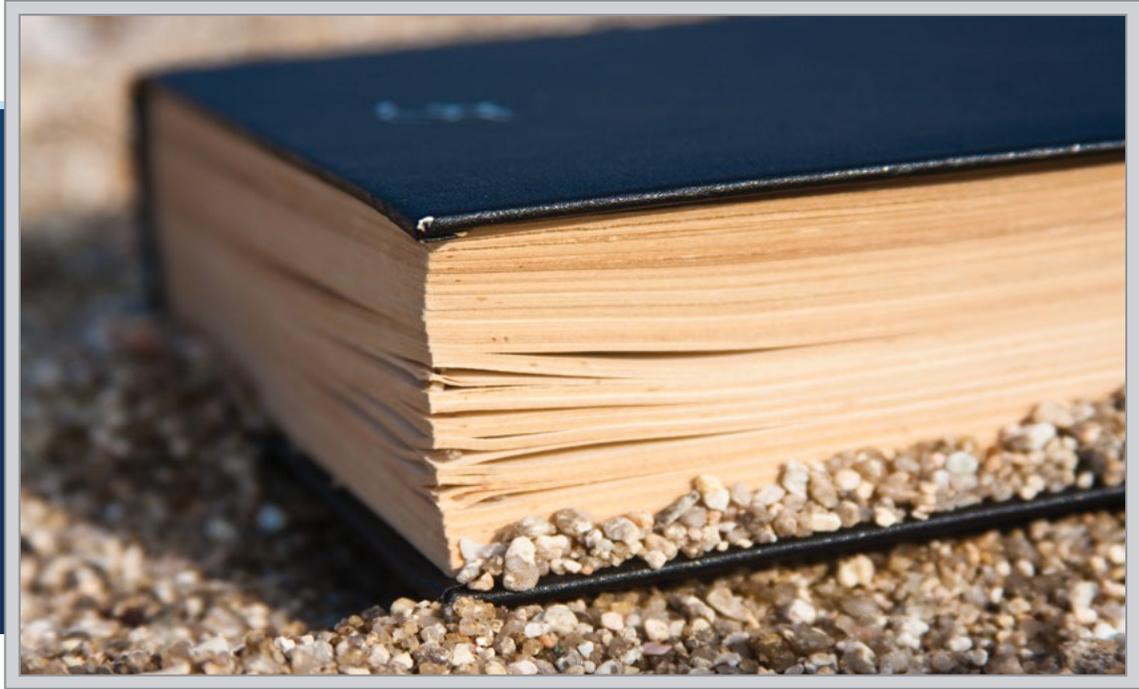
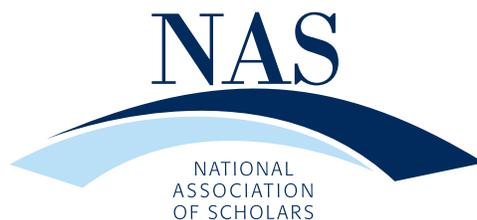


BEACH BOOKS: 2014-2016

What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?



February 2016

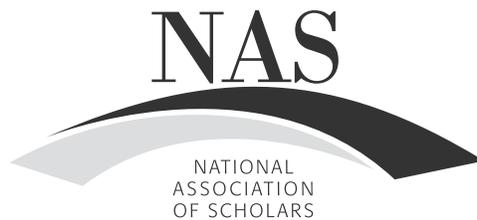


A report by the National Association of Scholars

BEACH BOOKS: 2014-2016

What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?

February 2016



DAVID RANDALL

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

Mission

The National Association of Scholars is an independent membership association of academics and others working to sustain the tradition of reasoned scholarship and civil debate in America's colleges and universities. We uphold the standards of a liberal arts education that fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship.

What We Do

We publish a quarterly journal, *Academic Questions*, which examines the intellectual controversies and the institutional challenges of contemporary higher education.

We publish studies of current higher education policy and practice with the aim of drawing attention to weaknesses and stimulating improvements.

Our website presents a daily stream of educated opinion and commentary on higher education and archives our research reports for public access.

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Visit our website, www.nas.org, to learn more about NAS and to become a member.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hundreds of American colleges and universities continue to assign a summer reading to entering freshmen—typically one book, which the students are asked to read outside their courses. Many institutions embed the common reading in a larger program of campus activities: typically, they invite the common reading author to help open the academic year by speaking on campus at convocation. The book usually is chosen by a committee or by student vote, although occasionally by presidential or decanal fiat. The book sometimes is associated with a larger school theme for the academic year, such as Hesston College’s (Kansas) “Be the Change: Caring that Matters.” On other occasions it is associated with an administrative sponsor within the university, such as its Office of Diversity, and thus is selected to promote that sponsor’s institutional mandate. Colleges devote substantial administrative resources to supporting the common reading programs: librarians write reading guides and publish them on the library web site, the common reading programs themselves usually devote several pages of their websites to their latest selection and promote the reading through social media, and the school sponsors lectures and other related events throughout the academic year.

Most colleges see the key purpose of a common reading program as fostering community on campus and student activism in the outside world. Many also declare that common reading is important because it sets academic expectations, begins conversations, and encourages critical thinking, but these goals are meant to be achieved within the matrix of community and activism.

Although there are several databases of common reading assignments, the annual *Beach Books* reports by the National Association of Scholars are the most comprehensive. *Beach Books* is the only series that categorizes the books according to their main subjects and track trends in genres, publication dates, and additional themes.

Our study covers more than 350 colleges and universities for the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-16. We present the results of our research in terms of findings, facts, characteristics, and recommendations.

The Findings

College common reading programs are:

1. **Enduringly Popular.** Common reading programs remain popular. A significant minority of colleges abandon their common reading programs each year, but so far they have been replaced by other colleges starting new common reading programs.
2. **Meant to Build Community.** Colleges see their common readings more as exercises in community-building than as means to prepare students for academic life.

3. **Dominated by Mediocre, New Books.** The list of readings continues to be dominated by recent, trendy, and intellectually unchallenging books.
4. **Predominantly Progressive.** The assigned books frequently emphasize progressive political themes—illegal immigrants contribute positively to America, the natural environment must be saved immediately—and almost never possess subject matter disfavored by progressives.
5. **A Homogenous Market.** A profitable common reading genre has emerged, in which publishers and authors market a homogenized product to a highly predictable market of college selection committees. Students are the captive readership of this market.

The Facts

1. **Author Speaking:** In 2014, 53% of colleges with common reading programs hosted personal appearances by the authors, and in 2015 54% of colleges with common reading programs had author appearances.
2. **Not Mandatory:** In 2014 29% of colleges required students to read their common reading. In 2015 the figure was 28% of colleges.
3. **Recent:** More than half of common reading assignments (58% in 2014, 60% in 2015) were published between 2010 and the present. Only 12 assignments (1.6%) in 2014 and 2015 combined were published before 1900, and another 5 (0.7%) between 1900 and 1945. A grand total of 17 (2.3%) were published before the dawn of the Atomic Age.
4. **Nonfiction:** 71% of assignments in 2014 and 75% of assignments in 2015 were memoirs, biographies, essays, and other non-fiction. A handful of these were popular histories; the work that came closest to a professional work of history was classicist/political theorist Danielle Allen's historically-informed close reading of *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (2014).

The Characteristics

1. **Civically Engaged:** Common readings are overwhelmingly chosen to foster civic engagement; they scarcely mention the complementary and equally valuable virtues of the disengaged life of the mind. They give no sense of why or how college differs from the world outside, and why those differences are valuable.
2. **Nothing Foreign:** Classics in translation were nearly absent—and so was anything modern in translation. Even common readings about foreigners generally were written in English, not translated from Spanish, Chinese, Urdu, Latin, or any other foreign language.

3. **No Classics:** Only a scattering of colleges assigned works that could be considered classics.¹ With few exceptions, the hundreds of common reading programs across the country ignored books of lasting merit. Austen, Balzac, Cather, Dostoevsky, Eliot, and Fitzgerald were not to be found. Neither was there a trace of Gissing, Hawthorne, Ibsen, James, Kipling, or Lessing (Doris or Gottfried). There is a void that stretches from Achebe to Zamyatin.
4. **No Modern Classics:** Even in confining themselves to living authors, common reading programs neglect some of the best ones, such as Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Wendell Berry, J. M. Coetzee, Don DeLillo, Annie Dillard, Mark Helprin, Denis Johnson, Cormac McCarthy, John McPhee, Alice Munro, V. S. Naipaul, Jodi Picoult, Marilynne Robinson, Philip Roth, Richard Russo, Wole Soyinka, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Tom Wolfe.
5. **A Narrow, Predictable Genre:** The common reading genre is *parochial, contemporary, commercial, optimistic, juvenile, obsessed with suffering, and progressive*. Not every selected text embraces all these categories, but these adjectives define the characteristic common reading.

Recommendations

The National Association of Scholars believes that common reading programs are a good idea in principle. At a time when true core curricula (as opposed to distribution requirements) have largely disappeared, a common reading assignment can provide at least an abbreviated substitution that may inspire students to read further and better than they otherwise would and foster intellectual friendship on campus. To increase the odds that a common reading assignment will have these effects, we repeat 11 recommendations for book selection criteria from our last report, and add 10 new ones.

The 11 recommendations we repeat are:

1. Seek diversity—the intellectual kind.
2. Seek books that are neither too long nor too short.
3. Seek texts that are a bit over students’ heads, but not so far that they are beyond reach.
4. Seek works that are not contemptuous of humanity or dyed in profound cynicism.
5. In fiction, seek works that exemplify elegance of language and a degree of complexity, along with moral seriousness.
6. In nonfiction, seek works that exemplify important ideas lucidly argued and writers who take their rhetorical task seriously.

