

# THE BIRCH WATHEN LENOX SCHOOL

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Dear Incoming 11th Graders:

Greetings! Ms. Anderson, who will also teach 11th grade English next year, knows many of you, and I am looking forward to meeting you. We are both excited about English next fall. Our required summer reading book, *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is fantastic and perfect, we believe, for 11th grade. A young woman, not much older than you, journeys from Nigeria to America, seeking opportunity. Along the way, she wrestles with questions about her identity and who she wants to love. Though the book is on the long side, I read it in just a few hours; it creates not only a rich, complex portrait of race relations in America, but it is also a page-turner with a lot of romance and snappy prose.

Adichie is an extremely engaging storyteller. Many of you watched her TedTalk last year, “The Danger of a Single Story.”

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

Her work feels particularly important as I watch the news, as you must be, about the protests around the country over the death of George Floyd. Adichie’s questions about race relations are crucial right now. *Americanah* will give us plenty to talk about, but you must read it carefully to be prepared for writing and class discussion.

We have all come off of a very difficult period. I write this after having just listened to Governor Cuomo’s plans to begin to open New York City. I know being at home, apart from friends, must have been difficult for many, and Ms. Anderson and I are ready to be supportive through these uncertain times.

We look forward to working with all of you,

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## Entering 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Required Reading

With the exception of rising 12th grade, Upper School students must read **one** required text (with an asterisk), which is listed below and at least **two** additional books of their own choosing from the US Summer Reading Suggestions List. English classes will start the semester focusing on these works. Thus, it is essential all summer reading and assignments be completed by the first day of school.

**\**Americanah***—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Ifemelu and Obinze are young and in love when they depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. Beautiful, self-assured Ifemelu heads for America, where despite her academic success, she is forced to grapple with what it means to be black for the first time. Quiet, thoughtful Obinze had hoped to join her, but with post-9/11 America closed to him, he instead plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London. Fifteen years later, they reunite in a newly democratic Nigeria, and reignite their passion—for each other and for their homeland.

### Upper School Summer Reading Suggestions

#### DYSTOPIAN/ FANTASY/ SCI FI

***Dune*** (Dune #1)—Frank Herbert. Set in the far future amidst a sprawling feudal interstellar empire, *Dune* tells the story of young Paul Atreides (the heir apparent to Duke Leto Atreides and heir of House Atreides) as he and his family accept control of the desert planet Arrakis, the only source of the “spice” melange, the most important and valuable substance in the cosmos.

***Kindred***—Octavia Butler. This combination of slave memoir, fantasy, and historical fiction is a novel of rich literary complexity. Having just celebrated her 26th birthday in 1976 California, Dana, an African-American woman, is suddenly and inexplicably wrenched through time into antebellum Maryland.

***Ocean at the End of the Lane***—Neil Gaiman. A middle-aged man returns to his childhood home to attend a funeral. Although the house he lived in is long gone, he is drawn to the farm at the end of the road, where, when he was seven, he encountered a most remarkable girl, Lettie Hempstock, and her mother and grandmother. When the unremembered past comes flooding back, it is a past too strange, too frightening, and too dangerous.

***The Bullet-Catcher's Daughter*** (Fall of the Gas-Lit Empire #1)—Rod Duncan. Elizabeth Barnabus lives a double life—as herself and as her brother, the private detective. She is trying to solve the mystery of a disappearing aristocrat and a hoard of arcane machines. But when she comes up against an agent of the all-powerful Patent Office, her life and the course of history will begin to change. And not necessarily for the better...

***The Handmaid's Tale***—Margaret Atwood. Offred is one of many Handmaids in the Republic of Gilead. She may leave the home of the Commander and his wife once a day to walk to food markets whose signs are now pictures instead of words because women are no longer allowed to read, and is only valued if she is able to bear children for them.

***The Left Hand of Darkness***—Ursula K. Le Guin. A groundbreaking work of science fiction tells the story of a lone human emissary to Winter, an alien world whose inhabitants can choose - and change - their gender. His goal is to facilitate Winter's inclusion in a growing intergalactic civilization. But to do so he must bridge the gulf between his own views and those of the completely dissimilar culture that he encounters.

***The Name of the Wind*** (The Kingkiller Chronicle #1)—Patrick Rothfuss. Told in Kvothe's own voice, this is the tale of the magically gifted young man who grows to be the most notorious wizard his world has ever seen. A high-action story written with a poet's hand, *The Name of the Wind* is a masterpiece that will transport readers into the body and mind of a wizard.

