

11 /12th Grade Summer Reading List: 2015-2016

DIRECTIONS: If you are a rising junior, welcome to the 11/12 team! Here is our first assignment for 2015-2016: Select and read a book from the following list. **In order to receive credit, you must read a book that you have never read before.**

Finish your reading before the beginning of the school year. Early in the semester, students will complete a follow-up project based on the summer reading books. This project will count as a significant grade. Also, an extra-credit assignment will be available for reading a second book from the list.

To choose your book, I recommend that you browse in a bookstore, read the back cover and the first two paragraphs of the first chapter. These selections represent a wide array of subject matter, style, and reading difficulty. Consider the reading levels & choose wisely!

** Very accessible reading level*

** * Most 11th & 12th graders find the reading level works for them*

** * * Challenging reading level; strong readers may enjoy more*

The following descriptions were taken from Wikipedia & Amazon.com, or written by myself:

*** * *Winter's Bone* by Daniel Woodrell:** Ree Dolly is 17 and living in the Ozark Mountains with her mother and two little brothers. She already has many responsibilities on her shoulders when she finds out that her father, a long-time drug dealer, put the family house up as bail security. When he does not show up for court, Ree discovers that her home and land will be taken in a few weeks if her father does not reappear. Part mystery and part heroic journey, the novel traces Ree's search to find her father as she enters into the shadowy underworld of a rural crime family.

The author Daniel Woodrell is a resident of the Ozarks and published this novel in 2006. In 2010, *Winter's Bone* was made into an acclaimed, independent film. It received excellent reviews and numerous awards, including four Academy Award nominations. There are some significant changes from the book, so I recommend watching the movie after we finish the summer reading assignment in September.

*** * *King Dork* by Frank Portman:** Tom Henderson (a.k.a. King Dork, Chi-mo, Hender-fag, and Sheepie) is a typical American high school loser until he discovers the book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, that will change the world as he knows it. When Tom discovers his deceased father's copy of the Salinger classic, he finds himself in the middle of several interlocking conspiracies and at least half a dozen mysteries involving dead people, naked people, fake people, ESP, blood, a secret code, guitars, monks, witchcraft, the Bible, girls, the Crusades, a devil head, and rock and roll. And it all looks like it's just the tip of a very odd iceberg of clues that may very well unravel the puzzle of his father's death and-oddly-reveal the secret to attracting semi-hot girls.

* * ***The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver:** Clear-eyed and spirited, Taylor Greer grew up poor in rural Kentucky with the goals of avoiding pregnancy and getting away. But when she heads west with high hopes and a barely functional car, she meets the human condition head-on. By the time Taylor arrives in Tucson, Arizona, she has acquired a completely unexpected child, a three-year-old American Indian girl named Turtle, and must somehow come to terms with both motherhood and the necessity for putting down roots. Hers is a story about love and friendship, abandonment and belonging, and the discovery of surprising resources.

* * ***Thank You for Smoking* by Christopher Buckley:** Published in 1994 as the tobacco industry was fighting to reverse ever decreasing profits, this satirical comedy follows the machinations of Big Tobacco's chief spokesman, Nick Naylor, who spins propaganda on behalf of cigarettes while trying to remain a role model for his twelve-year-old son. Fast-paced and tongue-in-cheek, the story veers to the zany while lampooning lobbyists, big industries, and politicians.

* * ***The Collector* by John Fowles:** Published in 1963, the novel is disturbing, engrossing, and an unforgettable page-turner. The story focuses on an obsessive young man and the girl he kidnaps and holds prisoner in his cellar. The main character, Frederick Clegg, works as a clerk in a city hall and collects butterflies in his spare time. He is obsessed with Miranda Grey, an upper-class art student. The first part of the novel tells the story from his point of view. The second part of the novel is narrated by Miranda in the form of fragments from a diary that she keeps during her captivity.

* * ***The Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler:** This hopeful tale is set in a dystopian future United States of walled cities, disease, fires, and madness. Lauren Olamina is an 18-year-old woman with hyper-empathy syndrome--if she sees another in pain, she feels their pain as acutely as if it were real. When her relatively safe neighborhood enclave is inevitably destroyed, along with her family and dreams for the future, Lauren grabs a backpack full of supplies and begins a journey north. Along the way, she recruits fellow refugees to her embryonic faith, Earthseed, the prime tenet of which is that "God is change." This is a great book--simple and elegant, with enough message to make you think, but not so much that you feel preached to.

* * ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley:*** If there was any one man who articulated the anger, the struggle, and the beliefs of African Americans in the 1960s, that man was Malcolm X. His AUTOBIOGRAPHY is now an established classic of modern America, a book that expresses like none other the crucial truth about our times.

