



[\(Two Women Reclining on the Floor of a Room and Reading a Book, Nishikawa Sukenobu\)](#)

SUMMER READING 2023: New Students

Summer break can be a wonderful time to catch up on reading—to discover new genres or authors, to re-read old favorites, or to finally tackle a literary classic. We share this summer reading list to help students do just that. It includes information about the required all-school summer reading, which you should have received in the mail by now, and the course-specific required reading. You will also find several curated lists of book recommendations from teachers, students, and beyond. We hope you will use these lists to establish additional reading goals for yourself this summer. Your advisor will likely ask you about what you've read over the summer when you meet this fall.

Happy reading!

Mr. MacDonnell

PART ONE: Required All-School Summer Reading

The aim of Commonwealth's All-School 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. This year, each book has a central theme of or relationship to *metamorphosis*. In September, we will break into small groups to discuss different books, and faculty and returning students will lead discussions.

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

You chose one of the following books for as your reading choice on New Students' Day, and you have received a copy of it in the mail:

***Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (p. 1813) - Fiction:** Since its immediate success in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* has remained one of the most popular novels in the English language. Jane Austen called this brilliant work "her own darling child" and its vivacious heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print." The romantic clash between the opinionated Elizabeth and her proud beau, Mr. Darcy, is a splendid performance of civilized sparring. And Jane Austen's radiant wit sparkles as her characters dance a delicate quadrille of flirtation and intrigue, making this book the most superb comedy of manners of Regency England. (Ms. Tyson)

***A (Very) Short History of Life on Earth: 4.6 Billion Years in 12 Pithy Chapters* by Henry Gee (p. 2021) - Nonfiction:** In *A (Very) Short History of Life on Earth*, Henry Gee zips through the last 4.6 billion years with infectious enthusiasm and intellectual rigor. Drawing on the very latest scientific understanding and writing in a clear, accessible style, he tells an enlightening tale of survival and persistence that illuminates the delicate balance within which life has always existed. (Mr. Spalding)

***The Lais of Marie de France* (p. 1160) - Fables, Fiction:** *The Lais of Marie de France*, written in the 12th century, are a dozen beautiful fables exploring the ill-defined boundaries between humanity and animality, reality and imagination, culture and wilderness. (Mr. Korta)

***The Breaks of the Game* by David Halberstam (p. 1981) - Nonfiction:** Tune into any talking head sports show about basketball, you'll certainly hear pundits squabbling about the vast changes that the National Basketball Association has undergone since its inaugural season in 1946-47. Yet, despite those semi-legitimate gripes, David Halberstam was able to predict many of the crucial forthcoming changes that the league would experience in the 21st century back in the early 1980s. Focusing on the 1979 Portland Trail Blazers, a former championship team anchored by superstar center Bill Walton and Kermit Washington, *The Breaks of the Game* identifies changes in racial dynamics between players and the media, contracts for superstars, player empowerment, and personal health. Watch the league go through the beginnings of a decades-long metamorphosis in this powerful journalistic account of a once successful team now left searching for their identity and place in the sports landscape. (Mr. MacDonnell)

***The Trial* (p. 1925) & *The Metamorphosis* (p. 1915) by Franz Kafka - Two Novellas, Fiction:** Like all great literature, *The Trial* is about metamorphosis in the sense that it traces the changes in its main character, Joseph K., a man who discovers one morning that he has been "traded"—accused by someone he does not know of an unnamed crime to be tried in an unnamed court. The novel, with its echoes of the Book of Job, details how Joseph K. responds to this feeling of being unjustly trapped, much as the main character of *The Metamorphosis* experiences when he wakes up one day transformed to something like a cockroach. Kafka resists being reduced to one reading, writing books so particular and powerful that the adjective "Kafkaesque" had to be invented to describe what he saw so plainly and painfully in the modern world. (Ms. Haber)

PART TWO: Required Summer Reading for Courses

All students should check this section to see which courses they are taking have required summer reading.

