



[\(Compartment C, Car 293 - 1938 by Edward Hopper\)](#)

SUMMER READING 2024: 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 by now, and the course-specific required reading. You will also find several curated lists of book recommendations from teachers 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 **failure and redemption**. 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:

***Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo (p. 1862):** Victor Hugo's tale of injustice, heroism and love follows the fortunes of Jean Valjean, an escaped convict determined to put his criminal past behind him. But his attempts to become a respected member of the community are constantly put under threat: by his own conscience, when, owing to a case of mistaken identity, another man is arrested in his place; and by the relentless investigations of the dogged Inspector Javert. It is not simply for himself that Valjean must stay free, however, for he has sworn to protect the baby daughter of Fantine, driven to prostitution by poverty.

***Fermat's Enigma* by Simon Singh (p. 1997):** $x^n + y^n = z^n$, where n represents 3, 4, 5, ...no solution. "I have discovered a truly marvelous demonstration of this proposition which this margin is too narrow to contain." With these words, the seventeenth-century French mathematician Pierre de Fermat threw down the gauntlet to future generations. What came to be known as Fermat's Last Theorem looked simple; proving it, however, became the Holy Grail of mathematics, baffling its finest minds for more than 350 years. In *Fermat's Enigma*—based on the author's award-winning documentary film, which aired on PBS's "Nova"—Simon Singh tells the astonishingly entertaining story of the pursuit of that grail, and the lives that were devoted to, sacrificed for, and saved by it. Here is a mesmerizing tale of heartbreak and mastery that will forever change your feelings about mathematics.

***Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson (p. 2014):** An unforgettable true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to end mass incarceration in America—from one of the most inspiring lawyers of our time. Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit law office in Montgomery, Alabama, dedicated to defending the poor, the incarcerated, and the wrongly condemned. *Just Mercy* tells the story of EJI, from the early days with a small staff facing the nation's highest death sentencing and execution rates, through a successful campaign to challenge the cruel practice of sentencing children to die in prison, to revolutionary projects designed to confront Americans with our history of racial injustice.

***Michael Jordan: The Life* by Roland Lazenby (p. 2014):** The definitive biography of a legendary athlete. The Shrug. The Shot. The Flu Game. Michael Jordan is responsible for sublime moments so ingrained in sports history that they have their own names. When most people think of him, they think of his beautiful shots with the game on the line, his body totally in sync with the ball—hitting nothing but net. But for all his greatness, this scion of a complex family from North Carolina's Coastal Plain has a darker side: he's a ruthless competitor and a lover of high stakes. There's never been a biography that encompassed the dual nature of his character and looked so deeply at Jordan on and off the court—until now.

***Life After Life* by Kate Atkinson (p. 2013):** What if you could live again and again, until you got it right? On a cold and snowy night in 1910, Ursula Todd is born to an English banker and his wife. She dies before she can draw her first breath. On that same cold and snowy night, Ursula Todd is born, lets out a lusty wail, and embarks upon a life that will be, to say the least, unusual. For as she grows, she also dies, repeatedly, in a variety of ways, while the young century marches on towards its second cataclysmic world war. Does Ursula's apparently infinite number of lives give her the power to save the world from its inevitable destiny? And if she can - will she?

***Confessions* by Saint Augustine:** The son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, Saint Augustine spent his early years torn between conflicting faiths and world views. His *Confessions*, written when he was in his forties, recount how, slowly and painfully, he came to turn away from his youthful ideas and licentious lifestyle, to become instead a staunch advocate of Christianity and one of its most influential thinkers. A remarkably honest and revealing spiritual autobiography, the *Confessions* also address fundamental issues of Christian doctrine, and many of the prayers and meditations it includes are still an integral part of the practice of Christianity today.

***H is for Hawk* by Helen MacDonald (p. 2014):** As a child, Helen MacDonald was determined to become a falconer. She learned the arcane terminology and read all the classic books, including T. H. White's tortured masterpiece, *The Goshawk*, which describes White's struggle to train a hawk as a spiritual contest. When her father dies and she is knocked sideways by grief, she becomes obsessed with the idea of training her own goshawk. She buys Mabel for £800 on a Scottish quayside and takes her home to Cambridge. Then she fills the freezer with hawk food and unplugs the phone, ready to embark on the long, strange business of trying to train this wildest of animals.

***Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren (p. 2016):** Acclaimed scientist Hope Jahren has built three laboratories in which she's studied trees, flowers, seeds, and soil. Her first book is a revelatory treatise on plant life—but it is also so much more. *Lab Girl* is a book about work, love, and the mountains that can be moved when those two things come together. It is told through Jahren's stories: about her childhood in rural Minnesota with an uncompromising mother and a father who encouraged hours of play in his classroom's labs; about how she found a sanctuary in science, and learned to perform lab work done "with both the heart and the hands"; and about the inevitable disappointments, but also the triumphs and exhilarating discoveries, of scientific work.

***Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis* by Robert Bringhurst and Jan Zwicky (p. 2018):** In this powerful little book, two leading intellectuals illuminate the truth about where our environmental crisis is taking us. Writing from an island on Canada's Northwest coast, Robert Bringhurst and Jan Zwicky weigh in on the death of the planet versus the death of the individual. For Zwicky, awareness and humility are the foundation of the equanimity with which Socrates faced his death: he makes a good model when facing the death of the planet, as well as facing our own immortality. Bringhurst urges readers to tune their minds to the wild. The wild has healed the world before, and it is the only thing that stands any chance of healing the world now - though it is unlikely to save *Homo sapiens* in the process.

***The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig (p. 2020):** Between life and death there is a library. When Nora Seed finds herself in the Midnight Library, she has a chance to make things right. Up until now, her life has been full of misery and regret. She feels she has let everyone down, including herself. But things are about to change. The books in the Midnight Library enable Nora to live as if she had done things differently. With the help of an old friend, she can now undo every one of her regrets as she tries to work out her perfect life. But things aren't always what she imagined they'd be, and soon her choices place the library and herself in extreme danger.

PART TWO: Required Summer Reading for Specific Classes

All students should check this section to see which courses they are taking 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):** 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 of *The Buried Book*. 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 WORLD HISTORY - 10TH GRADE STUDENTS

***The Prince* by Machiavelli (ISBN: 978-0199535699):** When Machiavelli's brief treatise on Renaissance statecraft and princely power was posthumously published in 1532, it generated a debate that has raged unabated until the present day. Based upon Machiavelli's first-hand experience as an emissary of the Florentine Republic to the courts of Europe, *The Prince* analyzes the usually violent means by which men seize, retain, and lose political power. Machiavelli added a dimension of incisive realism to one of the major philosophical and political issues of his time, especially the relationship between public deeds and private morality. His book provides a remarkably uncompromising picture of the true nature of power, no matter in what era or by whom it is exercised. This fluent new translation is accompanied by an introduction that considers the true purpose of *The Prince* and dispels some of the myths associated with it. It has the most comprehensive explanatory and critical notes found in any currently available English translation and the most comprehensive bibliography in any edition of the work. It also contains a helpful Glossary of Proper Names, an Index and a map.

PART THREE: Faculty Recommendations

Faculty and staff share some of their favorite books.

Commonwealth School Book Club: *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (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 (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.

Anna Moss: *How Long 'til Black Future Month?* by N. K. Jemisin (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.

Mr. Chalue: *No One is Talking About This* by Patricia Lockwood (p. 2021) - It is excellent! Mr. Kerner also enjoys it. It is an interesting analysis of our online lives.

Mr. MacDonnell: *I, Claudius* by Robert Graves (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.

Mr. MacDonnell: *The Nix* by Nathan Hill (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 (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 (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 (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.

Ms. Thompson: *Women and Children First* by Alina Grabowski (Class of 2012) (p. 2023) - Nashquitten, MA, is a decaying coastal enclave that not even tourist season can revive, full of locals who have run the town's industries for generations. When a young woman dies at a house party, the circumstances around her death suspiciously unclear, the tight-knit community is shaken. As a mother grieves her daughter, a teacher, her student, a best friend, her confidante, the events around the tragedy become a lightning rod: blame is cast, secrets are buried deeper. Some are left to pick up the pieces, while others turn their backs, and all the while, a truth about that dreadful night begins to emerge.

Mx. Korman: *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care* by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (p. 2023) - A life giving book on how to attain and maintain political agency with love during a world in crisis.

Mx. Korman: *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* by Bell Hooks (p. 2003) - This one directly addresses men, but is a fine read for many despite showing its age at times. A book on how to love and be loved.

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 and 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