¹ We use “classics” in the common sense of writings that are broadly recognized as having stood the test of time. These are books that have gone through many editions, have standing with a general readership, and have earned high regard from scholars. The National Association of Scholars does not have a canon in the sense of a supposedly exhaustive list of great works of literature. We do think that old books that more than three generations have found interesting are pretty good on average, but our opinion is not essential to our definition of what “classics” are.

7. Pay deliberate attention to important books from earlier eras.
8. Consider that the book you choose will be more than a reading for the students. It will also be a public representation of the college's academic standards, values, and reputation.
9. All members of the committee should read the books they weigh as finalists for selection. Reviews and blurbs are not enough.
10. Consult with others who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books.
11. Consult outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars' list (See Appendix IV: Recommended Books for College Common Reading) or Modern Library's list of 100 Best Novels and 100 Best Nonfiction.²

We now add 10 further recommendations:

1. Alter common reading mission statements to excise all non-academic goals.
2. Appoint smaller common reading committees, composed exclusively of faculty. All the members should be widely read and committed to reading.
3. Don't choose a book for its subject matter, since books chosen on those grounds are usually dull, often poorly written, and seldom distinguished.
4. Cultivate impartiality in judging offensiveness: if books offensive to progressives are to be excluded, so too should books offensive to every other sort of reader.
5. Choose books for adults, not books for children.
6. Assign multiple readings—perhaps a classic and a modern book that share a subject matter.
7. Consider choosing local readings, having to do with the institution or the locale of a college.
8. Consider choosing translated readings; the English language is a small part of the world.
9. Integrate summer readings with actual courses; give students a test on their content that will affect their grades.
10. Tighten college admission standards so as to select a student body with the capacity and desire to read a challenging book.

² Modern Library, "Top 100," <http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/>.

FOREWORD

BY PETER WOOD

The book that a college chooses for common reading tells you more about the college than any tour guide walking you through the quad. It reveals something more important than college rankings, graduation rates, or even the course catalog. Not that these other things are unimportant. High school juniors and seniors and their parents should gather as much information as they can about a college before making the life-directing—and typically very expensive—decision about where to go. Consider the earnings of alumni ten years after graduation, as the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard invites you do. Look at the speeches of the college president, typically posted on the college website, and count the clichés.

While all of these give important clues, none of them capture the character of the college as well as its choice of a common reading. There is a reason for that. Contemporary American colleges and universities are a chaotic whirl of activity. They take pride in this hubbub. They typically sell themselves on the claim that the student has endless opportunities to study anything he wishes, pursue a cornucopia of extra-curricular interests, and plunge into a diversity of diversities. These claims are mostly illusion but they do capture some of the fragmentation of the contemporary academic scene, where specialization rules the academic side of things and campus life is a hive of disparate pursuits.

But when a college chooses *one* book to introduce its freshmen to college life, it forces itself to compress the whole chaotic swirl of activities into a single idea. The choice says: *This* is what we are really about.

The National Association of Scholars happened upon this subject innocently. Several years ago a faculty member sent us an email asking what we thought about the particular book chosen by his college. One thing led to another and soon we had a long list of colleges that had chosen similar books. We published the list and got a strong response. In each succeeding year, the list grew and so did the depth of our inquiry. We got to know many of the faculty members and administrators who manage these programs. We interviewed participants. We found that our studies struck a chord with professors as well as general readers. Our study became a go-to source and led to television appearances by Ashley Thorne, who devised this research, and to accounts in the international press.

We never anticipated this level of interest but we are, of course, glad to have it. *Beach Books* now enters its sixth year. We hope this addition will prove to be even more helpful. We are partly enthusiasts for the idea of common reading programs, but we are also critics of the way most of them are carried out. Our recommendations of better books for the (freshman) beach, has been the most enduringly popular part of the annual study. In that light, we have expanded it. We hope it will inspire readers of all ages to discover some new books to read and to rediscover old favorites.



MECHANICS OF COMMON READING PROGRAMS

Colleges generally give students—freshmen or the entire community—one book in their common reading programs. Students usually read the book over the summer, so that they can discuss it during orientation or early in the fall semester. Colleges intend these books to introduce new students to academic rigor, to promote community and conversation among the students, and to articulate their institutional values.

It isn't easy to set up or maintain a common reading program. The College of William and Mary just began one in 2015, and getting the program up and running involved the Dean's Office reading lists of common readings assigned at other universities; five separate deans reading and approving the final selection (Oliver Sacks' *Island of the Colorblind*); arranging with Vintage Books to publish a new print run of the book so that there would be enough copies for the students; mailing a copy of the book and a cover letter from Dean Kate Conley to every incoming student; modifying the syllabus and course assignment of William and Mary's introductory course "Writers about Writing" to incorporate Sacks' book; suggesting to orientation leaders that they use the book in their welcome to incoming freshmen; composing blog posts for the First Year Experience blog to publicize the program; arranging a three-person, interdisciplinary faculty panel on the book in the beginning of September; and adding questions to the students' orientation survey to elicit their feedback on the program. The purchase and mailing alone of the common reading cost more than \$18,000.³

William and Mary hardly exhausted the activities that a common reading program can include. Pomona College chose Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* in 2014 as its common reading, invited Adichie to speak at campus, and set its librarians to write an impressively thorough Library Guide (LibGuide) webpage on the book for the benefit of Pomona students.⁴ Hofstra University (New York), by way of incentive for a voluntary exercise, arranged a Common Reading Essay Contest in 2015 for its incoming students on Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog*, with essays to be read and judged by the faculty, and the prize for the top (dog) three essayists a luncheon with Ms. Parks and a free iPad.⁵ William and Mary restricted its selectors to the Dean's Office; Elon University's (North Carolina) Selection Committee includes administrators, librarians, faculty, and students, and they take two years to choose a common reading.⁶ Each of these activities requires at least the payment of salary to administrators and faculty for their time, and further substantial outlays on expenses such as honoraria to visiting authors.

3 Cortney Langley, "William & Mary Launches First Common Book for Freshmen," *William & Mary News & Media*, September 17, 2015, <http://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2015/william--mary-launches-first-common-book-for-freshmen.php>.

4 Claremont Colleges Library, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Americanah*: Welcome!," <http://libguides.libraries.claremont.edu/c.php?g=317857&p=2120186>.

5 Hofstra University First-Year Connections, "Common Reading Essay Contest," http://www.hofstra.edu/academics/colleges/hclas/fyc/commonreading/commonreading_essaycontest.html.

6 Elon University Common Reading, "Committee Members," http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/special_programs/common_reading/about-committee.xhtml; Elon University Common Reading, "Selection Process," http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/special_programs/common_reading/about-selection.xhtml.

Some colleges encourage faculty to incorporate the common reading into their courses; others incorporate it into required first-year courses. The University of South Florida does both:

First-year students will have the book integrated into their Academic Foundations courses and selected ENC 1102 First Year Composition courses. Other faculty teaching in both undergraduate and graduate courses will include parts of the book in their coursework.⁷

So too does the University of North Carolina, Wilmington: “During the fall, *Chasing Chaos* will be used in First-Year Seminar and various courses of the faculty’s choosing.”⁸ Most colleges still don’t incorporate common reading into their regular curricula, but there are plenty of models to show how it can be done.

Program Goals

Common reading programs aim to familiarize new students with how college students think, read, discuss, and write. They are meant to establish academic standards—and to establish a sense of community among students, both with other students and with the faculty. How well they do either of these things is open to question, but for most of the programs the emphasis falls on community building over academic preparation. Common reading programs focus on creating a sense of community both because they consider it a good in itself and because it is supposed to aid in both *student success* (diligence and excellence at study) and *student retention* (feeling sufficiently motivated not to drop out). Common reading programs are also meant to inculcate institutional identity and institutional goals—under which cover progressive tenets such as *diversity* and *sustainability* often creep in,⁹ but the desire to foster institutional identity also guides (for example) Benedictine colleges to choose books Benedictine in spirit. Books are selected to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, both to satisfy the varieties of student taste and disciplinary interest and so as to get as broad an institutional “buy-in” as possible from the administration and the faculty. The basic rationale, however, is that if students can be brought to care enough about a book to read it, and even think it’s interesting enough to talk about with their friends, they might also care enough about college to make a real go at their education.

We have serious qualms about these program goals—not least because they assume that the typical matriculating college freshman has to be wooed to something so basic as reading a book for pleasure. Neither do we believe they succeed particularly well even on their own terms. Yet we do think these goals are humane in their intent, if flawed in their execution and their consequences.

⁷ University of South Florida Common Reading Experience (CRE), “2015-2016 Book Selection,” <http://www.usf.edu/undergrad/cre/index.aspx>.

