



SUMMER READING 2022: 10s, 11s, 12s

In this packet, you will find information about Summer Reading for new and returning Commonwealth students. At the beginning of each school year, we break into small groups to discuss different books, representing a range of topics and genres, chosen by the faculty member leading the conversation. This year, each book has a central theme or relationship to *empathy*. Please select one book from the “Summer Reading Discussion Groups” list and come to school prepared to share your observations!

Summer break can be a wonderful time to catch up on your reading—to discover new genres or authors, to re-read old favorites, or to finally tackle a literary classic. We encourage you to explore the titles on the attached lists, which include recommendations from the library, your teachers, and your classmates. If you liked a book in one of your courses last year, you might want to try another by the same author this summer. When you return to school in the fall, your advisor will be interested to hear what you have read and your responses.

These lists are also available on the library webpage (under Academics at commschool.org) where I have provided links to online ordering options for the required reading. Most books on this list will also be available at your local bookshop or library.

Happy reading!
Mr. MacDonnell

PART ONE: Summer Reading Discussion Groups

All-School Summer Reading Mission Statement:

The aim of Commonwealth's Summer Reading Program is to encourage our community to read for pleasure outside of school in the hopes of developing lifelong reading skills and interests. The summer reading program will expose faculty, staff, and students to new writers, genres, and reading experiences, all while practicing analytical thinking and group discussion.

Ideally, Summer Reading will expose faculty, staff, and students to varied opinions on a text, help us be open to new perspectives, inspire the readers and writers in our community, and encourage reading outside of the classroom.

It is an utmost priority that students of all levels of ability be able to participate in and gain from this program. Faculty discussion leaders will meet students where they are at, and create an environment for fruitful and respectful discussion.

Summer Reading List

Each student will participate a discussion group for one of these books upon returning to school in the fall.

[Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking](#) by Susan Cain (p. 2012) -

Nonfiction (Ms. Shu): At least one-third of the people we know are introverts. They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking; who innovate and create but dislike self-promotion; who favor working on their own over working in teams. It is to introverts—Rosa Parks, Chopin, Dr. Seuss, Steve Wozniak—that we owe many of the great contributions to society. In *Quiet*, Susan Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so. She charts the rise of the Extrovert Ideal throughout the twentieth century and explores how deeply it has come to permeate our culture. She also introduces us to successful introverts—from a witty, high-octane public speaker who recharges in solitude after his talks, to a record-breaking salesman who quietly taps into the power of questions. Passionately argued, superbly researched, and filled with indelible stories of real people, *Quiet* has the power to permanently change how we see introverts and, equally important, how they see themselves.

[World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whalesharks, and Other Astonishment](#) by Aimee Nezhukumatathil (p. 2020) -

Essays (Ms. McGrath): From beloved, award-winning poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil comes a debut work of nonfiction—a collection of essays about the natural world, and the way its inhabitants can teach, support, and inspire us. As a child, Nezhukumatathil called many places home: the grounds of a Kansas mental institution, where her Filipina mother was a doctor; the open skies and tall mountains of Arizona, where she hiked with her Indian father; and the chillier climes of western New York and Ohio. But no matter where she was transplanted—no matter how awkward the fit or forbidding the landscape—she was able to turn to our world's fierce and

funny creatures for guidance. "What the peacock can do," she tells us, "is remind you of a home you will run away from and run back to all your life." The axolotl teaches us to smile, even in the face of unkindness; the touch-me-not plant shows us how to shake off unwanted advances; the narwhal demonstrates how to survive in hostile environments. Even in the strange and the unlovely, Nezukumatathil finds beauty and kinship. For it is this way with wonder: it requires that we are curious enough to look past the distractions in order to fully appreciate the world's gifts. Warm, lyrical, and gorgeously illustrated by Fumi Nakamura, *World of Wonders* is a book of sustenance and joy.