ANCIENT HISTORY (ninth-grade students)

[*The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh* by David Damrosch](#) (ISBN: 978-0805087253): One of the first works we will read in Ancient History is the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh, a tale of tyranny, friendship, and the human fear of death. The Buried Book recounts how this epic was lost for millennia—literally buried in the ruins of the Assyrian empire—and then rediscovered in the nineteenth century. Over the summer, please read the Introduction, Chapters 1-3, and Chapter 5. As you read, concentrate on the big picture. What obstacles did archaeologists face as they tried to unearth the remnants of Mesopotamian civilizations? How did scholars learn to read unknown ancient languages? Moving back in time, why did Assyrian kings value writing, and how did cuneiform writing work? We hope that this reading will be enjoyable! Don't worry about remembering specific names and dates. Instead, try to mark a few points that interest, puzzle, or surprise you.

MEDIEVAL HISTORY (tenth-grade students)

[*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.

PART THREE: Recommendations from faculty members & the Class of 2023

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. 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 Nix* by Nathan Hill](#), Contemporary Fiction (p. 2016) - This book is a fun political satire that certainly reflects the modern era that it was written during. It's episodic, character-rich, and incredibly witty. It's a fun book, certainly worth the read.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell](#), Nonfiction, Literary / Mythical Analysis (p. 1949) - Famously the book that inspired the plot arc and character development in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, this book is a foundational and insightful look at the myths that shape our past and contemporary storytelling traditions. I learned a great deal from this book.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula K. Le Guin](#), Fantasy (p. 1968) - Ged, the greatest sorcerer in all Earthsea, was called Sparrowhawk in his reckless youth. Hungry for power and knowledge, Sparrowhawk tampered with long-held secrets and loosed a terrible shadow upon the world. This is the tale of his testing, how he mastered the mighty words of power, tamed an ancient dragon, and crossed death's threshold to restore the balance.

Mr. MacDonnell: [*The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro](#), Literary Fiction (p. 1989) - Written from the perspective of a dutiful butler at the end of his professional career, this book asks important questions about love, professionalism, growth, and meaning. I was so deeply moved upon reading this book, I re-read it only a month later! Ishiguro's prose is unbelievable.

Graduating & Rising Seniors' Recommendations

Jo Axel '23: *[Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families](#)* by J. Anthony Lukas (p. 1985) **Nonfiction:** I read this book as a freshman for the City of Boston Class, and it fundamentally changed my perception of Boston and my own identity as a white, Irish-German New Englander. Definitely think it's a good read for Commonwealth students.

Ava Rahman '23: *[Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader](#)* by Anne Fadiman (p. 1998) **Nonfiction:** For some reason, I really love to read books about reading. This book is a series of humorous and thoughtful essays about a book worm's love of a books and words. It made me reflect on my own reading habits and made me laugh.

Ava Rahman '23: *[My Family and Other Animals](#)* by Gerald Durrell (p. 1956) **Fiction:** A story of an eccentric British family living in Corfu. It's also really funny, entertaining, and well-written.

Ava Rahman '23: *[To the Lighthouse](#)* by Virginia Woolf (p. 1927) **Fiction:** This is one of my favorite books! It's a little unconventional in terms of style, since there is not a linear plot or perspective, but the writing is beautiful and the reflections of the characters profound. It made me think a lot about how people understand (and misunderstand) each other, and how you can live your life in a meaningful way.

Ava Rahman '23: *[Is that a Fish in your Ear?](#)* by David Bellos (p. 2011) **Nonfiction:** This is a good book for anyone interested in languages, translation, and linguistics. It's non-fiction, but very readable and engaging. It addresses some of the essential questions of what meaning is, and how we understand it. It made me re-think ideas I previously took for granted, like the idea that meaning lies in definitions and dictionaries, or that a translated work of literature is "better" in the original. It sounds sort of boring and abstract when I explain it, but it is really interesting to read in reality! And I think it raises relevant ideas about language and culture becoming more global.

Ava Rahman '23: *[A Tree Grows in Brooklyn](#)* by Betty Smith (p. 1943) **Fiction:** A heartfelt coming of age story about a young girl living in the slums of Brooklyn, New York. I found it valuable and moving to read at the beginning of high school.