***Children of Blood and Bone***—Tomi Adeyemi. Zélie Adebola remembers when the soil of Orīsha hummed with magic. But everything changed the night magic disappeared. Under the orders of a ruthless king, maji were killed, leaving Zélie without a mother and her people without hope. Now Zélie has one chance to bring back magic and strike against the monarchy. With the help of a rogue princess, Zélie must outwit and outrun the crown prince, who is hell-bent on eradicating magic for good. (Young Adult)

## ESSAYS, POETRY, SHORT STORIES

***A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories***—Flannery O'Connor. Thought-provoking, profound, and sometimes violent short stories.

***Cathedral***—Raymond Carver. Spare, understated short stories that began a new trend in literature. Moving tales about love, loss, loneliness and hard times. Accessible, provocative and challenging.

***Naked***—David Sedaris. This scaldingly funny collection of writings by one of America's great contemporary essayists reminds us of how important humor and the comedic temperament is in our own lives and others.

***Poems of New York***—ed. by Elizabeth Schmidt. An impressive, wide-ranging collection of poetry on the city we call home that spans the early, exuberant musings of Walt Whitman and Hart Crane to contemporary poets post-9/11.

***Tales of the Jazz Age and Other Stories***—F. Scott Fitzgerald. Short stories set in the roaring twenties. Beautiful prose, complex themes.

***Up in the Old Hotel***—Joseph Mitchell. A collection of stories and essays, many reprinted from *The New Yorker*, that eloquently chronicle a New York that was, and maybe still is.

## FICTION

***A Separate Peace***—John Knowles. Experiences of adolescents at a boarding school in the early years of WWII erode their innocence and change their world forever. Gene is a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas is a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happens between the two friends one summer, like the war itself, banishes the innocence of these boys and their world.

***All The Light We Cannot See***—Anthony Doerr. A beautifully crafted story of a blind French girl and German boy trying to survive the chaos of World War II. The novel relates the

interwoven stories of the blind Marie-Laure LeBlanc, the orphaned and diminutive Werner Pfennig and others as they are brought into the globe-spanning conflict that was the Second World War. The plot centers but does not focus upon the fate of the Sea of Flames Diamond in the conflict, with several characters united by it and others tied to them.

***Beartown***—Frederik Backman. A small Swedish town on the edge of the forest has dwindling resources but a collective dream of winning big in hockey. A small group of teenage boys carry the burden and hope of the town, only to have an act of violence tear at the very fabric of the community.

***Beloved***—Toni Morrison. Sethe was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but eighteen years later she is still not free. She has borne the unthinkable, yet she is still held captive by memories of Sweet Home, the beautiful farm where hideous things happened. Meanwhile Sethe's house has long been troubled by the angry, destructive ghost of her baby, Beloved. Sethe works at beating back the past, but it makes itself heard and felt incessantly in her memory and in the lives of those around her. When a mysterious teenage girl arrives, calling herself Beloved, Sethe's terrible secret explodes into the present.

***The Bell Jar***—Sylvia Plath. Esther Greenwood is brilliant, beautiful, enormously talented, and successful, but slowly going under—maybe for the last time. In her acclaimed and enduring masterwork, Sylvia Plath brilliantly draws the reader into Esther's breakdown with such intensity that her insanity becomes palpably real, even rational—as accessible an experience as going to the movies. The novel is a deep penetration into the darkest and most harrowing corners of the human psyche.

***The Eagle of the Ninth*** (The Dolphin Ring Cycle #1)—Rosemary Sutcliffe. The Ninth Legion marched into the mists of northern Britain—and they were never seen again. Four thousand men disappeared and their eagle standard was lost. It's a mystery that's never been solved, until now.... Marcus has to find out what happened to his father, who led the Legion. He sets out into the unknown on a quest so dangerous that nobody expects him to return.

***The Namesake***—Jhumpa Lahiri. *The Namesake* takes the Ganguli family from their tradition-bound life in Calcutta through their fraught transformation into Americans. On the heels of their arranged wedding, Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli settle together in Cambridge, Massachusetts. An engineer by training, Ashoke adapts far less warily than his wife, who resists all things American and pines for her family. When their son is born, the task of naming him betrays the vexed results of bringing old ways to the new world. Named for a Russian writer by his Indian parents in memory of a catastrophe years before, Gogol Ganguli knows only that he suffers the burden of his heritage as well as his odd, antic name.

