



["A Chemist in his Laboratory" - Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin](#)

SUMMER READING 2026: 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 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 exposes faculty, staff, and students alike to new writers, genres, and reading experiences, all while practicing analytical thinking and group discussion.

Ideally, summer reading will elucidate 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 selected book relates to the theme of **loneliness & connection**. In September, we will break into small groups to discuss different books across grade levels.

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.

On this year's theme:

This year, the summer reading theme at Commonwealth is **loneliness & connection**. Students, faculty, and staff can choose one of four stories exploring characters' or subjects' private and personal lives, and, ultimately, the bonds that tether those personae to a broader world. Each book, whether set in contemporary times or years ago, explores how loneliness can impact emotional states, decision making, and personal growth; the sibling subject, connection, also appears across these works, begging questions about cultural belonging, development of community, and the lifelong challenge of searching for meaning. Past years' summer reading themes of immigrant experiences, failure & redemption, metamorphosis, and empathy may offer additional lenses of analysis to examine these works through.

This year, our format is slightly different. There are two required readings:

1. Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (p. 1946). All students receive a copy of this book, and should have it read before our first assembly block. It is recommended that students begin their summer reading with this book. Frankl's psychological arguments and retold experiences from his time in concentration camps serve as frames of references for textual and thematic analysis of the other selected works.
2. One of the four books offered for summer reading. Students select which of these they will read over the summer in addition to *Man's Search for Meaning*. Teachers pitch these books at recess and announcements. These books run the typical gamut of summer reading selections - covering multiple genres, eras, and subjects. The books reflect a diverse range of perspectives and authorial identities.

You must read this book:

***Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (p. 1946 - Memoir / Nonfiction):** Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir has riveted generations of readers with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Based on his own experience and the stories of his patients, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. At the heart of his theory, known as logotherapy, is a conviction that the primary human drive is not pleasure but the pursuit of what we find meaningful. *Man's Search for Meaning* has become one of the most influential books in America; it continues to inspire us all to find significance in the very act of living. **Content Warning: holocaust / genocide, camp conditions & forced labor, death & violence.**

You choose one of the following books as your summer reading:

***The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans (p. 2025 - Epistolary / Fiction):** Every morning, Sybil Van Antwerp sits down to write letters – to her brother, to her best friend, to the president of the university who will not allow her to attend a class she desperately wants to take, to her favourite authors to tell them what she thinks of their latest books, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter. Because at seventy-three, Sybil has used her correspondence – witty and wise – to make sense of the world. But beyond the page, she has spent the last thirty years keeping the people who love her at arms' length... Until letters from someone in her past force her to examine one of the most painful periods of her life. Now, Sybil must send the letter she has been writing for all these years - and find forgiveness within herself in order to move on. **Content Warning: mentions of self-harm, cancer**

***Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri (p. 1999 - Short Stories / Fiction):** Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession. **Content Warning: cultural displacement, racism, and emotional abuse**

***The Plague* by Albert Camus (p. 1947 - Classics / Fiction):** *The Plague* tells the story from the point of view of a narrator of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran. The novel presents a snapshot of life in Oran as seen through the author's distinctive absurdist point of view. The book tells a gripping tale of human unrelieved horror, of survival and resilience, and of the ways in which humankind confronts death, *The Plague* is at once a masterfully crafted novel, eloquently understated and epic in scope, and a parable of ageless moral resonance, profoundly relevant to our times. In Oran, a coastal town in North Africa, the plague begins as a series of portents, unheeded by the people. It gradually becomes an omnipresent reality, obliterating all traces of the past and driving its victims to almost unearthly extremes of suffering, madness, and compassion. **Content warning: violence, disease, gore**

***The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro (p. 1989 - Classics / Historical Fiction):** In the summer of 1956, Stevens, a long-serving butler at Darlington Hall, decides to take a motoring trip through the West Country. The six-day excursion becomes a journey into the past of Stevens and England, a past that takes in fascism, two world wars, and an unrealised love between the butler and his housekeeper.

PART TWO:
Required Summer Reading for Specific Classes

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.

FRENCH 2 - MIXED GRADE LEVELS

***Contes* by Charles Perault (ISBN: 978-2011557438)**

FRENCH 3 - MIXED GRADE LEVELS

***Nouvelles du monde* by Various (ISBN: 978-2278082568)**

PART THREE: **Student, Faculty, and Staff Recommendations**

Faculty and staff recommendations related to loneliness & connection:

Ms. Gillis - *Hamnet* by Maggie Farrell (p. 2020): Warwickshire in the 1580s. Agnes is a woman as feared as she is sought after for her unusual gifts. She settles with her husband in Henley street, Stratford, and has three children: a daughter, Susanna, and then twins, Hamnet and Judith. The boy, Hamnet, dies in 1596, aged eleven. Four years or so later, the husband writes a play called Hamlet.

