

## MVLC Adult Book Club Kit Titles and Descriptions

- **Ahab's Wife** by Sena Jeter Nasland-Inspired by a brief passage in Moby Dick, Sena Jeter Naslund has created an enthralling and compellingly readable saga, spawning a rich, eventful, and dramatic life. At once a family drama, a romantic adventure, and a portrait of a real and loving marriage, Ahab's Wife gives a new perspective on the American experience.
- **All Souls: A Family Story From Southie** by Michael Patrick MacDonald- A saga if the MacDonald family caught up in a web violence, injustice and rage in South Boston.
- **Amateur Marriage** by Anne Tyler-From the inimitable Pulitzer Prize-winning author of "Breathing Lessons" comes a rich and compelling novel--a "New York Times" bestseller--about a mismatched marriage, and its consequences spanning three generations.
- **Angela's Ashes** by Frank McCourt-"When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I managed to survive at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood." So begins the luminous memoir of Frank McCourt, born in Depression-era Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants and raised in the slums of Limerick, Ireland.
- **Angels and Demons** by Dan Brown- A Harvard symbologist analyzes a mysterious symbol seared to the chest of murdered physicist and discovers evidence of the resurgence of an ancient secret brotherhood to carry out its vendetta against the Catholic Church.
- **Angle of Repose** by Wallace Stegner- Wallace Stegner's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is a story of discovery – personal, historical and geographical. Confined to a wheelchair, retired historian Lyman Ward sets out to write his grandparents' remarkable story, chronicling their days spent carving civilization into the surface of America's western frontier. But his research reveals even more about his own life than he's willing to admit. What emerges is an enthralling portrait of four generations in the life of an American family.
- **Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons** by Lorna Landvik- Five friends live through three decades of marriages, child raising, neighborhood parties, bad husbands and good brownies. When Faith Owens's husband is transferred from Texas to the "stupid godforsaken frozen tundra" of Freesia Court, Minn., in 1968, her life looks like it's going to be one dull, snowy slog-until the power goes out one evening and a group of what appear to be madwomen start a snowball fight in her backyard.

- **The Bean Trees** by Barbara Kingsolver- Outspoken, gritty Taylor Greer, leaves Kentucky to head west. She becomes mother to an abandoned baby and ends up sharing a room with a young, battered divorcee who also has a little girl. Despite the hurt and rage, themes of love and nurturing emerge.
- **Before You Know Kindness** by Chris Jahlia-On a balmy July night in New Hampshire a shot rings out in a garden, and a man falls to the ground, terribly wounded. The wounded man is Spencer McCullough, the shot that hit him was fired (accidentally?) by his adolescent daughter Charlotte. It's a family saga that is timely in its examination of some of the most important issues of our era, and timeless in its exploration of the strange and unexpected places where we find love.
- **Bel Canto** by Ann Patchett-Celebrated American soprano Roxane Coss has just finished a recital in the home of the vice-president of a poor South American country when terrorists burst in, intent on taking the country's president hostage. The president, however, has not attended the concert, which is a birthday tribute in honor of a Japanese business tycoon and opera aficionado. Determined to fulfill their demands, the rough, desperate guerrillas settle in for a long siege. The hostages, winnowed of all women except Roxane, whose voice beguiles her captors, are from many countries; their only common language is a love of opera. As the days drag on, their initial anguish and fear give way to a kind of complex domesticity, as intricately involved as the melodies Roxane sings during their captivity.
- **Blood and Chocolate** by Annette Curtis Klause-Having fallen for a human boy, a beautiful teenage werewolf must battle both her packmates and the fear of the townspeople to decide where she belongs and with whom.
- **The Bonesetter's Daughter** by Amy Tan-Tan's empathetic insight into the complex relationship of Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters is again displayed in her latest extraordinary, multi-layered tale. Now suffering from Alzheimer's, Lu Ling's references to the past are confusing and contradictory particularly her desperate attempts to communicate with her deceased Precious Auntie, who was her nursemaid and Ruth worries about her mother's health. But when Ruth translates Lu Ling's lengthy journal, she learns that her mother was once a strong-willed, courageous girl who overcame a background of family secrets and lies, persevered despite romantic heartbreak and survived tremendous hardships and suffering in war-torn China.
- **Brave New World** by Aldous Huxley- Far in the future, the world controllers have finally created the ideal society. In laboratories world-wide, genetic science has brought the human race to perfection. Man is bred and educated to be blissfully content with a pre-destined world. But Bernard Marx is unhappy. He wants to be free.