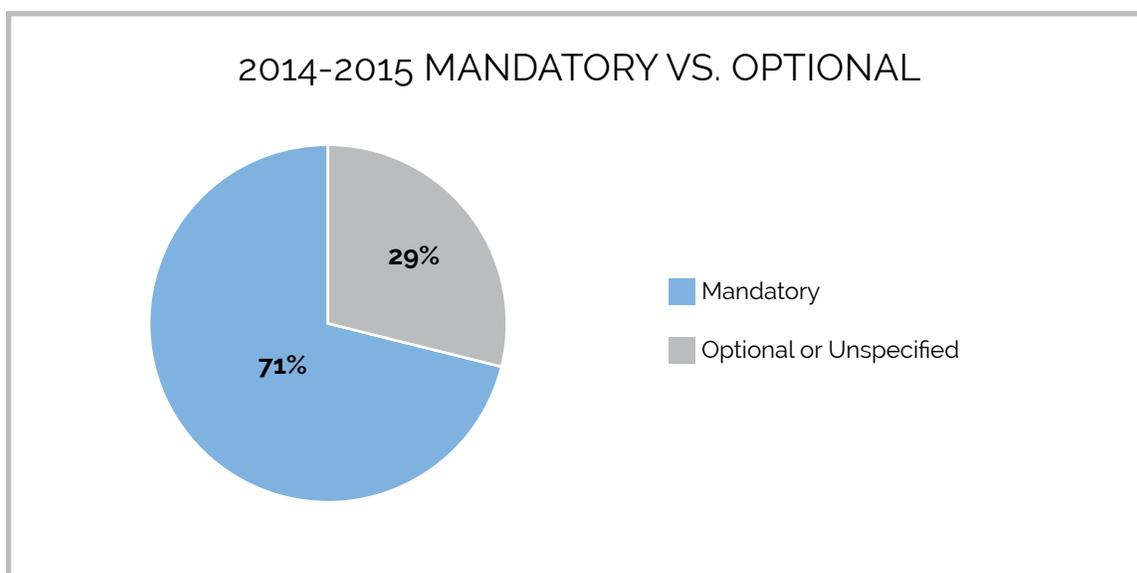
⁸ University of North Carolina Wilmington Common Reading, “Synergy: Common Reading,” <http://uncw.edu/commonreading>.

⁹ For extended definitions of *diversity* and *sustainability*, and full-length critiques of the programs that operate under their auspices, see Peter W. Wood, *Diversity: The Invention of a Concept* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003); and Rachele Peterson and Peter W. Wood, *Sustainability: Higher Education’s New Fundamentalism* (National Association of Scholars, 2015), https://www.nas.org/projects/sustainability_report.

Mandatory or Optional?

Some colleges are clear about whether a book is mandatory or optional. Rollins College (Florida) states outright that “The Summer Reading program is required for all incoming first-year students and all transfer students,”¹⁰ while the University of Connecticut is equally clear that “We invite you to join us in reading this year’s book of choice.”¹¹ A great many colleges instead use ambiguous language: the University of Kentucky informs the reader that “New students will read a book selected for their cohort the summer before their first semester on campus,” where the expectation of participation avoids an imperative.¹² Eastern Illinois University rests its ambiguity instead upon whether the word *ask* is to be taken as tentative or demanding: “All first-year students will be asked to read the same book before their arrival on campus for the fall semester.”¹³ This ambiguity among common reading programs appears deliberate—delicate phrasing that will get as many students as possible to read the books without actually requiring the incoming students to do any work.

So far as we can judge from noncommittal language, in 2014-15 29% of colleges (105 out of 366) required students to read their common reading, while in 2015-16 the figure was 28% of colleges (98 out of 350).

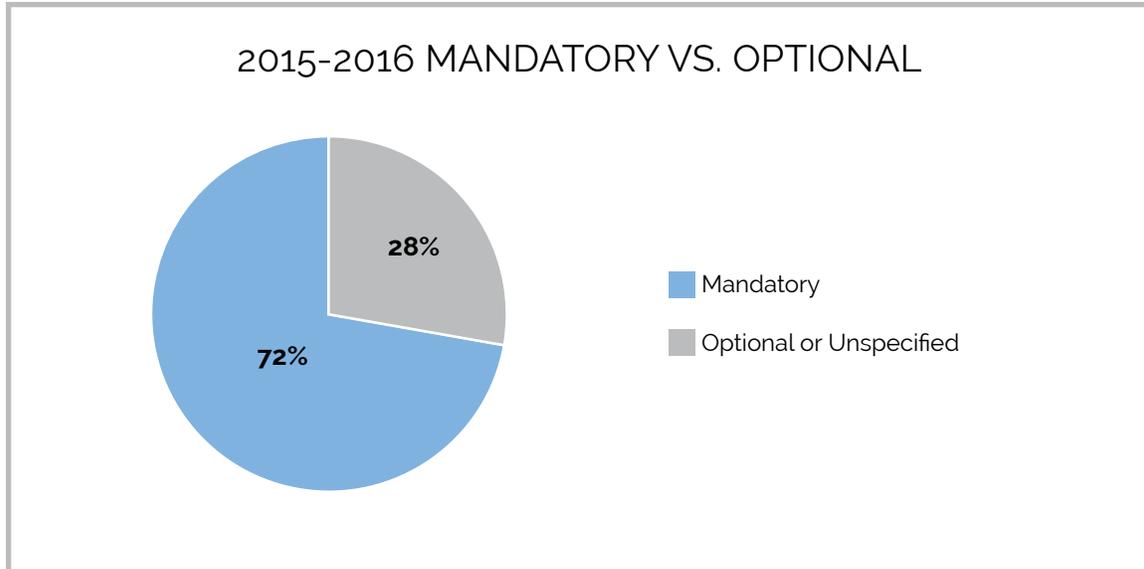


10 Rollins College Student Success, “Lifelong Learning Through Literature,” <http://www.rollins.edu/student-success/first-years-transfers/summer-reading.html>.

11 University of Connecticut, “UConn Reads,” <http://uconnreads.uconn.edu/>.

12 University of Kentucky Student Affairs, “Introduction to the Common Reading Experience,” <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/NewStudentPrograms/CRE4/aboutcre.php#6>.

13 Eastern Illinois University, “Welcome to Eastern Reads!,” <http://castle.eiu.edu/~eiureads/>.



One may wonder why a college would tread so lightly in setting this requirement. Are freshmen so delicate or so diffident that assigning them a required book prior to matriculation would make them choose a different college, or decide not to go to college at all? The colleges' answer appears to be, "Yes, they are."

Among those colleges that required their students to read the summer book, some provided no connection to any class or any alternative means of enforcement: examples include Coastal Carolina University (South Carolina), Saint Louis University (Missouri), and Young Harris College (Georgia).¹⁴ A few are more rigorous. Luther College (Iowa) includes an essay assignment on the Common Reading as part of its required first-year Paideia course—"You'll write your first Paideia paper about *The Book of Unknown Americans*"¹⁵—while Augustana College (Illinois) says that "All fall term LSFY [Liberal Studies] and first-year honors classes will discuss the book and collect the required summer writing assignment about the book as part of their common curriculum during the first few weeks of each course."¹⁶ Yet these measures to integrate the common reading with the curriculum are rare.

The enforcement of student participation in common reading programs relies, save in the few programs that actually test students for their knowledge of the book, on student enthusiasm to read, honorable unwillingness to get by on skimming and Cliff Notes, and shame at being found by

¹⁴ Coastal Carolina University, "CCU Announces Summer 2015 Big Read Book," May 12, 2015, <http://www.coastal.edu/newsarticles/story.php?id=4031>; Saint Louis University First-Year Experience, "First-Year Summer Reading," <http://www.slu.edu/student-involvement-center/first-year-experience/first-year-summer-reading>; Young Harris College, "Common Reading Program," <http://www.yhc.edu/student-life/fyf/common-reading>.

¹⁵ Luther College Paideia Program, "2015 Summer Reading Guide," <http://www.luther.edu/paideia/program/summer-reading/unknownamericans/>.

¹⁶ Augustana College Student Life, "Summer 2015 Reading for First-Year Students," <https://www.augustana.edu/student-life/incoming-students/preparing-for-the-fall-term/summer-reading-program>.

their peers unready to participate in a discussion of the common reading. Purdue University (Indiana) President Mitch Daniels' cancellation of the university's common reading program in 2014 illustrates the limits of such reliance. The more formal analysis of the failings of Purdue's program included the explanation that it was never "formally connected to the curriculum."¹⁷ Purdue student Patrick Smalls stated the consequence: "No one hardly read the book."¹⁸

"No one hardly read the book." – Patrick Smalls, Purdue University student.

For Freshmen or for All Students?