Mr. Korta - *Friday, or, The Other Island* by Michel Tournier (p. 1967): recasts Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, telling and subverting the original story through the experience of Friday, Robinson's native companion whom he initially treats with little more than disdain. Robinson, setting out to tame the wild nature of the island he shipwrecked on, is soon humbled by the forces of nature and the irrepressibly joyful Friday whose perspective on Robinson's Western values - autonomy, profit, faith - serves to turn them on their head. It's also beautifully written.

Mx. Korman - *The Moor's Account* by Laila Lalami (p. 2014): This one ties in with our theme and adds to the plurality of voices on offer. I think it will appeal to our history as well as literature interested students. The wikipedia description "The Moor's Account is a fictional memoir of Estebanico, the Moroccan slave who survived the Narvaez expedition and accompanied Cabeza de Vaca. He is widely considered to be the first African explorer of America, but little is known about his early life except for one line in Cabeza de Vaca's chronicle: "The fourth [survivor] is Estebanico, an Arab Negro from Azamor.""

Ms. Brewster - *Gaudy Night* by Dorothy L. Sayers (p. 1935): A mystery set in 1930s Oxford, dense with literary allusions and surprisingly astringent feminism. The sleuth is Lord Peter Wimsey, who says things like "I admit that a desire to have all of the fun is nine-tenths of the law of chivalry." But the heroine is Harriet Vane, who writes mysteries until she gets embroiled in one herself.

Dr. Lasker - *The Ice Palace* by Tarjei Vesaas (p. 1963): Read this with a group of friends from college a year or so ago and it blew me away. It felt a little like reading Pedro Paramo for the first time, although it's much more accessible. It connects to the theme of loneliness in its intersection with loss. For me a book that I knew I would return to and reread even as I read it for the first time.

Mr. MacDonnell - *Hatchet* by Gary Paulson (p. 1987): This is a YA classic. Survival alone in Alaska after a plane crash. Memorable scenes with a bear and with a moose. This was one of the first truly immersive, one sitting reads I remember having.

Mr. MacDonnell - *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir (p. 2021): This is a book you can absolutely speed through with great, highly detailed science fiction construction. If you enjoyed the movie, you will dig this book. Certainly about finding connection in the loneliest of all places, the book leaves you hopeful. It's just really fun.

Mr. MacDonnell - *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* by Haruki Murakami (p. 2013): This fills my annual Haruki Murakami summer reading quotient. This story is based much more in reality than his other works, which tend towards surrealism. It can get grim at points, but it's still beautiful prose (be warned, there's certainly adult themes in this book). I can't get

enough of his writing style. Centers a 36 year old man suddenly questioning why he was extradited from his immensely tight high-school friend group (insert meme about Murakami's miserably flat women characters). He must answer many questions about connectedness and how we see ourselves in our friend groups.

Mr. MacDonnell & Ms. Haber - *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke (p. 2020): Literally labyrinthian in it's construction, the book builds out a plot as though it were a 1st person version of a Borges short story.

Mr. MacDonnell & Mr. Roberts - *A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance* by Hanif Abdurraqib (p. 2021): A captivating series of essays exploring the intricacies of black performance and the ways they both isolate the performer and connect the viewers and appreciators. It's profound, funny, and beautifully written.

Mr. Roberts - *The Book of I* by David Greig (p. 2025): Viking raider left for dead after the destruction of a monastery on the island of Iona helps rebuild it with the one surviving monk and a mostly-mute beekeeper. It's a matter-of-fact and beautiful novel (and short, if you'd like a quick read).

Ms. Anna - *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Can Pelt (p. 2022): It's about two people who for very different reasons have lost some of the connections in their lives, and are brought together by an octopus who wants to be mostly solitary. I found it sweet and charming.

Ms. Anna - *Enter Ghost* by Isabella Hammad (p. 2023): A Palestinian actress returns to Haifa for the first time in a while to visit her sister and reconnect in some ways to her roots. While there she joins a production of Hamlet and sees more facets of Palestinian life that she's been insulated from while in London.

Mr. Brunick - *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson (p. 1962): Cult Classic. Excellently written, hauntingly evocative.

Mr. Brunick - *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (p. 1952): Canonical classic.

Mr. Singer - *Small Rain* by Garth Greenwell (p. 2024): About a gay man's terrifyingly isolated hospital stay during COVID lockdown. Certainly lonely, beautifully written, and hits the diversity quota!

