with all manner of folk. The results are poignant, surprising, and often laugh-out-loud funny. Roberta Rood



FINALLY

Best American Magazine Writing 2007. Anthologies like this one bring great writing to the attention of those who truly appreciate it. For example, there is Caroline Alexander's "Murdering the Impossible," about mountaineer Reinhold Messner; Alex Ross's stunning meditation on Mozart, "The Storm of Style;" and Eric Konigsberg's "Prairie Fire," which might break your heart. Roberta Rood