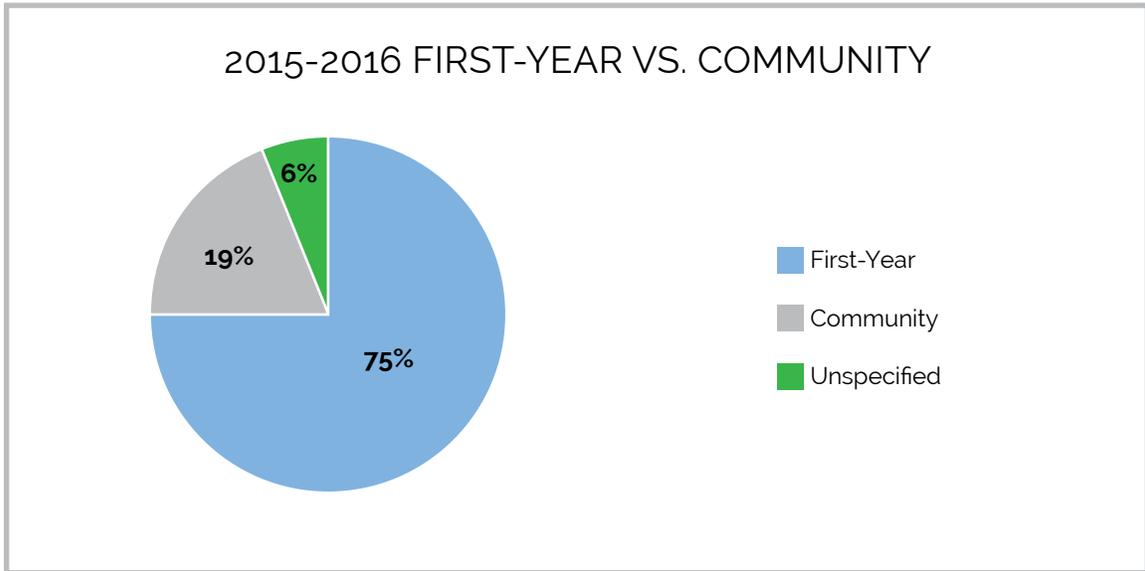
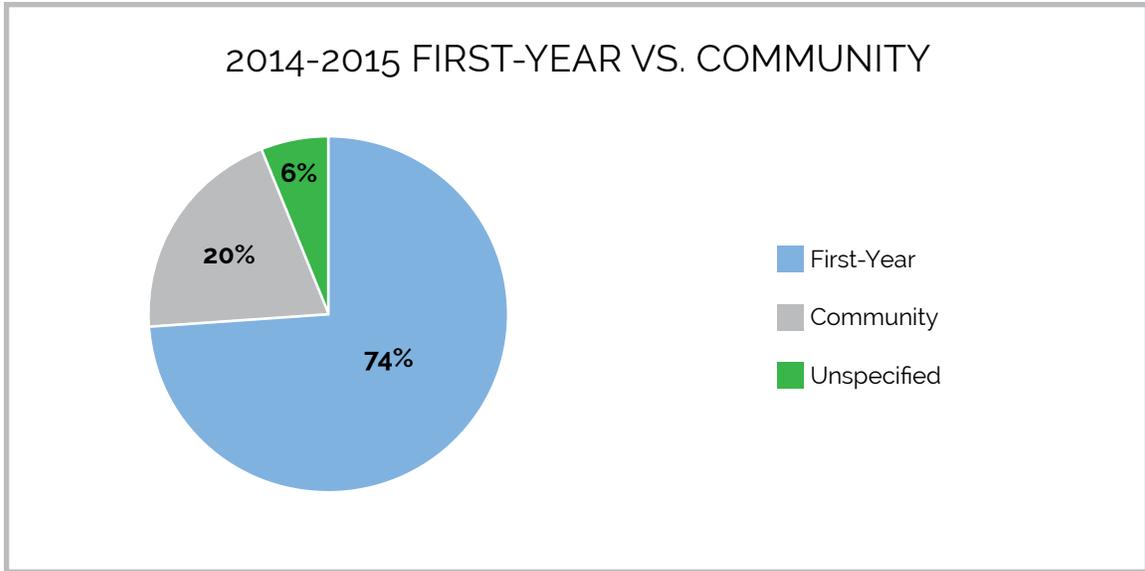
Colleges also use ambiguous language about who is supposed to read these books. Some are explicitly for new students (freshmen or transfers). Some, often community colleges, intend for them to be read by the entire community. Other programs try to square the circle, and say that their books are supposed to be for the entire community—but especially for new students. Concordia College (Minnesota), for example, states that "Each year, the entire Concordia campus community is invited to read a selected book. All first-year students participate in a discussion about the book during Fall Orientation."¹⁹ Northern Kentucky University's "Book Connection program seeks to provide a unifying, academic experience for more than 1,500 first-year students, while also engaging the community at large."²⁰ We have assigned all programs that refer at all to first-year students to the first-year category, on the grounds that their mention of the larger community is more than usually aspirational. In 2014-15, 74% of colleges (273 out of 366) directed their summer readings to first-year students and 20% (72 out of 366) directed them to the entire community; the remainder (21 out of 366) did not identify their target audience. In 2015-16, 75% of colleges (261 out of 350) directed their summer readings to first-year students and 19% (68 out of 350) directed them to the entire community; the remainder (21 out of 350) did not identify their target audience.

17 Hayleigh Colombo, "Emails Shed Light on End of Common Reading at Purdue," *JOnline Lafayette Journal & Courier*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.jonline.com/story/news/college/2014/04/18/emails-light-end-common-reading-purdue/7892757/>.

18 Jake Sohn, "Common Reading Program Meets Its Fateful End," *The Exponent Online*, January 14, 2014, http://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/article_ofb45b11-6eb6-5116-9d4e-77022d952623.html.

19 Concordia College First-Year Experience, "Summer Book Read," <https://www.concordiacollege.edu/studentlife/first-year-experience/summer-book-read/>.

20 Northern Kentucky University First Year Programs, "About Book Connections," <http://firstyear.nku.edu/bookconnection.html>.

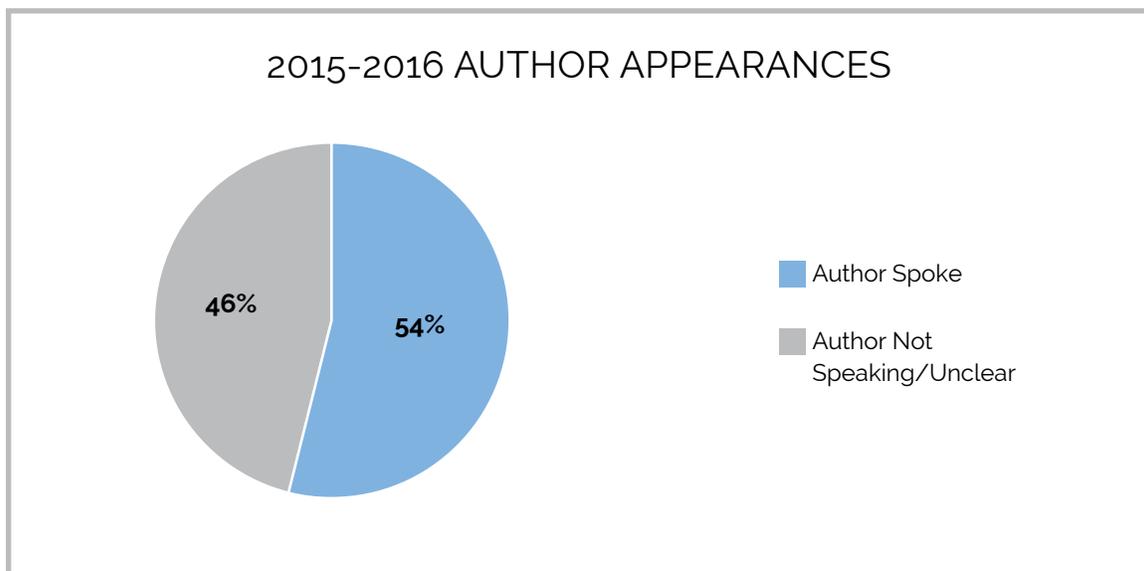
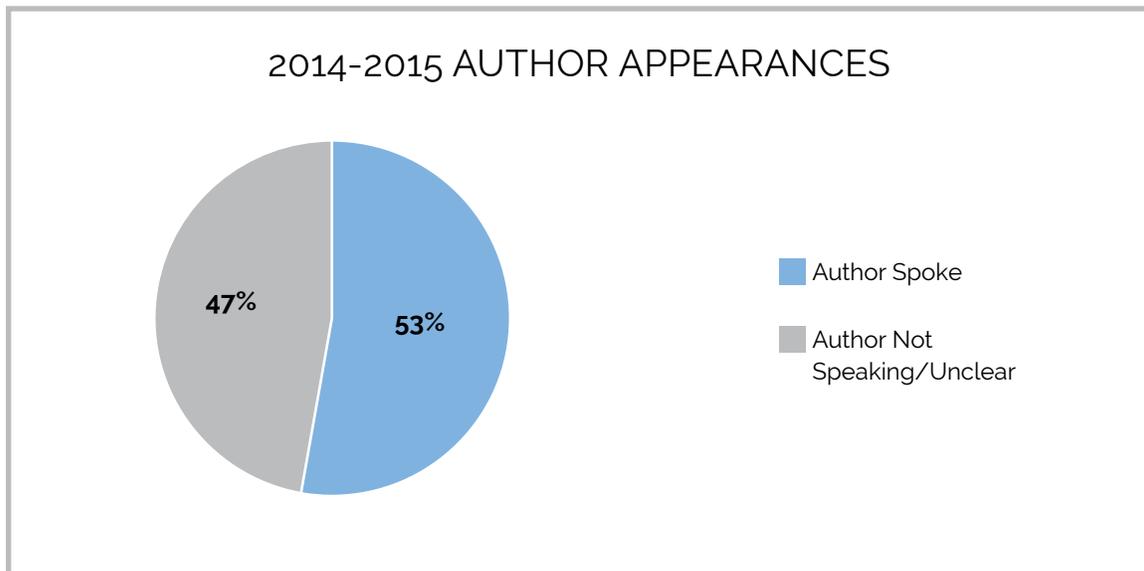


Author Speaking?

Many common reading programs specify in their selection criteria that the book's author should be living and available for a campus appearance: Otterbein College (Ohio), Ramapo College (New Jersey), and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville are examples.²¹ Even where this is not required, it is a predilection. Colleges frequently bring the authors to campus, usually for a convocation

²¹ Otterbein College Center for Student Success, "Common Book," <http://www.otterbein.edu/public/Academics/EnrichmentPrograms/CommonBook.aspx>; Ramapo College First-Year Seminar, "Summer Reading," <http://www.ramapo.edu/first-year/summer-reading/>; The University of Tennessee Knoxville First-Year Studies, "Suggest a Book," <http://fys.utk.edu/life-of-the-mind/suggest-a-book/>.

speech at the beginning of the freshman year or for a separate appearance in the fall. Some authors appear in the following spring, some have already appeared in the previous year, and when a book is assigned two years running, the author does not usually show up the second time. In 2014-15 at least 53% of colleges (193 out of 366) had author speeches, and in 2015-16 at least 54% of colleges (189 out of 350) had author speeches. This figure is a conservative estimate: not every author appearance is listed on the common reading website, and our web-searches probably missed a significant number of author visits. Our educated guess is that 60%+ of common reading programs include author speeches.