Mr. Hinterlang - *Perfecting Sound Forever* by Greg Milner (p. 2009): (The book) does not directly fall into the theme of loneliness and connection, but it's an incredible book about the history of recorded music. This would be particularly good for any of our students (or colleagues!) who are interested in making their own recordings or are simply obsessed with listening to music! It's also one that I love to talk about with folks ad nauseam. From the description in the link below: "In 1915, Thomas Edison proclaimed that he could record a live performance and reproduce it perfectly, shocking audiences who found themselves unable to tell whether what they were hearing was an Edison Diamond Disc or a flesh-and-blood musician. Today, the equation is reversed. Whereas Edison proposed that a real performance could be rebuilt with absolute perfection, Pro Tools and digital samplers now allow musicians and engineers to create the illusion of performances

that never were. In between lies a century of sonic exploration into the balance between the real and the represented."

Recommendations from graduating seniors (& some current students...):

Emi - *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin: This is one of the best queer novels that I have ever read, and for its relatively short length, it is not lacking in content. In an odd reflection of its subject and narrator, it distantly deals with the loneliness, both social and literal, that can come from being queer.

Emi - *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters: This might be the best queer novel I've ever read, and is much more digestible to a modern audience because it was written more recently. As much as the book is a story, along the way it asks deep questions about gender and sexuality, and confronts some axiomatic ways of queer life (at least, in the book) that lead to separation and loneliness.

Emi - *Still Life* by Sarah Winman: While one of my favorite books of all time, it is much lighter and more fun (one of the reviews on the front cover says something like "it is a cure for wanderlust," and I concur) and doesn't feature queer themes quite like the others. However, the relatively few times it does, it is wonderful and insightful, especially for people of our age who don't know exactly how to feel yet.

Tomas - *The Path to Power* by Robert Caro (p. 1982): (I recommend this) for its in depth analysis of its subject, Lyndon Johnson, which goes far beyond many other biographies in its pursuit to describe Johnson's psychology, his compulsive lying, thirst for power, and even his family history. Caro's choice to divide Johnson's life between multiple books also means you get a deep understanding of the person before you reach the highs of his political career.

Nora ('27) - *Useful Phrases for Immigrants* by May-Lee Cha (p. 2018). It's a fantastic collection of short stories that's only 140 pages, perfect for a Commonwealth schedule. Each one has a new narrator with a different voice, whether it's narrated in first or third person, and takes you to the story of a different family. Some are primarily about ethnic identity, but most are stories about people being people, and about how their different cultural spheres interact.

Sol ('27) - *Perfect Happiness* by You-Jeong Jeong (p. 2021). I enjoyed it because the protagonist is a lonely and isolated (often neglected) six-year-old child who has a terrifying mom who might have committed murder. Told in free indirect discourse, the narrator is often unreliable and feels quite innocent and naive to be telling this horrifying tale. Regardless, the author does a superb job of depicting a complex mother-child relationship, tainted by twisted family dynamics and masterful psychological descriptions.

Sofia ('27) - *Tell Me Everything* by Elizabeth Stoit (p. 2024). A sweet exploration of the stories we've lived and the daring act of telling them.

Enda ('29) - *Dubliners* by James Joyce (p. 1914). It is fascinating to understand, particularly in "The Dead" how peoples' lives are interconnected

Enda ('29) - *The Burial at Thebes* by Heaney (p. 2004). Short if that matters, entertaining, a new translation of a classic (note that my idea of "new" is not shared by everyone).

Enda ('29) - *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (p. 1949). It is good to see the patterns of mythology and dream

Recommendations from affinity groups:

Gender-Sexuality Alliance

- *Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller
- *Who's Afraid of Gender* by Judith Butler
- *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin
- *House on the Cerulean Sea* by TJ Klune
- *Rain God* by Arturo Islas
- *Brownstone* by Samuel Teer
- *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong
- *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel

FAM

- *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi (2020): Follows Gifty, a PhD candidate navigating her mother's depression and her brother's overdose, focusing on grief and silence.
- *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* by James McBride (1995): The autobiography and memoir of James McBride first published in 1995
- *Black Ice*, by Lorene Cary (1991): is a memoir by Lorene Cary chronicling her experience as an African American scholarship student at St. Paul's, an elite, formerly all-white, all-male boarding school in New Hampshire during the 1970s.
- *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* By Ron Suskind (1998): The book chronicles a determined student's struggle to escape poverty and violence, his academic and social challenges at an Ivy League school, and his quest for the American dream

- *The Lonely Letters* by Ashon T. Crawley (2020): An epistolary work exploring Black queer life, theology, and the intersection of joy and loneliness.
- *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin (1956): Focuses on the intense isolation of a man grappling with his sexuality and social expectations.
- *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jesmyn Ward (2017): Depicts a family dealing with addiction, incarceration, and abandonment in the rural South.
- *1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019)
- *Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)
- *Kindred* by Octavia Butler (1979)
- *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958)