Moe Frumkin '23: *[Copenhagen](#)* by Michael Frayn (p. 1998) **Plays:** This thought provoking play features Werner Heisenberg, Neils Bohr, and his wife, Margrethe Bohr, as they try to untangle what led to Heisenberg's and Bohr's falling out after Heisenberg's 1941 visit to Bohr in Copenhagen. As they work through the past, they find themselves exploring the difficult philosophical questions posed by science. Most immediately, the quantum model of particle physics poses as many philosophical questions as it answers scientific ones. However, the deadly applications of particle physics pose additional, moral, questions, during the midst of a world war. If you've ever asked "what does quantum physics say about reality?" "Are scientists morally responsible for the applications of their work?" and "Is science objective?" I would highly recommend this play.

Moe Frumkin '23: [*Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*](#) by Paul Tough (p. 2008) **Nonfiction:** In 2004, Geoffrey Canada, the President of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), launched his most audacious plan to date: the Promise Academy Charter Schools. Canada wasn't new to education or Harlem. After growing up in the neighborhood, attending college, and earning a master's degree in education, he returned determined to fight poverty. At the HCZ he wanted to create a safety net so tightly woven that no child could fall through. HCZ already offered Baby College and an assortment of afterschool programs but Canada believed that, with his own schools, he could even more radically change the prospects of Harlem's children. This book chronicles the first few years of the schools and the accompanying successes and failures. Tough vividly tells the story and captures Canada's thought provoking insights into poverty, education, and class. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in education or anti-poverty policy in general. After reading the book, I gained an entirely new perspective on the difficulty, but also exciting opportunities of educational reform.

Romen Der Manuelian '23: [*Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon*](#) by Steve Sheinkin (p. 2012) **Nonfiction:** This non fiction book reads like a real life spy novel centered around the lead up to the production of the atomic bomb. It's a fascinating historical narrative, and really informs a lot of our modern nuclear geopolitical era.

Romen Der Manuelian '23: [*Conscience of a Conservative*](#) by Barry Goldwater (p. 1960) **Nonfiction:** This easy to follow ideological book about the fundamentals of Goldwater's brand of conservatism (which centers around individualism, fiscal restraint, and small government) may expose my classmates to a totally different worldview.

Caroline Brown '23: [*The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*](#) by Taylor Jenkins Reid (p. 2017) **Fiction:** Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now?

Caroline Brown '23: [*I'll Be Seeing You*](#) by Suzanne Hayes and Lorette Nynan (p. 2013) **Fiction:** I'll Be Seeing You is a deeply moving union of style and charm. Filled with unforgettable characters and grace, it is a timeless celebration of friendship and the strength and solidarity of women.

Caroline Brown '23: [*Three Hours in Paris*](#) by Cara Black (p. 2020) **Fiction:** In June of 1940, when Paris fell to the Nazis, Hitler spent a total of three hours in the City of Light—abruptly leaving, never to return. To this day, no one knows why.

Grace Pariser '23: [*The Catcher in the Rye*](#) by J.D. Salinger (p. 1951) **Fiction:** It's cliché, but apart from it being one of the Great American Novels, there's really something in there for everyone. At base, it's an excellent internal portrait of an underdog. The themes of connection (or lack thereof) and suspicion towards society are so universal that I think if people go into it with an open mind they'll find that they took something meaningful.

Grace Pariser '23: [*The Miseducation of Cameron Post*](#) by Emily M. Danforth (p. 2012) **Fiction:** I read this one summer in two days flat, and it's still one of my favorite books. The development of characters over a long span of time is incredible. The voice of the protagonist is also unique.

Grace Pariser '23: [*Candide*](#) by Voltaire (p. 1759) **Fiction:** I was surprised to enjoy this so much. It's a very short read but the plot is crammed with constant movement. The philosophical irony is entertaining, but I enjoyed the writing itself even more, and found that there were many moments available in the text for reflection. Also, you can listen to Leonard Bernstein's musical interpretation.

Amith Saligrama '24: [*The White Tiger*](#) by Aravind Adiga (p. 2008) **Fiction:** Aravind Adiga's brilliantly irreverent tale of two Indias charts one man's evolution from village waiter to larcenous killer to amoral entrepreneur.

PART FOUR: Further Reading Recommendations

Additional curated lists to assist students in finding enjoyable reads.

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