- **Breathing Underwater** by Alex Flinn-A 16-year-old boy deals with a turbulent home life and problems with dating violence.
- **The Carpet Makers** by Andreas Eschbach- A barren, isolated planet's whole economy turns around weaving carpets, allegedly for the emperor's palace, out of the hair of the weavers' wives. Although a weaver must have several wives to make his particular carpet, he may have only one son, who becomes his successor when he finishes his carpet and dies. And so life goes, generation after generation, even after rumors and, finally, ships from the new government arrive with word of the emperor's removal. The new interstellar government learns the emperor secretly maintained thousands of carpet-making planets. Why? Find out!
- **The Center of Everything** by Laura Moriarty- Set in Kerrville, Kansas, *The Center of Everything* is told by Evelyn Bucknow, an endearing character with a wholly refreshing way of looking at the world. Living with her single mother in a small apartment, Evelyn is a young girl wincing her way through adolescence. With a voice that is as charming as it is recognizable, Evelyn immerses the reader in the dramas of an entire community. The people of Kerrville, stuck at once in the middle of nowhere but also at the center of everything, are the source from which Moriarty draws on universal dilemmas of love and belief.
- **Clearing Land** by Jane Bronx-In this clear-eyed, lyrical account, Brox twines two narratives--personal and historical--to trace the evolution of the romanticized family farm to the modern world, where much of our food is produced by industrial agriculture.
- **Cold Mountain** by Charles Frazier- Inman, a wounded Confederate soldier, leaves the hospital before his gashed neck heals enough to get him sent back to war. Still weak, he heads for the mountains, where a minister's daughter named Ada is his objective. Inman's return could hardly be timelier for the Charleston-raised Ada: her father has died, and she finds she knows little about operating a farm. Frazier blends the story of Inman's journey with that of Ada's efforts, with the help of a drifter named Ruby, to wring a subsistence living from the neglected land; in the background are the yelping dogs of war (most dramatically, gangs chasing Confederate deserters like Inman), as well as hints of changes the end of war will bring.
- **The Corrections** by Jonathan Franzen-A comic, tragic masterpiece of an American family breaking down in an age of easy fixes, Franzen's third novel brings an old-time America into wild collision with the era of home surveillance and New Economy speculation. Winner of the National Book Award.
- **Crescent** by Diana Abu-Jaber- Crescent is the story of Sirine, a thirty-nine year old single woman living in the Arab-American community of Los Angeles. Sirine is a passionate cook, and works in a Lebanese restaurant, where her storytelling uncle and her saucy boss believe she should be trying harder to find a husband. Her encounter with a professor of Arabic literature causes her to question her identity and the world around her.

- **Crossing to Safety** by Wallace Stegner- This book traces the lives, loves, and aspirations of two couples who move between Vermont and Wisconsin.
- **Crow Lake** by Mary Lawson- Set in northern Ontario, Crow Lake is a gentle and moving story of a family living on an isolated farm. After the tragic death of their parents two older siblings are forced to make choices to keep the family together. Those choices have disturbing repercussions on all their lives. Issues of self-sacrifice, relationships, forgiveness, tragedy and happiness run throughout this thoughtful novel.
- **Cry, the Beloved Country** by Alan Paton-Paton's deeply moving story of Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom, set against the backdrop of a land and people riven by racial inequality and injustice, remains the most famous and important novel in South Africa's history.
- **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime** by Mark Haddon- Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow. This improbable story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog makes for one of the most captivating, unusual, and widely heralded novels in recent years.
- **Da Vinci Code** by Dan Brown- Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon and French cryptologist Sophie Neveu work to solve the murder of an elderly curator of the Louvre, a case which leads to clues hidden in the works of Da Vinci and a centuries-old secret society.
- **Dark Tide: Great Molasses Flood of 1919** by Stephen Puleo-Shortly after noon on January 15, 1919, a fifty-foot-tall steel tank filled with 2.3 million gallons of molasses collapsed on Boston's waterfront, disgorging its contents as a fifteen-foot-high wave of molasses that briefly traveled at thirty-five miles an hour. Dark Tide tells the compelling story of this man-made disaster that claimed the lives of twenty-one people and scores of animals and caused widespread destruction.
- **The Devil in White City: murder, magic, and madness at the fair that changed America** by Erik Larson- The story of two men's obsessions with the Chicago World's Fair, one its architect, the other a murderer. "The Devil in the White City" draws the reader into a time of magic and majesty, made all the more appealing by a supporting cast of real-life characters, including Buffalo Bill, Theodore Dreiser, Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Edison, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and others.
- **The Dew Breaker** by Edwidge Danticat-We meet him late in life: a quiet man, a good father and husband, a fixture in his Brooklyn neighborhood, a landlord and barber with a terrifying scar across his face. As the book unfolds, moving seamlessly between Haiti in the 1960s and New York City today, we enter the lives of those around him, and learn that he has also kept a vital, dangerous secret. Edwidge

Danticat's brilliant exploration of the "dew breaker"-or torturer-is an unforgettable story of love, remorse, and hope; of personal and political rebellions; and of the compromises we make to move beyond the most intimate brushes with history. It firmly establishes her as one of America's most essential writers.

- **Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant** by Anne Tyler- The Tull family resembles families most of us know. Each family member takes a turn telling their story. Lovable in the complicated way only family members are.
- **East of Eden** by John Steinbeck- Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families -- the Trasks and the Hamiltons -- whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel.
- **Ella Minnow Pea : a progressively lipogrammatic epistolary fable** by Mark Dunn- Ella Minnow Pea is a girl living happily on the fictional island of Nollop, South Carolina. Now Ella finds herself acting to save her friends, family, and fellow citizens from the encroaching totalitarianism of the island's Council, which has banned the use of certain letters of the alphabet in this love letter to language.
- **Empire Falls** by Richard Russo- The proprietor of a local diner struggles to raise his teenage daughter in a small town in Maine long after the logging and textile industries, that provided its citizens with their livelihood, shut down.
- **Evening** by Susan Minot- Ann Grant is dying of cancer. Memories of a weekend 40 years ago come rushing back, and with those memories, the all-consuming passion of love.
- **Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close** by Jonathan Safran Foer-Meet Oskar Schell, an inventor, Francophile, tambourine player, Shakespearean actor, jeweler, and pacifist. He is nine years old. And he is on an urgent, secret search through the five boroughs of New York. His mission is to find the lock that fits a mysterious key belonging to his father, who died in the World Trade Center on 9/11.
- **Fast Food Nation** by Eric Schlosser- Fast food has hastened the malling of our landscape, widened the chasm between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity, and propelled American cultural imperialism abroad. That's a lengthy list of charges, but Eric Schlosser makes them stick with an artful mix of first-rate reportage, wry wit, and careful reasoning. Schlosser's myth-shattering survey stretches from California's subdivisions, where the business was born, to the industrial corridor along the New Jersey Turnpike, where many of fast food's flavors are concocted.
- **Fever 1793** by Laurie Halse Anderson-In 1793 Philadelphia, a sixteen-year old Matilda Cook, separated from her sick mother, learns about perseverance and self-reliance when she is forced to cope with the horrors of a yellow fever epidemic.