***New Kid* & *Class Act* by Jerry Craft (p. 2019 & 2020) - Graphic Novel (Led by Sisters - Commonwealth Affinity Group):** In *New Kid*, seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to his dream art school, his parents enroll him in the prestigious Riverdale Academy Day School, where there are few kids of color. As Jordan makes the daily trip from his Washington Heights apartment to the upscale school, he finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighborhood friends and staying true to himself?

In *Class Act*, newly minted eighth grader Drew Ellis takes center stage. Drew is no stranger to the saying "You have to work twice as hard to be just as good." But what if he works ten times as hard and still isn't afforded the same opportunities as his privileged RAD classmates? To make matters worse, Drew is trying not to withdraw from his buddy Liam, who might be one of those privileged kids. And their mutual friend, Jordan, doesn't know how to keep the group together. Will Drew ever find a way to bridge the divide so they can all truly accept each other? Moreover, will he ever be able to accept himself?

***Spring* by Ali Smith (p. 2019) - Novel (Ms. Tyson):** From the Man Booker Prize Finalist comes the third novel in her Seasonal Quartet—a New York Times Notable Book and longlisted for the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction 2020. What unites Katherine Mansfield, Charlie Chaplin, Shakespeare, Rilke, Beethoven, Brexit, the present, the past, the north, the south, the east, the west, a man mourning lost times, a woman trapped in modern times? *Spring*. The great connective. With an eye to the migrancy of story over time and riffing on Pericles, one of Shakespeare's most resistant and rollicking works, Ali Smith tell the impossible tale of an impossible time. In a time of walls and lockdown, Smith opens the door. The time we're living in is changing nature. Will it change the nature of story? Hope springs eternal.

***Maus I* & *II* by Art Spiegelman (p. 1986 & 1992) - Graphic Novel (Anna Moss):** On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its first publication, here is the definitive edition of the book acclaimed as "the most affecting and successful narrative ever done about the Holocaust" (Wall Street Journal) and "the first masterpiece in comic book history" (The New Yorker). The Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* tells the story of Vladek Spiegelman, a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe, and his son, a cartoonist coming to terms with his father's story. *Maus* approaches the unspeakable through the diminutive. Its form, the cartoon (the Nazis are cats, the Jews mice), shocks us out of any lingering sense of familiarity and succeeds in "drawing us closer to the bleak heart of the Holocaust" (The New York Times). *Maus* is a haunting tale within a tale. Vladek's harrowing story of survival is woven into the author's account of his tortured relationship with his

aging father. Against the backdrop of guilt brought by survival, they stage a normal life of small arguments and unhappy visits. This astonishing retelling of our century's grisliest news is a story of survival, not only of Vladek but of the children who survive even the survivors. Maus studies the bloody pawprints of history and tracks its meaning for all of us.

Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World by Tracy Kidder (p. 2003) - **Nonfiction (Ms. Brewster)**: At the center of *Mountains Beyond Mountains* stands Paul Farmer. Doctor, Harvard professor, renowned infectious-disease specialist, anthropologist, the recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, world-class Robin Hood, Farmer was brought up in a bus and on a boat, and in medical school found his life's calling: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most.

Mountains Beyond Mountains takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia as Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that "the only real nation is humanity"—a philosophy that is embodied in the small public charity he founded, Partners in Health. He enlists the help of the Gates Foundation, George Soros, the U.N.'s World Health Organization, and others in his quest to cure the world. At the heart of this book is the example of a life based on hope, and on an understanding of the truth of the Haitian proverb "Beyond mountains there are mountains": as you solve one problem, another problem presents itself, and so you go on and try to solve that one too.

Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion by Paul Bloom (p. 2016) - **Nonfiction (Mr. MacDonnell)**: We often think of our capacity to experience the suffering of others as the ultimate source of goodness. Many of our wisest policy-makers, activists, scientists, and philosophers agree that the only problem with empathy is that we don't have enough of it. Nothing could be farther from the truth, argues Yale researcher Paul Bloom. In *AGAINST EMPATHY*, Bloom reveals empathy to be one of the leading motivators of inequality and immorality in society. Far from helping us to improve the lives of others, empathy is a capricious and irrational emotion that appeals to our narrow prejudices. It muddles our judgment and, ironically, often leads to cruelty. We are at our best when we are smart enough not to rely on it, but to draw instead upon a more distanced compassion. Basing his argument on groundbreaking scientific findings, Bloom makes the case that some of the worst decisions made by individuals and nations—who to give money to, when to go to war, how to respond to climate change, and who to imprison—are too often motivated by honest, yet misplaced, emotions. With precision and wit, he demonstrates how empathy distorts our judgment in every aspect of our lives, from philanthropy and charity to the justice system; from medical care and education to parenting and marriage. Without empathy, Bloom insists, our decisions would be clearer, fairer, and—yes—ultimately more moral.

Kindred by Octavia Butler (p. 1979) - **Science fiction / Historical fiction (Ms. Glenn-Haber & Ms. Lawrence)**: One of the first science fiction novels written by a black woman, *Kindred* has become a cornerstone of black American literature. 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. After saving a drowning white

boy there, she finds herself staring into the barrel of a shotgun and is transported back to the present just in time to save her life. During numerous such time-defying episodes with the same young man, she realizes the challenge she's been given...

[The Elegance of the Hedgehog by Muriel Barbery](#) (p. 2006) - Fiction (Mr. Korta): A moving, funny, triumphant novel that exalts the quiet victories of the inconspicuous among us. We are in the center of Paris, in an elegant apartment building inhabited by bourgeois families. Renée, the concierge, is witness to the lavish but vacuous lives of her numerous employers. Outwardly she conforms to every stereotype of the concierge: fat, cantankerous, addicted to television. Yet, unbeknownst to her employers, Renée is a cultured autodidact who adores art, philosophy, music, and Japanese culture. With humor and intelligence she scrutinizes the lives of the building's tenants, who for their part are barely aware of her existence. Then there's Paloma, a twelve-year-old genius. She is the daughter of a tedious parliamentarian, a talented and startlingly lucid child who has decided to end her life on the sixteenth of June, her thirteenth birthday. Until then she will continue behaving as everyone expects her to behave: a mediocre pre-teen high on adolescent subculture, a good but not an outstanding student, an obedient if obstinate daughter.

[PNIN by Vladimir Nabokov](#) (p. 1957) - Fiction (Mr. Kerner): One of the best-loved of Nabokov's novels, Pnin features his funniest and most heart-rending character. Professor Timofey Pnin is a haplessly disoriented Russian émigré precariously employed on an American college campus in the 1950's. Pnin struggles to maintain his dignity through a series of comic and sad misunderstandings, all the while falling victim both to subtle academic conspiracies and to the manipulations of a deliberately unreliable narrator. Initially an almost grotesquely comic figure, Pnin gradually grows in stature by contrast with those who laugh at him. Whether taking the wrong train to deliver a lecture in a language he has not mastered or throwing a faculty party during which he learns he is losing his job, the gently preposterous hero of this enchanting novel evokes the reader's deepest protective instinct.

PART TWO:

Required Summer Reading for Courses

All students should check this section to see if they have required summer reading.

ANCIENT HISTORY - 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

[The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh](#) by David Damrosch

(ISBN: 978-0805087253): Composed by a poet and priest in Middle Babylonia around 1200 bce, The Epic of Gilgamesh foreshadowed later stories that would become as fundamental as any in human history, The Odyssey and the Bible. But in 600 bce, the clay tablets that bore the story were lost--buried beneath ashes and ruins when the library of the wild king Ashurbanipal was sacked in a raid. The Buried Book begins with the rediscovery of the epic and its deciphering in 1872 by George Smith, a brilliant self-taught linguist who created a sensation when he discovered Gilgamesh among the thousands of tablets in the British Museum's collection. From there the story goes backward in time, all the way to Gilgamesh himself. Damrosch reveals the story as a literary bridge between East and West: a document lost in Babylonia, discovered by an Iraqi, decoded by an Englishman, and appropriated in novels by both Philip Roth and Saddam Hussein. This is an illuminating, fast-paced tale of history as it was written, stolen, lost, and--after 2,000 years, countless battles, fevered digs, conspiracies, and revelations--finally found.