This figure does not include speeches by relatives and representatives of the author, or speeches by the subjects of a book. Colleges that assign Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* often have members of the Lacks family appear: in 2014, members of the Lacks family visited Monroe Community College (Michigan), and in 2015 Lacks family members appeared either by live appearances or by video connection at Gustavus Adolphus College (Minnesota) and Montana State University.²² In 2015 the University of Massachusetts Amherst invited both the author (Anand Giridharadas) and the subject (Raisuddin Bhuiyan) of *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas*, while Indiana University Southeast hosted Luma Mufleh, the soccer-coach subject of Warren St. John's *Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference*.²³ Malala Yousafzai did not travel from the United Kingdom to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to highlight Madison's 2014 common reading of *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*—but Shiza Shahid, CEO and co-founder of the Malala Fund, gave Madison's October keynote speech.²⁴

Such substitutes suffice; but it is a truth largely acknowledged that a college in possession of a common reading program must be in want of an author visit.

Who Chooses the Books

A few deans at William and Mary decided on Oliver Sacks' *Island of the Colorblind*, and Princeton's president Christopher L. Eisgruber continues to choose Princeton's common readings by himself,²⁵ but most common reading programs call upon a committee of faculty and staff, sometimes with student participation. The University of Cincinnati's Common Read Committee illustrates the size and departmental variety of such collective endeavors:

- Chris Carter, director of Composition; department of English and Comparative Literature
- Craig Dietsch, associate professor; department of Geology
- Billie Dziech, professor; department of English and Comparative Literature
- Nicolette Fernandez, assistant director; Office of Judicial Affairs
- Marla Hall, associate professor; department of Psychology
- Anne Hoehn, academic director; College of Engineering and Applied Sciences
- Max Inniger, peer leader; Center for First-Year Experience and Learning Communities
- Jenn Lewis, associate director, academic student advising; Carl H. Lindner College of Business

22 Janet Ekis, "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks' Launches MCC's First-Ever Common Read," *Student Tribune*, January 22, 2014, <http://www.monroecc.edu/webdbs/studtrib.nsf/Include-StudentTrib/F6048062E3E8B6B605257C6700764F-9C?OpenDocument>; Gustavus Adolphus College New Student Orientation, "Reading in Common Program," <https://gustavus.edu/orientation/readingInCommon.php>; Montana State University, "2015 MSU Convocation," <http://www.montana.edu/convocation/>.

23 University of Massachusetts Amherst Student Life, "2015 Common Read Events Schedule," <http://www.umass.edu/studentlife/commonread/news/2015-events>.

24 Jenny Price, "Go Big Read Brings Malala Fund Co-Founder to Campus," *University of Wisconsin-Madison News*, October 21, 2014, <http://news.wisc.edu/23219>.

25 Jamie Saxon, "Eisgruber Chooses 'Whistling Vivaldi' for Pre-Read," *News at Princeton*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S42/86/08E82/>.

- Nicole Mayo, director; Student Activities & Leadership Development
- Greg Metz, assistant dean, academic affairs; UC Blue Ash College
- Audrey Miller, instructor, College of Allied Health Sciences
- Tony Williams, program coordinator, New Student Orientation
- Joanna Mitro, professor and associate dean for undergraduate affairs; McMicken College of Arts and Sciences
- Kim Paice, associate professor, Art History
- Trent Pinto, director, Residence and Education Development
- Maria Romagnoli, director of undergraduate studies; department of English and Comparative Literature
- Joanne Schweitzer, associate professor of clinical; College of Nursing
- Robin Selzer, assistant professor, Division of Professional Practice and Experiential Learning (ProPEL)
- Carney Sotto, associate clinical professor and undergraduate director; department of Communication Sciences and Disorders; College of Allied Health Sciences
- Mary Sterns, senior assistant dean, Academic Affairs; UC Clermont College
- Ric Sweeney, assistant professor; Lindner College of Business

These 21 people considered 150 books and narrowed the pool down to 6 finalists before finally settling upon *The Other Wes Moore* for 2015-16 and *A Deadly Wandering* for 2016-17.²⁶ There are only 15 members apiece in the selection committees of institutions such as Pacific Lutheran University (Washington), Southern Methodist University (Texas), and University of Virginia School of Engineering & Applied Science, but these are bulky enough.²⁷ Common readings generally must satisfy the taste of a sizeable committee—and the larger the committee and the larger the collective time expended, the less exciting or ambitious the results of their efforts are likely to be.

Common readings generally must satisfy the taste of a sizeable committee.

Names

Popular names for these programs are simple and descriptive: “Book in Common,” “Common Reading,” “Common Reader,” “Common Summer Reading,” “First-Year Common Reading,” “First-Year Reading Experience,” “Summer Reading,” and “Summer Reading Program.” More individual names include East Carolina University’s (North Carolina) “Pirate Read,” Metropolitan State

²⁶ University of Cincinnati Center for First Year Experience & Learning Communities, “The Next Common Read,” http://www.uc.edu/fye/center/communications_publications/FYEupdatehome/fye-1c-update-2014-2015/nextCR.html.

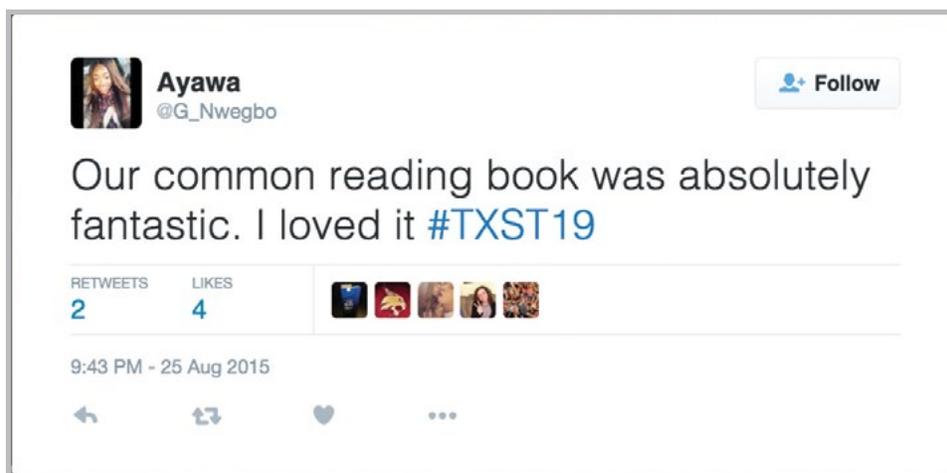
²⁷ Pacific Lutheran University First Year Experience Program, “Common Reading Selection Process,” <https://www.plu.edu/first-year/common-reading/selection-process/>; Southern Methodist University Office of the Provost, “2015 Common Reading Committee Members,” <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/CommonReading/Committee>; University of Virginia School of Engineering & Applied Science, “Common Reading Experience,” <http://www.seas.virginia.edu/acad/cre/>.

University of Denver’s (Colorado) “1Book/1Project/2Transform,” University of South Carolina Upstate’s “Preface,” and University of Tennessee Chattanooga’s “Read2Achieve.”

Social Media

Colleges have gone beyond posting web pages on their common readings and now incorporate a variety of social media as ways both to encourage student participation in these programs and to advertise the programs’ existence. Among the colleges whose common reading programs use social media, Kingsborough Community College (New York), Providence College (Rhode Island), and St. Cloud State University (Minnesota) have their own Facebook pages²⁸; the common reading programs of Shepherd University (West Virginia), Texas State University, University of North Carolina Wilmington use Twitter²⁹; and the University of Kentucky has put photographs about its common reading program on an Instagram account.³⁰ These social media efforts do not as yet seem overwhelmingly popular with their student bodies, but that is not for lack of effort on the part of the common reading programs.