- **The Five People That You Meet in Heaven** by Mitch Albom-Eddie is a wounded war veteran, an old man who has lived, in his mind, an uninspired life. His job is fixing rides at a seaside amusement park. On his 83rd birthday, a tragic accident kills him as he tries to save a little girl from a falling cart. He awakes in the afterlife, where he learns that heaven is not a destination. It s a place where your life is explained to you by five people, some of whom you knew, others who may have been strangers.
- **Founding Brothers** by Joseph J. Ellis-In this landmark work of history this National Book Award winning author, Joseph J. Ellis, explores how a group of greatly gifted but deeply flawed individuals - Hamilton, Burr, Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, Adams, and Madison confronted the overwhelming challenges before them to set the course for our nation.
- **Galileo's Daughter** by Dava Sobel- Galileo's Daughter introduces us to the man whose belief that the Earth moved around the sun caused him to be brought before the Holy Office of the Inquisition, accused of heresy, and threatened with torture. In contrast, his daughter Virginia chose the quiet life of a cloistered nun. Sobel takes us through the trials and triumphs of Galileo's career and his familial relationships, and simultaneously illuminates an entire era of flamboyant Medici Grand Dukes, the bubonic plague, and history's most dramatic collusion between science and religion.
- **Gathering Blue** by Lois Lowry-Lame and suddenly orphaned, Kira is mysteriously removed from her squalid village to live in the palatial Council Edifice, where she is expected to use her gifts as a weaver to do the bidding of the all-powerful Guardians.
- **Girl in Hyacinth Blue** by Susan Vreeland-The ownership of a supposed Vermeer painting is traced back to the moment of its inspiration; and as the painting moves through each owner's hands, what was long hidden or forgotten or repressed quietly surfaces. Like Vermeer's paintings, this bestselling novel illuminates the poignantly dear moments in people's lives.
- **Girl With a Pearl Earring** by Tracy Chevalier-Chevalier transports readers to a bygone time and place in this richly imagined portrait of the young woman who inspired one of Vermeer's most celebrated paintings. "Girl with a Pearl Earring" is the story of 16-year-old Griet, whose life is transformed by her brief encounter with genius, even as she herself is immortalized in canvas and oil.
- **The Golden Compass** by Philip Pullman- Carnegie Medal Award Winner-Lyra Belacqua is content to run wild among the scholars of Jordan College. But when her uncle, Lord Asriel, returns from the North with tales of mystery and danger, it sets off a chain of events that draws Lyra into the heart of a terrible struggle.
- **Gone With the Wind** by Margaret Mitchell-A monumental classic considered by many to be not only the greatest love story ever written, but also the greatest Civil War saga.

- **Growing Up** by Russell Baker-Russell Baker is the 1979 Pulitzer Prize winner for Distinguished Commentary and a columnist for The New York Times. This book traces his youth in the mountains of rural Virginia. When Baker was only five, his father died. His mother, strong-willed and matriarchal, never looked back. After all, she had three children to raise. These were depression years, and Mrs. Baker moved her fledgling family to Baltimore. Baker's mother was determined her children would succeed, and we know her regimen worked for Russell. He did everything from delivering papers to hustling subscriptions for the Saturday Evening Post. As is often the case, early hardships made the man.
- **The Handmaid's Tale** by Margaret Atwood-In the Republic of Gilead, formerly the United States, far-right Schlafly/Falwell-type ideals have been carried to extremes in the monotheocratic government. The resulting society is a feminist's nightmare: women are strictly controlled, unable to have jobs or money and assigned to various classes: the chaste, childless Wives; the housekeeping Marthas; and the reproductive Handmaids, who turn their offspring over to the "morally fit" Wives.
- **Haroun and the Sea of Stories** by Salman Rushdie- Story about a storyteller who loses his skill and a struggle against mysterious forces attempting to block the seas of inspiration from which all stories are derived.
- **The Heart is a Lonely Hunter** by Carson McCullers-When she was only twenty-three, Carson McCullers's first novel created a literary sensation. She was very special, one of America's superlative writers who conjures up a vision of existence as terrible as it is real, who takes us on shattering voyages into the depths of the spiritual isolation that underlies the human condition. This novel is the work of a supreme artist, Carson McCullers's enduring masterpiece. The heroine is the strange young girl, Mick Kelly. The setting is a small Southern town, the cosmos universal and eternal. The characters are the damned, the voiceless, the rejected. Some fight their loneliness with violence and depravity, Some with sex or drink, and some -- like Mick -- with a quiet, intensely personal search for beauty.
- **The Hobbit** by J. R. R. Tolkien-Bilbo Baggins, a respectable, well-to-do hobbit lives comfortably in his hobbit -hole until the day the wandering wizard Gandalf chooses him to take part in an adventure from which he may never return.
- **The Hours** by Michael Cunningham- Virginia Woolf is brought back to life in an intertwining of her story with those of two more contemporary women. In Woolf's life, she awakens one morning in London in 1923 with a dream that will become Mrs. Dalloway. In the present, Clarissa Vaughan is planning a party in Greenwich Village for her oldest love, a poet dying from AIDS. And in Los Angeles in 1949, Laura Brown is pregnant and unsettled, trying to prepare for her husband's birthday, but wanting nothing more than to sit and read Woolf.