***The White Tiger***—Aravind Adiga. A black comedy of the struggles and achievements of Balram Halwai, India's finest up-and-coming entrepreneur and emerging sociopath. Caught between the gleaming promise of global capitalism and the soul-sapping poverty of rural India, Balram Halwai finds the success he craves, but at a terrible cost.

***Water for Elephants***—Sara Gruen. When Jacob Jankowski, recently orphaned and suddenly adrift, jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks, drifters, and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression, making one-night stands in town after endless town. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful young star of the

equestrian act, who is married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. He also meets Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her.

## MEMOIRS

***I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban***—Malala Yousafzai, Christina Lamb. A remarkable tale of a family uprooted by global terrorism, of the fight for girls' education, of a father who, himself a school owner, championed and encouraged his daughter to write and attend school, and of brave parents who have a fierce love for their daughter in a society that prizes sons.

***Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina***—Misty Copeland. As the only African American soloist dancing with the prestigious American Ballet Theatre, Misty Copeland has made history. But when she first placed her hands on the barre at an after-school community center, no one expected the undersized, anxious thirteen-year-old to become a ground-breaking ballerina.

***Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History***—Art Spiegelman. A graphic novel of a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe and his son, a cartoonist who tries to come to terms with his father's story and history itself. By addressing the horror of the Holocaust through cartoons, the author captures the everyday reality of fear and is able to explore the guilt, relief and extraordinary sensation of survival - and how the children of survivors are in their own way affected by the trials of their parents.

***Odd Man Rush: A Harvard Kid's Hockey Odyssey from Central Park to Somewhere in Sweden--with Stops along the Way***—Bill Keenan. In his hilarious, gritty, and touching debut, a hockey star once on the fast-track to the NHL tells of how he found fulfillment and redemption in the strange world of European minor-league professional hockey. Abusive fans, cold showers, long bus rides—nothing diminishes his love for the sport. “Because that’s the way it works with me and hockey. Even when it’s horrible, it’s wonderful.”

## MYSTERY / SUSPENSE

***One of Us Is Lying*** (One of Us is Lying #1)—Karen M. McManus. *The Breakfast Club* meets *Pretty Little Liars*, *One of Us Is Lying* is the story of what happens when five strangers walk into detention and only four walk out alive. Everyone is a suspect, and everyone has something to hide.

***Martyr***—Rory Clements. John Shakespeare, Elizabethan England’s most remarkable investigator, and William Shakespeare’s brother, is the protagonist in this tale of murder and conspiracy that succeeds brilliantly as both historical fiction and a crime thriller.

***Revenger***—Rory Clements. In the sequel to *Martyr*, the Queen needs John Shakespeare’s services once more. England is still at war with Spain, but her court is riven by savage infighting among ambitious young courtiers. A fantastic novel by a master of historical suspense.

***The Godwulf Manuscript*** (Spenser #1)—Robert B. Parker. Spenser earned his degree in the school of hard knocks, so he is ready when a Boston university hires him to recover a rare, stolen manuscript. He is hardly surprised that his only clue is a radical student with four bullets in his chest. He tackles some very heavy homework and knows that if he doesn't finish his assignment soon, he could end up marked "D" -- for dead.

***The Lock Artist***—Steve Hamilton. Marked by tragedy, traumatized at the age of eight, Michael, now eighteen, is no ordinary young man. Besides not uttering a single word in ten years, he discovers the one thing he can somehow do better than anyone else. Whether it's a locked door without a key, a padlock with no combination, or even an eight-hundred pound safe ... he can open them all. Young Michael becomes a hot commodity with the wrong people.

***The Talented Mr. Ripley*** (Ripley #1)—Patricia Highsmith. Since his debut in 1955, Tom Ripley has evolved into the ultimate bad boy sociopath. In this first novel, we are introduced to suave, handsome Tom Ripley: a young striver, newly arrived in the heady world of Manhattan in the 1950s. A product of a broken home, Ripley becomes enamored of the moneyed world of his new friend, Dickie Greenleaf, a fondness that turns obsessive.

***Truly Devious*** (Truly Devious #1)—Maureen Johnson. Ellingham Academy is a famous private school in Vermont for the brightest thinkers, inventors, and artists. It was founded by Albert Ellingham, an early twentieth century tycoon, who wanted to make a wonderful place full of riddles, twisting pathways, and gardens. But something strange is happening. The past has crawled out of its grave. Someone has gotten away with murder.