Texas State University Common Reading Twitter Retweet³¹



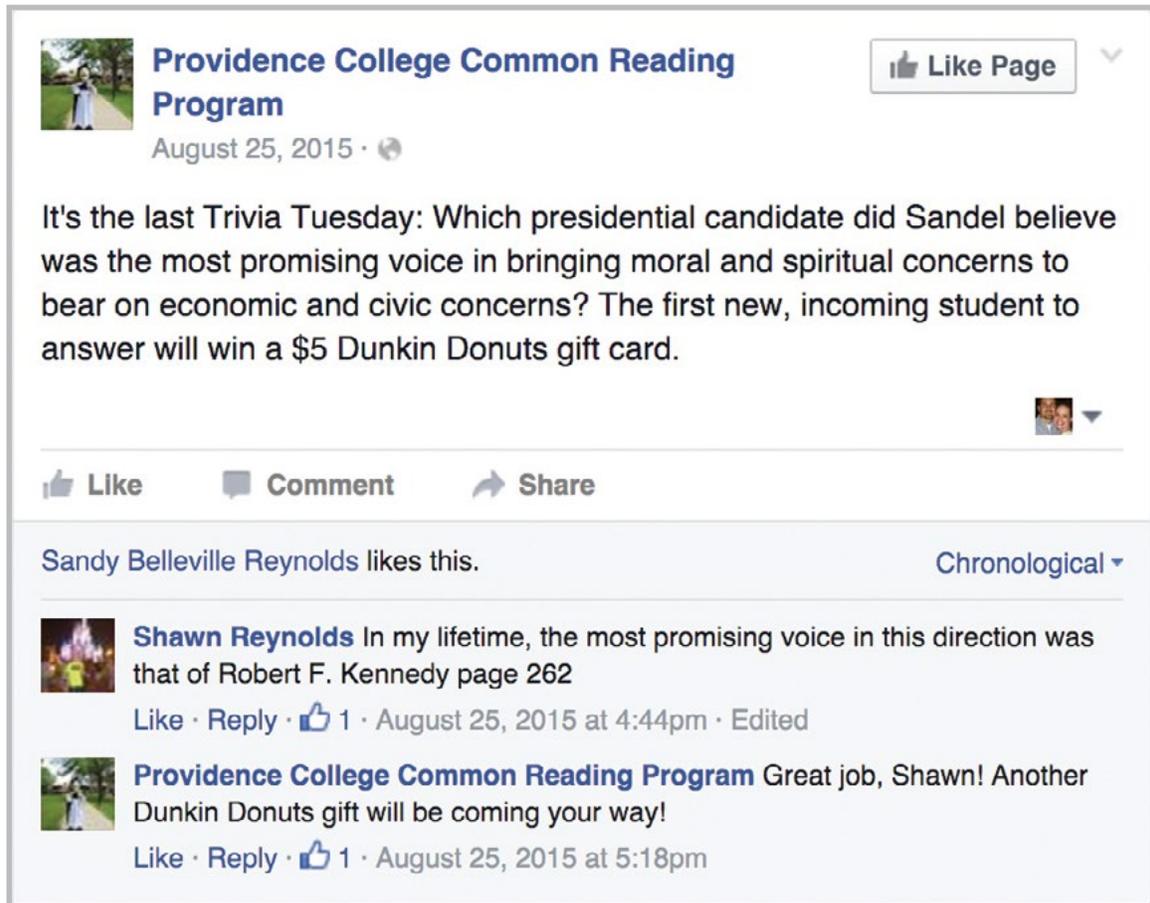
28 Kingsborough Community College, “KCC Reads: The Common Reading Program, Kingsborough CC CUNY,” <https://www.facebook.com/kcc.reads.cuny/>; Providence College, “Providence College Common Reading Program,” <https://www.facebook.com/friarbook/>; St. Cloud State University, “SCSU Common Read,” <https://www.facebook.com/SCSU-Common-Read-206140109405187/>.

29 Shepherd University, “SU Common Reading,” <https://twitter.com/commonreading>; Texas State University, “TXST Common Reading,” <https://twitter.com/bobcatbook>; University of North Carolina Wilmington, “UNCW Common Reading,” <https://twitter.com/uncwsynergy>.

30 University of Kentucky Common Reading Experience, “ukcommonreading,” <https://instagram.com/ukcommonreading/>.

31 TexasStateUniversityCommonReading, Twitter Retweet, https://twitter.com/G_Nwegbo/status/636398477266685952.

Providence College Common Reading Program Facebook Post³²



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the Providence College Common Reading Program. The post is dated August 25, 2015, and is public. The main text of the post is a trivia question: "It's the last Trivia Tuesday: Which presidential candidate did Sandel believe was the most promising voice in bringing moral and spiritual concerns to bear on economic and civic concerns? The first new, incoming student to answer will win a \$5 Dunkin Donuts gift card." Below the text are icons for Like, Comment, and Share. A user named Sandy Belleville Reynolds has liked the post. Two comments are visible: one from Shawn Reynolds stating "In my lifetime, the most promising voice in this direction was that of Robert F. Kennedy page 262" and another from the Providence College Common Reading Program replying "Great job, Shawn! Another Dunkin Donuts gift will be coming your way!".

Providence College Common Reading Program Like Page
August 25, 2015 · 🌐

It's the last Trivia Tuesday: Which presidential candidate did Sandel believe was the most promising voice in bringing moral and spiritual concerns to bear on economic and civic concerns? The first new, incoming student to answer will win a \$5 Dunkin Donuts gift card.

Like Comment Share

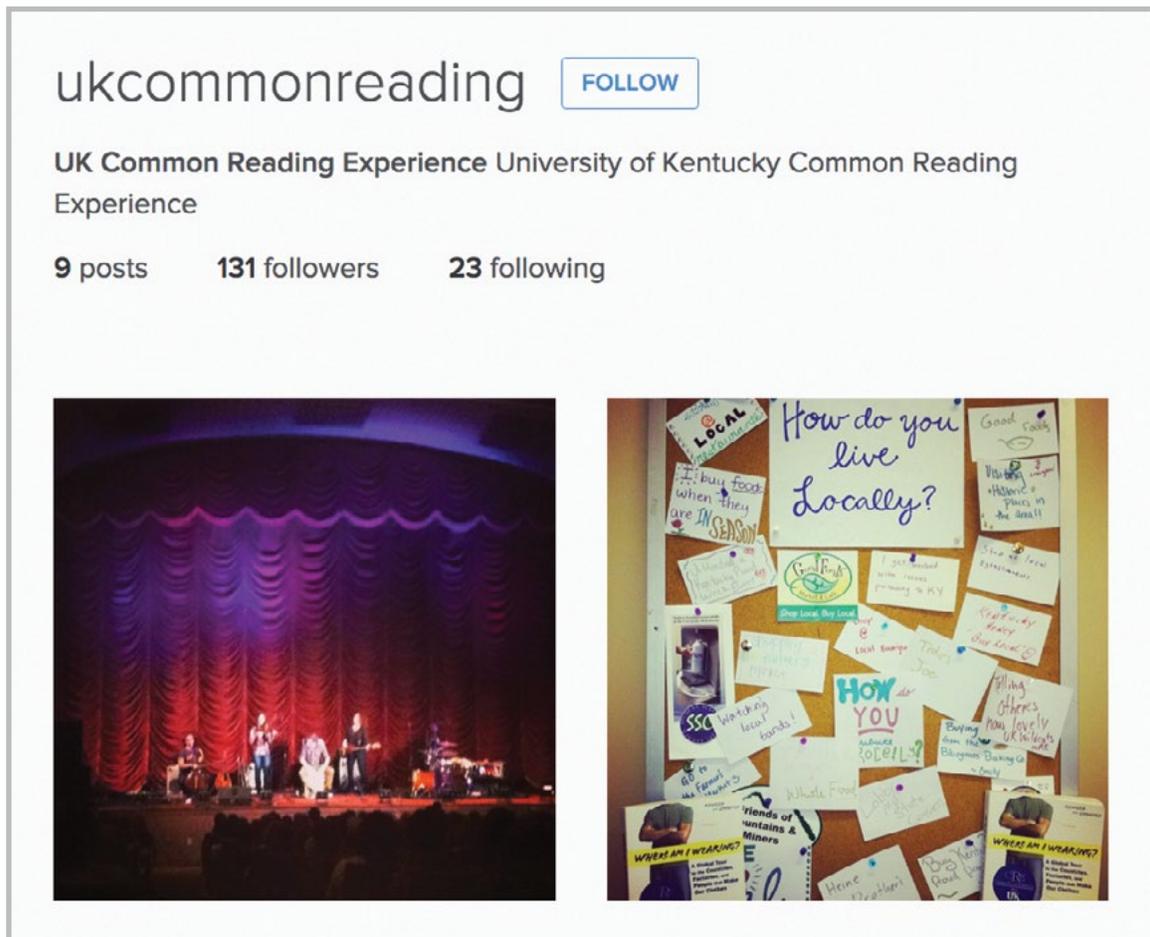
Sandy Belleville Reynolds likes this. Chronological ▾

Shawn Reynolds In my lifetime, the most promising voice in this direction was that of Robert F. Kennedy page 262
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · August 25, 2015 at 4:44pm · Edited

Providence College Common Reading Program Great job, Shawn! Another Dunkin Donuts gift will be coming your way!
Like · Reply · 👍 1 · August 25, 2015 at 5:18pm

³² Providence College Common Reading Program, Facebook Post, <https://www.facebook.com/friarbook/posts/884417214973059>.

University of Kentucky Instagram Photos³³



33 University of Kentucky Common Reading, Instagram Photos, <https://instagram.com/ukcommonreading/>.

Yearlong Themes

A significant number of books are chosen to be part of a theme selected by college administrators so as to give programmatic unity to a variety of planned events on campus. In 2014-15, 6% of colleges (23 out of 366) chose a book as part of a theme, and in 2015-16, 7% (24 out of 350) chose a book as part of a theme. In the wake of the Ferguson, Missouri unrest, chosen themes for 2015-16 shifted significantly toward topics relating to race and justice.