"Extraordinary. A brilliant, painful, important book." - THE NEW YORK TIMES

* * ***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey:** In this classic novel of the 1960's, Ken Kesey's hero is Randle Patrick McMurphy, a boisterous, brawling, fun-loving rebel who swaggers into the world of a mental hospital and takes over. A lusty, life-affirming fighter, McMurphy rallies the other patients around him by challenging the dictatorship of Big Nurse. He promotes gambling in the ward, smuggles in wine and women, and openly defies the rules at every turn. But this defiance, which starts as a sport, soon develops into a grim struggle, an all-out war between two relentless opponents: Big Nurse, backed by the full power of authority...McMurphy, who has only his own indomitable will. What happens when Big Nurse uses her ultimate weapon against McMurphy provides the story's shocking climax.

* * ***In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote:** On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun

held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

A highly acclaimed non-fiction story, it is one of the few 'true crime' books to be taught regularly in high schools and colleges. It inspired two movie adaptations as well as a recent critically acclaimed movie that traces Capote's writing of the book.

*** *Big Mouth and Ugly Girl* by Joyce Carol Oates:** In her first novel for young adults, acclaimed author Oates creates a provocative and unflinching story of friendship and family, loyalty and betrayal that hits close to home. Matthew Donaghy (Big Mouth) has always had a big mouth. But it never got him into trouble — until one day when two detectives escort him out of class for questioning. The charge? Matt has been accused of threatening to blow up Rocky River High School. Although he is innocent of the accusation, people shun him, and many adults, including the principal of Rocky River High School, get suspicious.

Ursula Riggs is a strong athlete at Rocky River High. She secretly gives herself the proper name "Ugly Girl." Ursula has no time for petty high school distractions like friends (except for her friend Bonnie) and dating. Ursula is content to mind her own business. She hardly knows Matt Donaghy at the start of the novel. But Ursula knows injustice when she sees it. And she's not afraid to speak out.

Joyce Carol Oates is an important contemporary American author who is known for her innovative and sophisticated style. This novel is her first written specifically for young adults, thus it is a more accessible read.

*** * *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker:** The novel tells the story of two sisters--one a missionary to Africa and the other a child wife living in the South--who remain loyal to one another across time, distance, and silence. The protagonist is Celie, a poor black woman whose letters tell the story of 20 years of her life, beginning at age 14 when she begins to protect her younger sister from their abusive father. Taking place mostly in rural Georgia, the story focuses on black life during the 1930s in the Southern United States. In 1983 Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for *The Color Purple*.

Controversial themes have led to this novel being banned by many school districts. However, it is already an important classic that is often taught in college courses. Both accessible and challenging, the novel is written as a series of letters. Walker's protagonist is barely literate at the beginning of the novel, so the writing style reflects Celie's dialect and poor spelling. This can be challenging at first, but the reader soon adjusts and the story becomes quite a page-turner with short letters that move the story along quickly.

* ***The Chosen* by Chaim Potok:** A bestselling novel published in 1967, it is about two teenage Jewish boys who form a friendship, though they come from different worlds. Set in 1940s Brooklyn, the novel explores the themes of tradition and independence. Reuven Malter, the narrator of the story, is the son of a writer and scholar who follows modern methods of studying Judaism and he is Orthodox. Danny, his new friend, is the genius son of a Hasidic rabbi, whose people live completely within the bounds of traditional Jewish law. The two boys learn from each other even as they encounter the cultural divide that separates them.

The novel received excellent reviews when it was first published and soon began to be taught in many school districts. A well crafted novel, it is an accessible read.

* * * ***Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen:** Published in 1813 by a now legendary author of British literature, many consider this one of Austen's best. For over 150 years, it has remained one of the most popular novels in the English language, inspiring numerous movie versions and several modern adaptations. The satiric story begins with Mrs. Bennet's attempts to marry off her five daughters. Excitement fizzles through the Bennet household at Longbourn in Hertfordshire when young, eligible Mr. Charles Bingley rents the fine house nearby. He may have sisters, but he also has male friends, and one of these -- the haughty, and even wealthier, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy -- irks the vivacious Elizabeth Bennet. The romantic clash between the opinionated Elizabeth and Darcy is a splendid rendition of civilized sparring. As the characters dance a delicate quadrille of flirtation and intrigue, Jane Austen's radiantly caustic wit and keen observation sparkle.

A challenging read, it is often taught in 12th grade honors classes.

* * * ***House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende:** The story details the life of the Trueba family, spanning four generations, and tracing the post-colonial social and political upheavals of the Latin American country they live in. The story is told mainly from the perspective of two protagonists and incorporates elements of magic realism. Published in Barcelona in 1982, the novel was critically acclaimed around the world, and catapulted Allende to literary stardom. That same year, the novel was named Best Novel of the Year in Chile, and she received the country's Panorama Literario Award. The novel has been translated to over 20 languages worldwide.

Allende is an important contemporary writer from South America who has been able to appeal to a large audience in the United States. A more challenging read from a very fine writer.