- **House of Sand and Fog** by Andre Dubus III- On a road crew in California, a former colonel in the Iranian Air Force under the Shah yearns to restore his family's dignity. When an attractive bungalow comes available on a county auction for a fraction of its value, he sees a great opportunity for himself, his wife and his children. But the house's former owner, a recovering alcoholic and addict down on her luck, doesn't see it that way, nor does her lover, a married cop driven to extremes to win her love and get her house back.
- **House of the Scorpion** by Nancy Farmer- Matteo Alacran was not Born; He was Harvested. His DNA came from El Patron, lord of a country called Opium -- a strip of poppy fields lying between the United States and what was once called Mexico.
- **How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents** by Julia Alvarez- It's a long way from Santo Domingo to the Bronx, but if anyone can go the distance, it's the Garcia girls. Four lively Latinas plunge from a pampered life of privilege on an island compound into the big-city chaos of New York, where they embrace all that America has to offer.
- **In Cold Blood** by Truman Capote- On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. A classic account by one of the 20th century's most intriguing writers.
- **In Revere, In Those Days** by Roland Merullo- A coming-of-age novel about an Italian-American boy growing up in Revere, Massachusetts. Anthony Benedetto navigates his way to adulthood, shaped by the old-country culture, the working-class city, and the elite prep school that widens his world.
- **In the Heart of the Sea; the tragedy of the whaleship Essex** by Nat Philbrick- The Essex, a Nantucket whaler, was rammed and sunk by an enraged sperm whale in the South Pacific. Philbrick details the next three months in the lives of the twenty-man crew as they try to reach the coast of South America. Readers learn of the resiliency of the human spirit and the community of whalers.
- **In the Lake of the Woods** by Tim O'Brien- On a lake deep in Minnesota's north woods, John and Kathy Wade are trying to reassemble their lives. John, a rising political star, has just suffered a devastating electoral defeat. Kathy attempts to comfort her husband, but soon it becomes apparent that something is horribly wrong between them, that they have hidden too much from each other. Then one day Kathy vanishes.
- **Industry of Souls** by Martin Booth- As he wakes up on his 80th birthday, Alexander Bayliss, a British citizen who spent 25 years in a Soviet gulag after being falsely charged with espionage and the next 20 years in the Russian village of Myshkino, has a major decision to make: Will he remain in the village or return home to England, where his family has just discovered that he is alive?

- **Interpreter of Maladies** by Jhumpa Lahiri-Winner of the Pulitzer Prize. The nine stories in this stunning debut collection unerringly chart the emotional journeys of characters seeking love beyond the barriers of nations and generations. Imbued with the sensual details of Indian culture, these stories speak with passion and wisdom to everyone who has ever felt like a foreigner. Like the interpreter of the title story, Lahiri translates between the strict traditions of her ancestors and a baffling new world.
- **Kaffir Boy** by Mark Mathabane-Mark Mathabane was weaned on devastating poverty and schooled in the cruel streets of South Africa's most desperate ghetto, where bloody gang wars and midnight police raids were his rites of passage. Like every other child born in the hopelessness of apartheid, he learned to measure his life in days, not years. Yet Mark Mathabane, armed only with the courage of his family and a hard-won education, raised himself up from the squalor and humiliation to win a scholarship to an American university. This extraordinary memoir of life under apartheid is a triumph of the human spirit over hatred and unspeakable degradation. For Mark Mathabane did what no physically and psychologically battered "Kaffir" from the rat-infested alleys of Alexandra was supposed to do -- he escaped to tell about it.
- **The Killer Angels** by Michael Shaara- In the four most bloody and courageous days of our nation's history, two armies fought for two conflicting dreams at the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War. One dreamed of freedom, the other of a way of life. Far more than rifles and bullets were carried into battle. There were memories. There were promises. There was love. And far more than men fell on those Pennsylvania fields. Bright futures, untested innocence, and pristine beauty were also the casualties of war.
- **The Killer's Cousin** by Nancy Werlin- After being acquitted of murder, seventeen-year-old David goes to stay with relatives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he finds himself forced to face his past as he learns more about his strange young cousin Lily.
- **The Kite Runner** by Khaled Hosseini- Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazzara—a shunned ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California Amir thinks he has escaped his past. And yet he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him.
- **The Kitchen Boy** by Robert Alexander- Returning to the Heart Lake School for Girls as a Latin teacher to start a new life with her daughter, Jane is haunted by past tragedy and terrifying memories when she begins receiving menacing messages.