APAA

- *Yellow Face* - Athena Liu
- *American Born Chinese* - Gene Luan Yang
- *Minor Feelings* - Cathy Park Hong
- *Crying in H-Mart* - Michelle Zauner
- *Front Desk* - Kelly Yang
- *Amal Unbound* - Aisha Saeed
- *The Sympathizer* - Viet Thanh Nguyen
- *Making of Asian America* - Erica Lee
- *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* - Ocean Vuong
- *Life of Pi* - Yann Nastel
- *Aru Shah* - Roshani Chokshi
- *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* - Kirani Desai
- *Clear Light of Day* - Anita Desai

Film recommendations related to loneliness & connection (we suggest you beware of all PG-13 and R MPAA films!):

Ms. Dale - *Perfect Days* (Wim Wenders, 2023), *Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders, 1987).

Mr. MacDonnell - *The Worst Person in the World* (Joachim Trier, 2021), *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), *She's Gotta Have It* (Spike Lee, 1986), *The Secret Agent* (Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2025), *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, 2017), *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Céline Sciamma, 2019), *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2014).

Mr. Elliott - *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000), *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1996), *Castaway on the Moon* (Lee Hae-jun, 2009), *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000),

Ms. Poynter - *The Shipping News* (Lasse Hallström, 2001)

Ms. Haber - *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967)

Mr. Hinterlang - *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michael Gondry, 2004), *The Lighthouse* (Rober

Mr. Roberts - *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), *The Fall* (Tarsem Singh, 2006), *Ikiru* (Akira Kurosawa, 1952), *Eephus* (Carson Lund, 2024), *Paprika* (Satoshi Kon, 2006).

Mr. Korta - *400 Blows* (François Truffaut, 1959), *Le Samourai* (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1967), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014).

Mr. Dardonville - *Paddington* (Paul King, 2014), *Paddington 2* (Paul King, 2017), *Paddington in Peru* (Dougal Wilson, 2024), Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy, *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, 1999).

Ms. Thompson - *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (F. W. Murnau, 1927) *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (Taika Waititi, 2016), *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Benh Zeitlin, 2012).

Mr. Brunick:

- *Happy Together* by Wong Kar-Wai: A Hong Kong tourist (Tony Leung) gets stranded in Buenos Aires after his on-again, off-again boyfriend (Leslie Cheung) disappears with his passport. An achingly beautiful study of loneliness and isolation: romantic, cultural, and linguistic.
- *The Hole* by Tsai Ming-Liang. An epidemic has Taipei residents quarantining at home as their condemned apartment building literally crumbles down around them. Austere long takes alternate with delirious musical numbers. An incredibly strange and humane film about forging human connection in difficult times.
- *The Taste of Cherry* by Abbas Kiarostami. A man drives through the outskirts of Tehran looking for someone to bury him after he commits suicide. An understated, ultimately profound parable on the necessity of social connection.
- *Magnolia* by P.T. Anderson. Stylistically maximalist melodrama about estranged families, faithless lovers, and lonely-hearted losers. A total tearjerker, epic in length and operatic in its emotional excess, with a script that launched a million acting-school monologues.
- *Au hasard Balthazar* by Bresson. The all-time greatest movie about a donkey.

PART FOUR: Further 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!

How to add library cards via libby using your BPL card!

Here's how you add the other library cards in Libby via your BPL card!

In Libby, go to the main menu section and search for the desired network under "add library." Choose "sign in with my card," select your home network under "partner libraries," and enter your home library card number and PIN. You have to do it separately for each network to set it up, but then they should all show up from then on. The networks are BPL, CLAMS, CWMARS, Merrimack Valley, Minuteman, NOBLE, Old Colony, and SAILS.

When navigating Libby, you can switch between the networks by tapping the little image of the library card that appears in an item record . It'll show you who has it and how long wait times are so you can choose the shortest one (or select one that has it currently available to borrow).

Recommendations from the Boston Public Library:

- [Staff Picks](#)
- [Personalized Reading Recommendations](#)
- [Award Winners](#)
- [Booklists](#): “Black Is...”, “AAPI Heritage Month”, “We Are Pride”, “Vida Latina”, “Native Lives, Native Stories”, “Disabled, Not Unable”
- [New Titles](#) & [Bestsellers](#)

Mind Matters | A Mental Health Resource Guide: Loneliness

Let's Talk About Loneliness

10 Books that Teach Us About Loneliness and Connection

NYPL: Books About Creating Connection

Minuteman Library Network Book Lists

New York Public Library Recommendations

Cambridge Public Library Recommendations

Brookline Public Library Recommendations