



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

SUMMER READING 2023: 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 *metamorphosis*. 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.

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 Pitby 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 “traduced”—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 “Kakfaesque” had to be invented to describe what he saw so plainly and painfully in the modern world. (Ms. Haber)

***The City We Became* by N. K. Jemisin (p. 2020) - Science Fiction:** The book centers on the idea of a world in which cities 'birth' avatars once they become unique and large enough. The avatars of New York (one for each borough) were all once normal New Yorkers and must all adjust to the sudden change, and find each other. It has elements of fantasy set in current New York. It's vibrant and diverse, and addresses both urban life and the changing faces of cities. (Anna Moss)

***H is for Hawk* by Helen MacDonald (p. 2023) - Memoir:** Destined to be a classic of nature writing, "H is for Hawk" is a record of a spiritual journey - an unflinchingly honest account of Macdonald's struggle with grief during the difficult process of the hawk's taming and her own untaming. At the same time, it's a kaleidoscopic biography of the brilliant and troubled novelist T. H. White, best known for "The Once and Future King." It's a book about memory, nature and nation, and how it might be possible to try to reconcile death with life and love. (Ms. Dale)

***The Wordbord: Daily Life in Old English* by Hana Videen (p. 2022) - Nonfiction:** An entertaining and illuminating collection of weird, wonderful, and downright baffling words from the origins of English—and what they reveal about the lives of the earliest English speakers. (Ms. Sundberg)

***Wake, Siren: Ovid Resung* by Nina MacLaughlin (p. 2019) - Fiction:** Drawing on the rhythms of epic poetry and alt rock, of everyday speech and folk song, of fireside whisperings and therapy sessions, Nina MacLaughlin, the acclaimed author of Hammer Head, recovers what is lost when the stories of women are told and translated by men. She breathes new life into these fraught and well-loved myths. (Lizzy W. & Mr. Singer)

***Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer (p. 1996) - Nonfiction:** In April, 1992, a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, a party of moose hunters found his decomposed body. How McCandless came to die is the unforgettable story of Into the Wild. (Ms. Borman)

PART TWO:

Required Summer Reading for Courses

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

MEDIEVAL HISTORY - 10TH 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.

UNITED STATES HISTORY

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.

UNITED STATES HISTORY SINCE 1865

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

Voltaire: a life by Ian Davidson (ISBN: 978-1605982878): Voltaire was arguably the single most influential thinker of the Enlightenment. Although he lived out his life (1694-1778) under the monarchy, he was later claimed as a hero by the leaders of the French Revolution. As you read Davidson's lively biography, first see what you can learn about the political and social realities of life under the old regime. For instance, how did authors make money? How did censorship work? How did French nobles conduct their extramarital affairs? Next, pay attention to the events that became part of the narrative of the Enlightenment. For instance, how and why did the trial of Jean Calas become notorious? **Please read the Note to the Reader and Chapters 1-9, 12, 17, 22, 25-29, and 33.** As you read, mark points that interest, puzzle, or surprise you. You will draw on this book for one of our early writing assignments.

WORLD SINCE 1945

Year Zero: A History of 1945 by Ian Buruma (ISBN: 978-1594204364): This powerful account brings us back to the world of 1945—a world in ruins. Combining individual stories with broader historical background, Buruma vividly sketches the harsh realities of post-war survival in Europe and Asia. Please read Parts I and II (Prologue and Chapters 1-6). As you read, mark points that interest, puzzle, or surprise you. You will draw on this book for our first writing assignment.

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.

CITY OF BOSTON - REDUX

Common Ground by Anthony Lucas (ISBN: 9780394746166): Winner of 3 different awards, this is a story of the busing crisis in Boston. The book traces the history of three families: the working-class African-American Twymons, the working-class Irish McGoffs, and the middle-class Yankee Divers. It gives brief genealogical histories of each families, focusing on how the events they went through illuminated Boston history, before narrowing its focus to the racial tension of the 1960s and the 1970s. Through their stories, *Common Ground* focuses on racial and class conflicts in two Boston neighborhoods: the working-class Irish-American enclave of Charlestown and the uneasily integrated South End.

PART THREE:

Recommendations from the Class of 2023 & Faculty

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

Faculty Recommendations

Commonwealth School Book Club: [*Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin](#), **Science Fiction (p. 1969)** - A groundbreaking work of science fiction, *The Left Hand of Darkness* tells the story of a lone human emissary to Winter, an alien world whose inhabitants spend most of their time without a 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.

Ms. Glenn-Haber: [*Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke](#), **Fiction (p. 2019) (Mr. MacDonnell Cosigns, "I also read this one last 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.

Ms. Thompson: [*Dune* by Frank Herbert](#), **Science Fiction (p. 1965)** - When House Atreides is betrayed, the destruction of Paul's family will set the boy on a journey toward a destiny greater than he could ever have imagined. And as he evolves into the mysterious man known as Muad'Dib, he will bring to fruition humankind's most ancient and unattainable dream.

Ms. Thompson: [*The Hand* by Frank R. Wilson](#), **Nonfiction (p. 1999)** - In this fascinating book, Wilson moves from a discussion of the hand's evolution—and how its intimate communication with the brain affects such areas as neurology, psychology, and linguistics—to provocative new ideas about human creativity and how best to nurture it. Like Oliver Sacks and Stephen Jay Gould, Wilson handles a daunting range of scientific knowledge with a surprising deftness and a profound curiosity about human possibility. Provocative, illuminating, and delightful to read, *The Hand* encourages us to think in new ways about one of our most taken-for-granted assets.

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 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 (p. 2010), Fiction - 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 Wind Up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami (p. 1995), Surrealist Fiction Detective Fiction - What happens when you come home and your cat is missing? Now pair that with a missing spouse and mysterious unknown callers. This book completely rocked me. It's mind-bending, wildly imaginative, and suspenseful. 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 & 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.

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](#)