MEDIEVAL HISTORY - 10TH GRADE STUDENTS

[The Arabian Nights](#) (ISBN: 9780812972146): This volume reproduces the 1932 Modern Library edition, for which Bennett A. Cerf chose the most famous and representative stories from Sir Richard F. Burton's multivolume translation, and includes Burton's extensive and acclaimed explanatory notes.

The tales told by Shahrazad over a thousand and one nights to delay her execution by the vengeful King Shahriyar have become among the most popular in both Eastern and Western literature, as recounted by Sir Francis Burton. From the epic adventures of "Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp" to the farcical "Young Woman and her Five Lovers" and the social criticism of "The Tale of the Hunchback", the stories depict a fabulous world of all-powerful sorcerers, jinns imprisoned in bottles and enchanting princesses. But despite their imaginative extravagance, the Tales are anchored to everyday life by their realism, providing a full and intimate record of medieval Islam.'

[The Divine Comedy: The Inferno](#) by Dante Alighieri (ISBN: 0374524521): Considered to be one of the greatest literary works of all time -- equal only to those of Shakespeare -- Dante's immortal drama of a journey through Hell is the first volume of his Divine Comedy. The remaining canticles, The Purgatorio and The Paradiso, will be published this summer in quick succession.

[*Tao Te Ching by Lao-Tse*](#) (ISBN: 9780872202320): The Tao Te Ching is a Chinese classic text written around 400 BC and traditionally credited to the sage Lao Tzu (or Laozi). The text's authorship, date of composition and date of compilation are debated. The oldest excavated portion dates back to the late 4th century BC, but modern scholarship dates other parts of the text as having been written—or at least compiled—later than the earliest portions of the Zhuangzi. The Tao Te Ching, along with the Zhuangzi, is a fundamental text for both philosophical and religious Taoism. It also strongly influenced other schools of Chinese philosophy and religion, including Legalism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism, which was largely interpreted through the use of Taoist words and concepts when it was originally introduced to China. Many artists, including poets, painters, calligraphers, and gardeners, have used the Tao Te Ching as a source of inspiration. Its influence has spread widely outside East Asia and it is among the most translated works in world literature.

[*Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali by D. T. Niane*](#) (ISBN: 0582264758): Retold by generations of griots - the guardians of African culture - this oral tradition has been handed down from the thirteenth century and captures all the mystery and majesty of medieval African kingship. It is an epic - part history, part legend - and a great adventure story.

UNITED STATES HISTORY & UNITED STATES HISTORY SINCE 1865

Please read William Cronon's "ethno-ecological" history of New England: [*Changes of the Land*](#) (ISBN: 978-0809016341). Taking paper notes on a copy from the library or an e-book is just fine). This profound and revolutionary book explores how Native Americans transformed the environment before contact with Europeans—and how the changing economy of the 17th century led to an ecological transformation. I encourage you to read the whole book, but if you want a shorter version, read chapters 4, 5, and 8. There is an [optional, extra-credit assignment here](#) to help you read actively, looking for the author's argument amidst the detail (a skill we'll try to practice in the coming year!) This book looks drier than it actually is—and reading actively may help you uncover the quite radical claims hidden within.

For students in United States History since 1865, you should supplement what we will be learning in this course with Jill Lepore's sweeping history of the United States, [*These Truths*](#) (ISBN: 978-0-393-63524-9). You are only responsible for the first 300 pages. If you would like to use it to start an AP study guide for the spring, you can use this option and [extra-credit document](#).

MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY

[*To End All Wars: A Study of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918*](#) by Adam Hochschild (ISBN: 9780547750316): The year 1914 marks a turning point in our Modern European History course. Up to that point, the story we tell is in many ways one of progress: growing prosperity, longer life spans and expanding political rights. Then came the First World War, "the great seminal catastrophe" of the twentieth century, in diplomat George

Kennan's words. In *To End All Wars*, Adam Hochschild captures the true complexity of the war's human dimension by exploring, not the clash of warring powers, but the tensions between supporters and opponents of the war in one of those powers, Great Britain. As you read, don't worry about remembering specific names and dates. Instead, try to mark a few sections that interest, puzzle, or surprise you.

BIBLE AS BIBLE / BIBLE AS HISTORY

[*Genesis* by Robert Alter](#) (ISBN: 9780393316704): In the beginning, there was summer reading: Genesis, translated by Robert Alter. Reading the Book of Genesis means a) reading the stories; b) making annotations about things that strike you as interesting, c) making a list of the different stories for later reference, and d) most importantly, making a list of themes that seem to emerge from those stories, which we'll discuss in the Fall (note subtle Bible humor there). (Please bring Genesis and that list on the first day.) The Book of Genesis is short, but Alter's version is long because of the copious and extremely useful notes. Don't ignore them! If you like, you might also read the four Gospels to familiarize yourself with those texts ahead of our study of the Christian texts in the Spring, but that is entirely optional.

ECONOMICS

[*Naked Economics* by Charles Wheelan](#) (ISBN: 9780393337648): Finally! A book about economics that won't put you to sleep. In fact, you won't be able to put this bestseller down. In our challenging economic climate, this perennial favorite of students and general readers is more than a good read, it's a necessary investment—with a blessedly sure rate of return. Demystifying buzzwords, laying bare the truths behind oft-quoted numbers, and answering the questions you were always too embarrassed to ask, the breezy *Naked Economics* gives readers the tools they need to engage with pleasure and confidence in the deeply relevant, not so dismal science.

PART THREE:

Recommendations from the Class of 2021 & Faculty

Graduating seniors, faculty, and staff share some of their favorite books.

Faculty Recommendations

Ms. Glenn-Haber: [*Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke](#), Fiction (p. 2019) (Mr. MacDonnell Cosigns, “I also read this one this year!”) - For one: it's short. Second: it's strange—I can't think of another book like it. Third, for writers: Clarke's slow reveal and intricate world-building are both a model of how to dole out information to keep the reader wanting more... and her willingness to be ambiguous about the "meaning" of the book is a gift to the reader. Recommended grades: 9, 10, 11, 12.

Anna Moss: [*How Long 'til Black Future Month?* by N.K. Jemisin](#), Short Stories (p. 2018) - A series of fantastic short stories ranging from fantasy to sci-fi, centering Black people in those imagined futures/world. Beautifully written, and in a ton of styles. Recommended grades: 9, 10, 11, 12.

Mr. Barsi: [*Enough Already: Time to End the War on Terror* by Scott Horton](#), Nonfiction (p. 2021) - Make a strong case again US military interventionism and complements nicely an assembly speaker who talked about journalism in Afghanistan. Might be heavy reading for younger students. Recommended grades: 12.