- **Life of Pi** by Yann Martel-The son of a zookeeper, Pi Patel has an encyclopedic knowledge of animal behavior and a fervent love of stories. When Pi is sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks and Pi finds himself in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and press him to tell "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional -- but is it more true?
- **Ladies Auxiliary** by Tova Mirvas-A traditional Jewish community in Memphis, Tennessee, is given a jolt with the arrival of a new art teacher from New York. A convert to Judaism, Batsheva Jacobs brings new ideas and before you know it, a rabbi's son does not want to be a rabbi anymore.
- **The Lake of Dead Languages** by Carol Goodman- Returning to the Heart Lake School for Girls as a Latin teacher to start a new life with her daughter, Jane is haunted by past tragedy and terrifying memories when she begins receiving menacing messages.
- **The Last Days of Dogtown** by Anita Diamant- Based loosely on a true story of a historic community, this novel is set on Cape Ann in the early 1800s. Peopled with widows, orphans, spinsters, scoundrels, free Africans, and "witches," it resurrects a forgotten sector of society.
- **The Lovely Bones** by Alice Sebold- Sebold, whose previous book, *Lucky*, told of her own rape and the subsequent trial of her attacker, here offers a powerful first novel, narrated by Susie Salmon, in heaven. Brutally raped and murdered by a deceptively mild-mannered neighbor, Susie begins with a compelling description of her death. During the next ten years, she watches over her family and friends as they struggle to cope with her murder. She observes their disintegrating lives with compassion and occasionally attempts, sometimes successfully, to communicate her love to them. Although the lives of all who knew her well are shaped by her tragic death, eventually her family and friends survive their pain and grief. In Sebold's heaven, Susie continues to grow emotionally. She learns that human existence is "the helplessness of being alive, the dark bright pity of being human feeling as you went, groping in corners and opening your arms to light all of it part of navigating the unknown." Sebold's compelling and sometimes poetic prose style and unsparing vision transform Susie's tragedy into an ultimately rewarding novel.

- **A Map of the World** by Jane Hamilton- The Goodwins, Howard, Alice, and their little girls, Emma and Claire, live on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. Although suspiciously regarded by their neighbors as "that hippie couple" because of their well-educated, urban background, Howard and Alice believe they have found a source of emotional strength in the farm, he tending the barn while Alice works as a nurse in the local elementary school. But their peaceful life is shattered one day when a neighbor's two-year-old daughter drowns in the Goodwins' pond while under Alice's care. Tormented by the accident, Alice descends even further into darkness when she is accused of sexually abusing of a student at the elementary school. Soon, Alice is arrested, incarcerated, and as good as convicted in the eyes of a suspicious community. As a child, Alice designed her own map of the world to find her bearings. Now, as an adult, she must find her way again, through a maze of lies, doubt and ill will. A vivid human drama of guilt and betrayal, *A Map of the World* chronicles the intricate geographies of the human heart and all its mysterious, uncharted terrain.
- **Mayflower : a Story of Courage, Community, and War** by Nathaniel Philbrick- The startling story of the Plymouth Colony--from the flight to religious freedom to the war that ravaged New England--is told by the bestselling author of *In the Heart of the Sea*, winner of the National Book Award.
- **Memoirs of a Geisha** by Arthur Golden- The strikingly pretty child of an impoverished fishing family, Chiyo is taken to faraway Kyoto and sold into slavery to a renowned geisha house where she is renamed Sayuri. Initially reluctant, Sayuri must finally invent and cultivate an image of herself as a desirable geisha in order to survive in Gion's cruel hierarchy. Through her eyes, we are given a backstage view of the ancient and secretive geisha district, Gion, and of the lives of the women who learn and practice the rigorous arts of the Geisha.
- **The Memory Keeper's Daughter** by Kim Edwards-This riveting family drama from the author of the short story collection "The Secrets of a Fire King" explores every mother's silent fears--losing a child and that the child grows up without her.
- **Mercy** by Jodi Picoult- Police chief of a small Massachusetts town, Cameron McDonald makes the toughest arrest of his life when his own cousin Jamie comes to him and confesses outright that he has killed his terminally ill wife out of mercy. Now, a heated murder trial plunges the town into upheaval, and drives a wedge into a contented marriage: Cameron, aiding the prosecution in their case against Jamie, is suddenly at odds with his devoted wife, Allie -- seduced by the idea of a man so in love with his wife that he'd grant all her wishes, even her wish to end her life.
- **Middlesex** by Jeffrey Eugenides- Middlesex tells the story of Calliope Stephanides and three generations of her Greek-American family who immigrate to Detroit from Mount Olympus in Asia Minor.

- **Monster** by Walter Dean Myers- While on trial as an accomplice to a murder, sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon records his experiences in prison and in the courtroom in the form of a film script as he tries to come to terms with the course his life has taken.
- **The Moviegoer** by Walker Percy-A funny, elegantly written account of a young man's search for signs of purpose in the universe.
- **Murder at Walden Pond** by Al Blanchard- Two weeks after a young woman speaks with eighth-grade history teacher Steve Asher about her troubled younger brother Petey one of his students Steve finds her body in Walden Pond. Police suspect Steve when they hear rumors of a relationship between him and the woman and read her diary depicting a fantasized love affair with him. As his job and relationships begin to crumble, Steve hastens to the offensive: a local gubernatorial candidate seems to have much to hide.
- **The Music of Dolphins** by Karen Hesse- A girl raised by dolphins must choose between two worlds in this critically acclaimed novel about what it means to be a human being.
- **My Sister's Keeper** by Jodi Picoult- Written with grace, wisdom, and sensitivity, this novel is about a teen who was conceived as a bone marrow match for her sister Kate, and what happens when she begins to question who she really is.
- **The Namesake** by Jhumpa Lahiri- Meet the Ganguli family, new arrivals from Calcutta, trying their best to become Americans even as they pine for home. The name they bestow on their firstborn, Gogol, betrays all the conflicts of honoring tradition in a new world—conflicts that will haunt Gogol on his own winding path through divided loyalties, comic detours, and wrenching love affairs.
- **The Nanny Diaries** by Emma McLaughlin- A blistering satire based on the real-life experiences of former New York City nannies McLaughlin and Kraus; this is a hilarious examination of the upper echelons of Manhattan society and the unlovable Park Avenue X family. The novel follows the adventures of the aptly named Nan as she negotiates the Byzantine byways of working for Mrs. X, a Park Avenue mommy who has little more to do than spend her adulterous, workaholic husband's seven-figure salary on manicures, designer clothes and floral arrangements. She delegates the care of her bratty four-year-old son, Grayer, and other small "errands" (e.g., shopping for a 50-guest dinner party) to Nan, an NYU grad student.
- **Nickel and Dimed: on (not) getting by in America** by Barbara Ehrenreich- Millions of Americans work full time, year round, for poverty-level wages. In 1998, Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them. She was inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform, which promised that a job -- any job -- can be the ticket to a better life. But how does anyone survive, let alone prosper, on \$6 an hour? To find out, Ehrenreich left her home, took the cheapest lodgings she could find, and accepted whatever jobs she was offered.