## NON-FICTION

***A Season on the Brink***—John Feinstein. The book follows the basketball season that John Feinstein spent following the Indiana Hoosiers and their fiery coach, Bob Knight. Knight granted Feinstein an unprecedented inside look at college basketball -- with complete access to every moment of the season. Feinstein saw and heard it all -- practices, team meetings, strategy sessions, and mid-game huddles -- during Knight's struggle to avoid a losing season.

***Beyond Broadway Joe***—Bob Lederer. A nostalgic, inside look from the men who composed the team behind Joe Namath's Super Bowl III win, filled with exclusive insights and stories from the surviving players, coaches, and management of that championship team whose victory changed the landscape of American football.

***Friday Night Lights***—H.G. Bissinger: A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist spends a season with the Permian Panthers and vividly exposes the glory and the glorification of Texas high school football. Odessa is not known to be a town big on dreams, but the Panthers help keep the hopes and dreams of this small, dusty town going. The town may be socially and racially divided, but every Friday night from September to December, when the Permian High School Panthers play football, this West Texas town becomes a place where dreams can come true.

***Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster***—Jon Krakauer. A bank of clouds was assembling on the not-so-distant horizon, but journalist-mountaineer Jon Krakauer, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, saw nothing that "suggested that a murderous storm was bearing down." He was wrong.

***Into the Wild***—Jon Krakauer. In April, 1992, Christopher Johnson McCandless, a young man from a well-to-do family, hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. Craving a blank spot on the map, McCandless simply threw away the maps. Leaving behind his desperate parents and sister, he vanished into the wild.

***Unbroken***—Lauren Hillenbrand. The inspiring true story of a man who lived through a series of catastrophes almost too incredible to be believed, *Unbroken* tells the story of Louie Zamperini--a juvenile delinquent-turned-Olympic runner-turned-Army hero. In boyhood, he'd been a cunning and incorrigible delinquent. As a teenager, he had channeled his defiance into running, a talent

that carried him to the Berlin Olympics. But when war had come, the athlete became an airman, embarking on a journey that led to his doomed flight, a tiny raft, and a drift into the unknown. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will.

***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks***—Rebecca Skloot. Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer whose cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb’s effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks remains virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave.

## ROMANCE

***Emma***—Jane Austen. Emma Woodhouse is one of Austen's most captivating and vivid characters. Beautiful, spoiled, vain and irrepressibly witty, Emma organizes the lives of the inhabitants of her sleepy little village and plays matchmaker with devastating effect.

***Frankly in Love***—David Yoon. Frank Li is a Korean American teen who feels neither completely Korean nor completely American. His parents want him to get into a good school, become a businessperson, and marry someone Korean. His sister, Hannah, broke that trajectory and was ostracized by their parents. Frank decides to avoid a similar fate by enlisting the help of one of the Korean girls from his parents' friend group so they can both date other people. (Young Adult)

***Lovely War***—Julie Berry. A sweeping, multi-layered romance with a divine twist, set in the perilous days of World Wars I and II. It’s the story of four lovers, and the unlikely way in which each couple falls deeply in love. Thirty years after these four lovers' fates collide, the Greek goddess Aphrodite tells their stories to her husband, Hephaestus, and her lover, Ares, in a luxe Manhattan hotel room at the height of World War II. She seeks to answer the age-old question: Why are Love and War eternally drawn to one another? But her quest for a conclusion that will satisfy her jealous husband uncovers a multi-threaded tale of prejudice, trauma, and music and reveals that War is no match for the power of Love. (Young Adult)

***Price of Salt***—Patricia Highsmith. The story of Therese Belivet, a stage designer trapped in a department-store day job, whose salvation arrives one day in the form of Carol Aird, an alluring suburban housewife in the throes of a divorce. They fall in love and set out across the United States, pursued by a private investigator who eventually blackmails Carol into a choice between her daughter and her lover.

***The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice and Virtue*** (Montague Siblings #1)—Mackenzi Lee. Henry “Monty” Montague was born and bred to be a gentleman, but he was never one to be tamed. The finest boarding schools in England and the constant disapproval of his father haven’t been able to curb any of his roguish passions—not for gambling halls, late nights spent with a bottle of spirits, or waking up in the arms of women or men.

Please note: All book descriptions are either written by faculty members or supplied by Goodreads.com.