2014-2015

Institution Name	Year Theme
Adelphi University	The Changing Nature of War and Peace
Amarillo College	Moral Courage
Georgia Institute of Technology	Digital Lives
Hesston College	Power of Choice: Changing Cultures of Oppression
Hiram College	Age and Aging
Indiana University, Southeast	The Gift of Empathy: Seeing the World through the Eyes of Another
LaGuardia Community College	Personal Narratives and Memoirs
Moravian College	War, Peacebuilding, and the Just Society
Occidental College	Emancipation
Pace University	Finding and Pursuing Your Passion
Rockhurst University	Cura Personalis (Care for the Whole Person)
Roger Williams University	Adaptation and Change
St. Edwards University	Justice
Stanford University	Science and Scientists
State University of New York, Cortland	R/Evolution
Texas State University	Exploring Democracy's Promise: From Segregation to Integration
The College of New Jersey	Justice
The King's College (New York)	Mortality
University of Alaska, Anchorage	Information, Ideas, Ideology: Shaping Your Reality.
University of Connecticut	Race in America
University of Pennsylvania	Year of Health
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	Creativity
Webster University	Disability Rights

2015-2016

Institution Name	Year Theme
Adelphi University	Racial Justice Matters
Elms College (College of Our Lady of the Elms)	Solidarity
Georgia Institute of Technology	Serve. Learn. Sustain.
Hesston College	Be the Change: Caring that Matters
High Point University	Just Communities
Hiram College	Borders
Illinois Wesleyan University	Nation(s) Divided?
Indiana University, Southeast	Building Communities in a Global Society
Lehigh University	Information, Ideas, Ideology: Shaping Your Reality.
Occidental College	Sustainability
Pace University	War, Peacebuilding, and the Just Society
Rockhurst University	Wisdom
St. Edwards University	Justice
Stanford University	Resilience
State University of New York, Cortland	Where Are We?
Texas State University	Bridged Through Stories: Shared Heritage of the United States and Mexico, an Homage to Dr. Tomás Rivera
The College of New Jersey	College and Change
University of Alaska, Anchorage	Negotiating Identity in America
University of Connecticut	Race in America
University of Northern Iowa	And Justice For All
University of Pennsylvania	Year of Discovery
Virginia Commonwealth University	Learning That Matters: Building a Culture of Generalizable Education
Webster University	Ferguson Protests
Western Michigan University	Making History Project

Sponsor Commitments

A significant number of books are chosen by the academy's diversity offices: the Diversity Cabinet co-sponsors the common reading at the University of New Orleans, the Diversity Council co-sponsors at Corning Community College (New York), and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion co-sponsors at Bunker Hill Community College (Massachusetts).³⁴ The sustainability programs are not yet institutional sponsors of common readings, but their influence can be seen in the uptick of sustainability themes for common reading programs. In 2015, Georgia Institute of Technology chose "Serve. Learn. Sustain."—a phrasing that apparently registers the influence of *Eat Pray Love*—and Occidental College selected "Sustainability." The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) certainly is interested in having common readings with sustainability themes: the AASHE's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) evaluates institutions on criteria that include "choosing a sustainability-related book for common reading."³⁵ AASHE appears to be correct in thinking that selecting sustainability-themed common readings will influence student behavior. The University of Tennessee's student-led fossil fuel divestment campaign began in January 2013,³⁶ but surged in popularity after incoming students read the 2013-14 common reading, Bill McKibben's *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. McKibben also illustrated the utility of the author visit, as he visited the University of Tennessee's campus that fall.³⁷

Marketing the Books: The Development of the Common Reading Genre

Common reading books are now a standard market of the publishing industry, whose advertising materials delineate the genre's characteristics. Available catalogs include HarperCollins' *First-Year Student*, Knopf Doubleday's *First-Year & Common Reading*, Macmillan's *Books for the First Year Experience*, Simon & Schuster's *Freshman Year Reading*, and Yale University Press' *Freshman Reading*.³⁸ Penguin Random House's *2015 First Year & Common Reading* catalog is the most informative of these publications. On the first of its 116 pages, it informs the reader that "Many of our authors are also available to visit college campuses as part of a first-year program." Discussion guides and customized versions of the books are also available, among other services.

34 Bunker Hill Community College, "One Book Program," <http://www.bhcc.mass.edu/onebook/>; Corning Community College, "One Book One College: No Impact Man," <https://www.corning-cc.edu/one-book-one-college-no-impact-man/>; The University of New Orleans, "Common Read Program," <http://www.uno.edu/fye/common-read.aspx>.

35 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), "STARS 2.0 Technical Manual," http://www.aashe.org/files/documents/STARS/2.0/stars_2.0.2_credit_en_3.pdf.

36 UT Coalition for Responsible Investment, Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/UTCoalition/timeline>.

37 "Noted Environmentalist, Author Bill McKibben to Speak Monday," Tennessee Today, August 15, 2013, <http://tntoday.utk.edu/2013/08/15/noted-environmentalist-author-bill-mckibben-speak-monday/>.

38 HarperCollins, *First-Year Student 2015-2016*, <http://files.harpercollins.com/HarperAcademic/FirstYearStudent1516.pdf>; Knopf Doubleday, *First-Year & Common Reading*, <https://www.randomhouseacademic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Knopf-Doubleday-First-Year-and-Common-Reading-2015-2016.pdf>; Macmillan, *Books for the First Year Experience*, <http://us.macmillan.com/static/macmillanacademic/Macmillan2016FYECOMMONREADINGBOOKS.pdf>; Simon & Schuster, "Freshman Year Reading," <http://pages.simonandschuster.com/freshmanreading>; Yale University Press, *Freshman Reading*, <http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/OnlineCatalog.asp?catalog=3254795>.

The section headings categorize the market expertly: *Life Stories—Memoir; Biography & Autobiography; Fiction to Talk About; Inspiration & Guidance; History & Society; Life & College Guides; Environmental Studies & Health Sciences; and Social Action*. Penguin Random House also provides selection criteria for common reading selectors:

Think about the following questions when considering eligible books for your program:

Does the book **tell a good story**?

Is the book accessible? Will a variety of students at different reading levels and with different interests be able to engage with the book? To this point, consider page count. A good rule of thumb is the “300 Rule”: if possible, choose a book with 300 pages or less.

Does it **feature a protagonist students can relate to**? They might be the same age or be dealing with similar life situations (change, challenge, adversity).

Does the book touch on **teachable themes**, such as inclusiveness/diversity, global engagement, etc.?

Do the themes of the book **correspond to your university’s strategic mission**? Campus engagement and resources will be easier to secure if you make this relationship clear.

If having the book’s author speak is part of the plan for your reading program, it is important to **consider author availability** during the book selection process. Speaking fees and availability can vary considerably. You don’t want to go through all the work to select a book, only to find out that the author’s speaking fee will not work for your budget, or s/he is not available to speak on the dates you need!

Penguin Random House devotes a full page to advertising audiobooks for common reading; most colleges do not appear to be attuned to this option yet.³⁹ Meanwhile, the Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau is there to make sure that there are no difficulties involved in arranging the author’s campus visit:

We handle booking travel, creating an itinerary for the campus visit, and working with the author to tailor the content of the lecture for your campus. During the entire planning process, one of our 16 full-time lecture agents will be personally assigned to your event, serving as a dedicated liaison between

³⁹ Penguin Random House, *2015 First Year & Common Reading*, <https://www.randomhouseacademic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015FYERHCATALOG.pdf>, esp. pp. 2-3, 6, 8, 10-11.

you and the author and guaranteeing a successful, worry-free event.⁴⁰

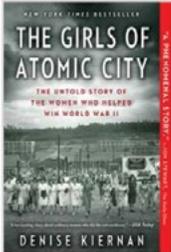
The publishers do all they can to make the selection of a common reading an effortless procedure.

The publishers do all they can to make the selection of a common reading an effortless procedure.

Advertising Copy

Publishing companies believe they know the taste of common reading selection committees. The best way to illustrate their conception of this taste is by extract. Below are the first books listed in several advertising catalogs and newsletters aimed for the common reading market—generally labeled as New, Featured, and so on. These books, and these advertising copies, provide a collective portrait of what the publishing companies judge will sell.

Simon & Schuster Common Reading Newsletter⁴¹





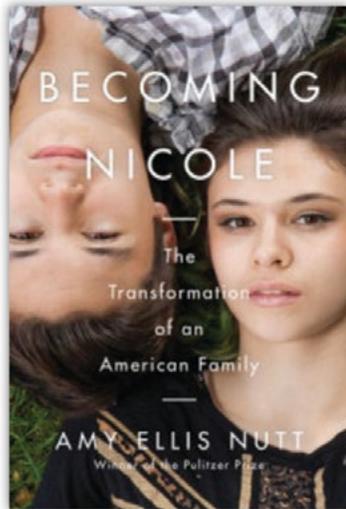
Denise Kiernan,
The Girls of Atomic City

This is the incredible true story of the top-secret World War II town of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and the young women brought there unknowingly to help build the atomic bomb.

⁴⁰ Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, “Planning First-Year Reading Programs,” September 29, 2015, <http://www.prhspeakers.com/first-year-reading-programs>.

⁴¹ Simon & Schuster Common Reading Newsletter, http://news.simonandschuster.com/pub/sf/ResponseForm?_ri_=X-oGzc2X%3DYQpgLjHJITQGtXcdzaEHRPqsXOsbs7s3ArOgFophdzezeLtzgFXll1zfFzem6YfCVXmTX%3DYQpgLjHJITQGjLEiucEu67JOXFaYEKbvkzdfnrsRfnRyIPPURhvza5D5LlZg3&_ei_=EvLjZxTJvfz5lOvDTol4mg9id4yHvviLaKi-11J2cmndWZiClilN8W1Fqt9-JO1c5Ew1KMNU.

Random House Academic Service Newsletter, “December 2015 – First-Year & Common Reading”⁴²



EXAM COPY

BUY NOW

Becoming Nicole

The Transformation of an American Family

By Amy Ellis Nutt

Random House | Hardcover | 10/20/2015
978-0-8129-9541-1 | 304 pages | \$27.00

The inspiring true story of a transgender girl, her identical twin brother, and an ordinary American family's extraordinary journey to understand, nurture, and celebrate the uniqueness in us all, from the Pulitzer Prize-winning science reporter for *The Washington Post*.

"*Becoming Nicole* is a miracle. It's the story of a family struggling with—and embracing—a transgender child. But more than that, it's about accepting one another, and ourselves, in all our messy, contradictory glory." — Jennifer Finney Boylan, co-chair of GLAAD and author of *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*

[Click here](#) to read an essay by Wayne Maines, father of Nicole Maines.

⁴² Random House Academic Service Newsletter, “December 2015 – First-Year & Common Reading,” http://view.email.randomhouse.com/?j=fe9415727563027a71&m=fe9713707566037575&ls=fe1a1078726206747d1479&l=ff64157570&s=fe4d1378736d007a7317&jb=ffca11&ju=fe5d1379756605797210&Ref=Email_B2B_2015-12-22&r=0.