- **The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency** by Alexander McCall Smith- Precious Ramotswe, the “Miss Marple of Botswana”, charms readers in this first of a series of novels about the first-ever female detective in her country in the south of Africa. Mma Ramotswe is rotund, jolly, and possessed of a wealth of common sense as she sets out to help people with their problems. Her solutions are resourceful and thought-provoking, and the book is both entertaining and life-affirming. Additionally, the look at present-day Botswana is quite wonderful.
- **October Sky** by Homer Hickam-Originally published as "Rocket Boys", this bestseller--based on a true story--follows a group of boys in a small West Virginia town in 1957 as they light up the skies with their flaming rockets and dreams of glory.
- **One Thousand White women: the journals of May Dodd** by Jim Fergus- Based on an actual historical event, but recounted through fictional diaries, "One Thousand White Women" tells the story of a woman who travels West in 1875 and marries the chief of the Cheyenne nation.
- **The Orchard: a memoir** by Adele Crockett Robertson-A gentle, nostalgic memoir of a young woman's struggle to save her family's farm in Ipswich during the Depression.
- **The Other Boleyn Girl** by Philippa Gregory-When Mary Boleyn comes to court as an innocent girl of fourteen she catches the eye of Henry VIII. Dazzled by the king, Mary falls in love with both her golden prince and her growing role as unofficial queen. She soon realizes just how much she is a pawn in her family's ambitious plots as the king's interest begins to wane and she is forced to step aside for her best friend and rival, her sister Anne. Then Mary knows that she must defy her family and her king, and take her fate into her own hands.
- **The Passion of Artemisia** by Susan Vreeland- Recently rediscovered by art historians and one of the few female post-Renaissance painters to achieve fame during her own era, Artemisia Gentileschi led a remarkably "modern" life. Susan Vreeland tells Artemisia's captivating story, beginning with her public humiliation in a rape trial at the age of eighteen, and continuing through her father's betrayal, her marriage of convenience, motherhood, and growing fame as an artist. Set against the glorious backdrops of Rome, Florence, Genoa, and Naples, inhabited by historical characters such as Galileo and Cosimo de' Medici II, and filled with rich details about life as a seventeenth-century painter.
- **The Perfect Storm** by Sebastian Junger- October 1991. It was "the perfect storm"--a tempest that may happen only once in a century--a nor'easter created by so rare a combination of factors that it could not possibly have been worse. Creating waves ten stories high and winds of 120 miles an hour, the storm whipped the sea to inconceivable levels few people on Earth have ever witnessed. Few, except the six-man crew of the Andrea Gail, a commercial fishing boat tragically headed towards its hellish center.

- **Persepolis** by Marjane Satrapi- Iranian Satrapi was 10 when the Islamic revolution shook her world in 1979. Using the popular graphic-novel format, she vividly portrays a society in chaos. Almost overnight, her progressive family found itself subject to the laws of a fundamentalist religious state. Through a young girl's eyes, this is the story of how life changed.
- **The Piano Tuner** by Daniel Mason-In 1886, a shy, middle-aged piano tuner named Edgar Drake receives an unusual commission from the British War Office to travel to the remote jungles of northeast Burma and there repair a rare piano belonging to an eccentric army surgeon who has proven mysteriously indispensable to the imperial design.
- **The Poisonwood Bible** by Barbara Kingsolver- A compelling story about a 1950's Baptist missionary who takes his wife and 4 young daughters from Georgia to the Congo to "convert" the natives. The reverberations of their culture clash are told from each character's perspective as years go by.
- **Practical Magic** by Alice Hoffman- For more than two hundred years, the Owens women had been blamed for everything that went wrong in their Massachusetts town. And Gillian and Sally endured that fate as well: As children, the sisters were forever outsiders, taunted, talked about, pointed at. Their elderly aunts almost seemed to encourage the whispers of witchery, with their musty house and their exotic concoctions and their crowd of black cats. But all Gillian and Sally wanted was to escape. One would do so by marrying, the other by running away. But the bonds they shared, even into adulthood, brought them back--almost as if by magic...
- **The Primrose Way** by Jackie French Koller-A young Puritan woman from England settles in what is now Ipswich, Mass. with her family in 1633. The story is about the clash of cultures she experiences, along with some adventure and romance.
- **Prodigal Summer** by Barbara Kingsolver- Prodigal Summer weaves together three stories of human love within a larger tapestry of lives inhabiting the forested mountains and struggling small farms of southern Appalachia. At the heart of these intertwined narratives is a den of coyotes that have recently migrated into the region. Deanna Wolfe, a reclusive wildlife biologist, watches the forest from her outpost in an isolated mountain cabin where she is caught off-guard by Eddie Bondo, a young hunter who comes to invade her most private spaces and confound her self-assured, solitary life. On a farm several miles down the mountain, another web of lives unfolds as Lusa Maluf Landowski, a bookish city girl turned farmer's wife, finds herself unexpectedly marooned in a strange place where she must declare or lose her attachment to the land. And a few more miles down the road, a pair of elderly, feuding neighbors tend their respective farms and wrangle about God, pesticides, and the complexities of a world neither of them expected.