Mr. Chalue: [*No One is Talking About This* by Patricia Lockwood](#), Fiction (p. 2021) - It is excellent! Mr. Kerner also enjoys it. It is an interesting analysis of our online lives. Recommended grades: 9, 10, 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*I, Claudius* by Robert Graves](#), Historical Fiction (p. 1934) - I found this book to be a very immersive and fun read. Definitely great for those who enjoyed some of the wilder emperors and political figures that you all learned about in Ancient History. There are some *Game of Thrones*esque political moves that happen. It can be a very tongue-in-cheek book at times as well. Recommended grades: 9, 10, 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Breaks of the Game* by David Halberstam](#), Nonfiction / Sports (p. 1981) - Any fan of basketball or the NBA will appreciate this book's interrogation of the state of the league in the early 1980s. Halberstam is an incredibly prescient writer, analytically describing and critiquing racism in the NBA, player salaries and contracts, the physical toll on players' bodies, and coaching strategies. I was astounded at how incisive and earnest his writing style was, and how relevant the issues were to today's game. Recommended grades: 9, 10, 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Girls* by Emma Cline](#), Historical Fiction (p. 2019) - This one is a spooky read!! It is told from the perspective of a survivor of a fictionalized version of the Manson cult. I greatly enjoyed Cline's writing style, which is poetic and descriptive, yet concise. *The Girls* can be graphic, violent, and challenging, so go into this one only if you're ready for some tough subject matter, particularly about men manipulating women. Recommended grades: 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell (cosigned by Hannah Jenkins '22): [*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith](#), Fiction (p. 2010) - Probably a top 10 book for me! I read this one a couple years back, and I've found myself in many conversations with friends, family, and coworkers about how incredible this book is. A generational tale of angst, displacement, national pride, and belonging, *White Teeth* tells the story of around 10 Londoner characters whose lives collide in dramatic ways. Recommended grades: 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler](#), Detective Fiction (p. 1939) - My dad initially recommended this book to me, and I foolishly wrote it off as a silly genre fiction at first. When I did get around to reading it, I loved it. Super quick read, very cool imagery, and gives you a sense of where noir film and television tropes came from. Also, it's weirdly the basis for the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1999). Recommended grades: 11, 12.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Broom of the System* by David Foster Wallace](#) (p. 1987) - This book is incredibly quick-witted and dialogue centric. I loved the flow of the book, and while it can be a bit difficult to grasp at times (intentionally so), the payoffs are very rewarding. Recommended grades: 11, 12.

Graduating Seniors' Recommendations

Annie Jones '22: [*My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante](#) (p. 2011)- I enjoyed that book because I felt it was different than what I typically read. I had the chance to read this in Dr. Lasker's psych class.

Hannah Jenkins '22: [*Writers and Lovers* by Lily King](#) (p. 2020) & [*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz](#) (p. 2007)

Chris Mafucci-Fitanides '22: [*The Death of Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes](#) (p. 1962), [*A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole](#) (p. 1980)

Addie Moore-Gerety '22: [*Ghost World* by Daniel Clowes](#) (p. 1998), [*Killing Commendatore* by Haruki Murakami](#) (p. 2017)

Alex Li '22: [*When the Emperor was Divine* by Julie Otsuka](#) (p. 2002)

Other Reading Recommendations

Books in the Commonwealth Library

- [What's new in the Commonwealth Library](#) - See what we've brought into the collection over this past year. It represents a range of genres, forms, modes, topics, and interests. Check one out!
- Book Displays
 - [AAPI Heritage Month Book Display](#)
 - [Black History Month Book Display](#)
 - [Halloween Book Display](#)
 - [LGBTQIA+ History Month Book Display](#)
 - [Mindfulness Book Display](#)
 - [National Hispanic Heritage Month Book Display](#)
 - [Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Display](#)
 - [Women's History Month Book Display](#)

Recommendations from the Boston Public Library

- [General Fiction](#)
 - [Fantasy](#)
 - [Historical Fiction](#)
 - [Literary Fiction](#)
 - [Mysteries](#)
 - [Romance](#)
 - [Science Fiction](#)
 - [Short Stories](#)
- [Nonfiction](#)
 - [Biographies](#)
 - [History](#)
 - [Science & Tech](#)
 - [Essays](#)
- [Teen Reads](#)
- [Audiobooks](#)
- [What to Read Next?](#)

Cambridge Public Library Summer Reading Program

Minuteman Library Network Book Lists

- [Local Interests and Recommendations](#)

New York Public Library Recommends