- **The Queen's Fool** by Philipa Gregory- In this eagerly awaited sequel to "The Other Boleyn Girl," readers return to Tudor England, where the offspring of Henry VIII ascend to the throne amid treason, poisonous rivalries, accusations of heresy, and unrequited love.
- **The Reading Group** by Elizabeth Noble- The reading group follows the trials and tribulations of a group of women who meet regularly to read and discuss books. Over the course of a year, each of these women becomes intertwined, both in the books they read and with one another's lives.
- **Reading Lolita in Tehran** by Azar Nafisi- Prof. Nafisi resigned from her job as professor of English literature at a university in Tehran in 1995 due to repressive government policies. For the next 2 years, until she left Iran, she gathered 7 young women, former students, at her house every Thursday morning to read and discuss works of Western literature forbidden by the new regime. They used this forum to learn to speak freely, not only about literature, but also about the social, political, and cultural realities of living under strict Islamic rule.
- **The Red Tent** by Anita Diamant- The red tent is the place where women gathered during their cycles of birthing, menses, and even illness. Like the conversations and mysteries held within this feminine tent, this sweeping piece of fiction offers an insider's look at the daily life of a biblical sorority of mothers, wives and daughters.
- **Redwall** by Brian Jacques- When the peaceful life of ancient Redwall Abbey is shattered by the arrival of the evil rat Cluny and his villainous hordes, Matthias, a young mouse, determines to find the legendary sword of Martin the Warrior which, he is convinced, will help Redwall's inhabitants destroy the enemy.
- **Remains of the Day** by Kazuo Ishiguro- A tragic, spiritual portrait of a perfect English butler and his reaction to his fading insular world in post-war England.
- **Renato's Luck** by Jeff Shapiro- This is the tale of Renato and his friends, family and fellow villagers, in a small village in Tuscany that is soon to be flooded to make a new dam.
- **Road From Coorain** by Jill Conway- One women's journey from a childhood in Australia's outback to adulthood as a successful American career woman. The Road From Coorain is about Everywoman, for it is about childhood loneliness, anguished parent-child relationships, dawning sensibility, discovering a vocation, and finding one's own sense of self.
- **Running with Scissors** by Augusten Burroughs- the true story of a boy whose mother (a poet with delusions of Anne Sexton) gave him away to be raised by her unorthodox psychiatrist who bore a striking resemblance to Santa Claus. So at the age of twelve, Burroughs found himself amidst Victorian squalor living with the doctor's bizarre family, and befriending a pedophile who resided in the backyard shed. The story of an outlaw childhood where rules were unheard of, and the Christmas tree

stayed up all year round, where Valium was consumed like candy, and if things got dull an electroshock- therapy machine could provide entertainment. The funny, harrowing and bestselling account of an ordinary boy's survival under the most extraordinary circumstances.

- **The Samurai's Garden** by Gail Tsukiyama- On the eve of the Second World War, a young Chinese man is sent to his family's summer home in Japan to recover from tuberculosis. He will rest, swim in the salubrious sea, and paint in the brilliant shoreside light. It will be quiet and solitary. But he meets four local residents - a lovely young Japanese girl and three older people. What then ensues is a tale that readers will find at once classical yet utterly unique. Young Stephen has his own adventure, but it is the unfolding story of Matsu, Sachi, and Kenzo that seizes your attention and will stay with you forever. Tsukiyama, with lines as clean, simple, telling, and dazzling as the best of Oriental art, has created an exquisite little masterpiece.
- **Seabiscuit** by Laura Hillenbrand- In this "New York Times" bestseller now in paperback, Hillenbrand unfolds the spellbinding story of the racehorse Seabiscuit in a riveting tale of grit, grace, luck, and an underdog's stubborn determination.
- **Second Summer of the Sisterhood** by Ann Brashares- With a bit of last summer 's sand in the pockets, the Traveling Pants and the Sisterhood that wears them embark on their 16th summer. Bridget: Impulsively sets off for Alabama, wanting to both confront her demons about her family and avoid them all at once. Lena: Spends a blissful week with Kostos, making the unexplainable silence that follows his visit even more painful. Carmen: Is concerned that her mother is making a fool of herself over a man. When she discovers that her mother borrowed the Pants to wear on a date, she's certain of it. Tibby: Not about to spend another summer working at Wallman's, she takes a film course only to find it's what happens off-camera that teaches her the most.
- **Secret Life of Bees** by Sue Monk Kidd- During the summer of 1964 in rural South Carolina, a young girl is given a home by three black, beekeeping sisters. As she enters their mesmerizing secret world of bees and honey, she discovers a place where she can find the single thing her heart longs for most.
- **The Shipping News** by Annie Proulx-A man finds himself taking care of his two daughters after his two-timing wife dies. He decides he will go back to his ancestral home in Newfoundland and start fresh. He meets up with an aging Aunt who holds a family secret and quite a past herself. His life does seem to get better, he is hired as a journalist and his children begin to put down roots. He also begins to fall in love and finds it very different this time. This is a wonderfully written story with deep characters and great detail. You can feel the cold of the Newfoundland coast as you read.
- **Short Novels of the Masters** edited by Charles Neider- A collection of ten works by 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century literary gods of America, Europe and the U.K.

- **The Sparrow** by Mary Doria Russell- A motley combination of agnostics, true believers, and misfits become the first to explore the Alpha Centuri world of Rakhat with both enlightening and disastrous results.
- **Sister of My Heart** by Chitra Banerjee Divakarunia-Anju is the daughter of an upper-caste Calcutta family; her cousin Sudha is the daughter of the black sheep of that family. Sudha is as beautiful, tenderhearted and serious as Anju is plain, whip-smart and defiant. Yet since the day they were born, Sudha and Anju have been bonded in ways even their mothers cannot comprehend. The cousins' bond is shattered, however, when Sudha learns a dark family secret. Urged into arranged marriages, their lives take sudden, opposite turns. Then tragedy strikes them both, and the women discover that, despite the distance that has grown between them, they have only each other to turn to. This is an exceptionally moving novel of love, friendship, and compelling courage.
- **Snow Flower and the Secret Fan** by Lisa See- A heart-breakingly beautiful story of the power of women's friendships, set in rural 19<sup>th</sup> Century China when foot-binding was the norm and women were routinely isolated from the larger community in separate women's quarters. It tells the story of Lily and Snow Flower, pledged to a special friendship since childhood, who communicated back and forth over the years in messages inscribed on a paper fan in "nu shu", the secret written code used by women at that time.
- **Snow in August** by Pete Hamill- It was an unusual friendship: 11-year-old Michael Devlin, an Irish Catholic from Brooklyn, and Judah Hirsch, a rabbi and refugee from Prague, meet during a swirling blizzard on the Saturday morning. For Michael, Hirsch is an extraordinary window to ancient times and foreign lands; for the Rabbi, Michael is an encyclopedia of cultural knowledge of his new land. In baseball, the two find a common love, but when some anti-Semitic hoodlums threaten them with violence, the two must look for a miracle in a most unlikely place.
- **Stuck in Neutral** by Terry Trueman- Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel, who suffers from severe cerebral palsy and cannot function, relates his perceptions of his life, his family, and his condition, especially as he believes his father is planning to kill him.
- **The Thorn Birds** by Colleen McCullough- This is the chronicle of three generations of Clearys, ranchers carving lives from a beautiful, hard land while contending with the bitterness, frailty, and secrets that penetrate their family. Most of all, it is the story of only daughter Meggie and her lifelong relationship with the haunted priest Father Ralph de Bricassart-an intense joining of two hearts and souls that dangerously oversteps sacred boundaries of ethics and dogma.

- **The Time Traveler's Wife** by Audrey Niffenegger-A most untraditional love story, this is the celebrated tale of Henry DeTamble, a dashing, adventuresome librarian who involuntarily travels through time and Claire Abshire an artist whose life takes a natural sequential course. Henry and Claire's passionate affair endures across the sea of time and captures them in an impossibly romantic trap that tests the strength of fate and basks in the bonds of love.
- **To Kill a Mockingbird** by Harper Lee- Through the young eyes of Scout and Jem Finch, Harper Lee explores with rich humor and unswerving honesty the irrationality of adult attitudes toward race and class in the Deep South of the 1930s. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence, and hypocrisy is pricked by the stamina and quiet heroism of one man's struggle for justice--but the weight of history will only tolerate so much.
- **Tracks** by Robyn Davidson- A cult classic with an ever-growing audience, Tracks is the brilliantly written and frequently hilarious account of a young woman's odyssey through the deserts of Australia, with no one but her dog and four camels as companions. Davidson emerges as a heroine who combines extraordinary courage with exquisite sensitivity.
- **Waiting** by Ha Jin- This is the story of Kin Long, a man living in two worlds, struggling with the conflicting claims of two utterly different women as he moves through the political minefields of society designed to regulate his every move and stifle the promotings of this innermost heart.
- **War of the Worlds** by H. G. Wells-As life on Mars becomes impossible, Martians and their terrifying machines invade the earth. This is the H. G. Wells title on which the Oct. 30, 1938 radio program that frightened listeners was based.
- **Water for Elephants** by Sara Gruen-A novel of star-crossed lovers, set in the circus world circa 1932. When Jacob Jankowski, recently orphaned and suddenly adrift, jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks, grifters, and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression, making one-night stands in town after endless town. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful young star of the equestrian act, who is married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. He also meets Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her.
- **The Weight of Water** by Anita Shreve- When Jean arrives on Smuttynose Island off the coast of Maine to research a century-old crime, she immerses herself in the details of the case--an outburst of passion that resulted in the deaths of two women. At the same time, she suspects her husband is having an affair, leading her to actions that have horrific consequences.

- **A Widow for One Year** by John Irving- closes in the autumn of 1995, when Ruth Cole is a forty-one-year-old widow and mother. She's about to fall in love for the first time. Richly comic, as well as deeply disturbing A Widow for One Year is a multilayered love story of astonishing emotional force. Both ribald and erotic, it is also a brilliant novel about the passage of time and the relentlessness of grief.
- **Year of Wonders** by Geraldine Brooks- It is the year 1666. Bubonic plague descends upon an English mountain village. In an extraordinary decision, the villagers decide to quarantine the village. This is their story seen through the eyes of a housemaid, Anna Frith.