HarperCollins, First-Year Student 2015-2016⁴³

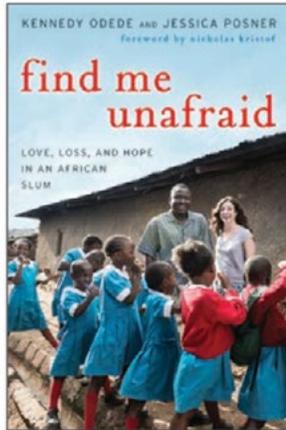
FIRST-YEAR STUDENT: BOOKS FOR COURSE ADOPTION

NEW & FEATURED

Find Me Unafraid:

Love, Loss, and Hope in an African Slum

Kennedy Odede and Jessica Posner



Find Me Unafraid tells the uncommon love story between two uncommon people whose collaboration sparked a successful movement to transform the lives of vulnerable girls and the urban poor. Jessica Posner met Kennedy Odede on her junior year abroad, when she arrived in Nairobi to work with Shining Hope for Communities, the youth empowerment group he had founded in Kibera, the notorious slum where he was raised. Though it was unheard of for a white person, Jessica decided to live in Kibera with Kennedy, and they fell in love. They went on to found Kibera's first tuition-free school for girls—a large, bright blue building, which stands as a bastion of hope in what once felt like a hopeless place. This is their story, and they are just getting started.

“Shining Hope for Communities is one of the most hopeful places I have ever visited.”
—Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*

Ecco: 352 pp.

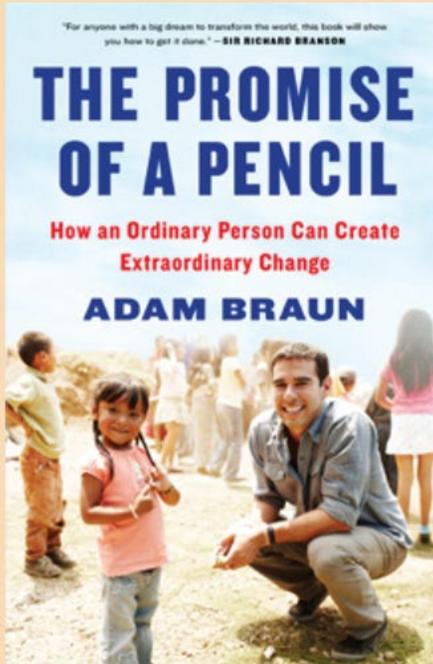
2015 • 978-0-06-229285-8 • hc • \$27.99 (\$34.99/CAN) 

Paperback available in September 2016: 978-0-06-229286-5 • pb • \$15.99 (\$19.99/CAN)

43 HarperCollins, First-Year Student 2015-2016, <http://files.harpercollins.com/HarperAcademic/FirstYearStudent1516.pdf>.

Simon & Schuster, “Freshman Year Reading”⁴⁴

This month's feature



The Promise of a Pencil **How an Ordinary Person Can Create** **Extraordinary Change**

By Adam Braun

9781476730839

Trade Paper

\$16.00

288 Pages

Scribner

**Theme: Global Perspective, Leadership,
Inspirational**

The riveting *New York Times* bestseller about a young man who built more than 250 schools around the world—and the steps anyone can take to lead a successful and significant life.

Adam Braun began working summers at hedge funds when he was just sixteen years old, sprinting down the path to a successful Wall Street career. But while traveling he met a young boy begging on the streets of India, who after being asked what he wanted most in the world, simply answered, “A pencil.” This small request led to a staggering series of events that took Braun backpacking through dozens of countries before eventually leaving a prestigious job to found Pencils of Promise, the organization he started with just \$25 that has since built more than 300 schools around the world.

The Promise of a Pencil chronicles Braun’s journey to find his calling, as each chapter explains one clear step that every person can take to turn their biggest ambitions into reality. If you feel restless and ready for transition, if you are seeking direction and purpose, this critically acclaimed bestseller is for you. Driven by inspiring stories and shareable insights, this is the book that will give you the tools to make your own life a story worth telling.

**All proceeds from this book will support Pencils of Promise.*

⁴⁴ Simon & Schuster, “Freshman Year Reading,” <http://pages.simonandschuster.com/freshmanreading>.

Authors

The authors of common reading books are entrepreneurs, although their market is the selection committees rather than the captive audience of student readers themselves. *The Other Wes Moore* is by far the most frequently selected book of the last two years—17 selections in 2014-15 and another 16 selections in 2015-16—and Wes Moore has worked hard to make that possible. The American Program Bureau represents him in his career as a public speaker, and informs us that he can speak on either of his two books (*The Other Wes Moore*, 2010; and *The Work*, 2014), and on topics such as “Transformational Leadership,” “The Transformative Power of Education,” and “Responsible Corporate Citizenship & the Real-Life Ramifications.” He has testimonials from numerous colleges, including the University of Utah, Davenport University (Michigan), and Kean University (New Jersey).⁴⁵ His own website lists an impressively large number of speaking events, and makes sure to include a “Buy Now” button at the top of every page.⁴⁶

The authors of common reading books are entrepreneurs, although their market is the selection committees rather than the captive audience of student readers themselves.

The Other Wes Moore: The Home Page⁴⁷



Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy* is the breakout book of 2015-16, assigned 14 times in the first summer following its publication, and in less than one year it has become the second most popular common reading of the last two years. Stevenson also has a webpage that lists his extensive series of public appearances and provides contact information for the person at Penguin Random House who will

⁴⁵ American Program Bureau, “Wes Moore,” <http://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/wes-moore>.

⁴⁶ The Other Wes Moore, “Home,” <http://theotherwesmoore.com/>; The Other Wes Moore, “Press & Appearances,” <http://theotherwesmoore.com/press-appearances/>.

⁴⁷ The Other Wes Moore, “Home,” <http://theotherwesmoore.com/>.

tell the interested party what he needs to do, and pay, “[t]o host Bryan for a speaking engagement.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere on the internet you can find the Bryan Stevenson page of the Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, with its own list of speaking topics and testimonials.⁴⁹ Dave Eggers’ *The Circle* ties with Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* as the third most frequently selected work—*The Circle* was selected 7 times in 2014-15 and another 6 times in 2015-16—and he too is represented by American Program Bureau. Eggers’ page also lists his preferred topics, but he has no testimonials.⁵⁰ All American Speakers informs the reader that Eggers’ Booking Fee Range is \$30,001 - \$50,000; we hope there is a campus discount.⁵¹

Dave Eggers Doesn’t Come Cheap⁵²



Dave Eggers Biography

Pulitzer Prize finalist author, philanthropist and founder of 826 Valencia, a non-profit tutoring lab network

Categories: [Authors](#), [Entertainment](#), [Speakers by Industry](#)

Booking Fee Range: ~~\$30,001~~ - ~~\$50,000~~ ⓘ

PURPOSES OF COMMON READING PROGRAMS

Our previous edition of *Beach Books* noted the prominence of *community*, *academic expectations*, *conversation*, *social activism*, and *thoughtfulness* among the stated goals of common reading programs.⁵³ The prominence of these goals has not changed in the last two years, and they remain the cornerstones of common reading programs. The most important thing to mention about these objectives is that they largely subsume an academic experience to extra-academic aims. These keywords telegraph the content of those goals: all save *academic expectations* are the euphemistic jargon of the left. Ohio State University wishes to foster “challenging conversations with peers”; in 2015, it chose Will Allen’s *The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities* (2012), which promotes urban farming so as to fight the social injustice

48 Bryan Stevenson Just Mercy, “Events,” <http://bryanstevenson.com/events/>; Bryan Stevenson Just Mercy, “Contact,” <http://bryanstevenson.com/contact/>.

49 Penguin Random House Speakers Bureau, “Bryan Stevenson,” <http://www.prhspeakers.com/speaker/bryan-stevenson>.

50 American Program Bureau, “Dave Eggers,” <http://www.apbspeakers.com/speaker/dave-eggers>.

51 All American Speakers, “Dave Eggers Biography,” <http://www.allamericanspeakers.com/speakers/Dave-Eggers/383333>.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Ashley Thorne, Marilee Turscak, and Peter Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014. What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* (National Association of Scholars, 2014; <https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS-BeachBooks.pdf>), pp. 21-22.

of America’s system of making and providing food.⁵⁴ Salem State University (Massachusetts) desires “thoughtful discussion of ideas”; in 2015 it chose Joshua Davis’ soft-sell for amnestying illegal immigrants, *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream* (2014).⁵⁵ Common reading programs state their goals with words that make a leftward skew in the book selections just about a sure thing.

Consider, for example, the mission statement of the University of La Verne’s (California) “One Book, One University” program:

The *One Book, One University* program promotes reading and the discussion of diverse perspectives as a common intellectual experience, teaches writing as a way of learning through reflection, and encourages civic communication while actively engaged in the world. In particular, the One Book, One University Program integrates La Verne’s four core values into student learning:

- A values orientation that encourages students to reflect upon personal, professional, and societal values;
- A respect for diverse communities and the biodiversity of the planet;
- Active lifelong learning;
- Engaged community service.⁵⁶

La Verne’s common reading choice in 2015 was Scott Russell Sanders’ *A Conservationist Manifesto*. Sanders’ book may be quite good of its sort—but it is an environmentalist manifesto rather than a work intended to promote open-ended inquiry into considerations of environmental policy. The book choice leads naturally from La Verne’s mission statement, but the mission statement does not align well with free academic inquiry.

These basic programmatic goals have been elaborated by a constellation of words and phrases that recur in the goals of common reading programs. This constellation largely partakes of progressive jargon as well: *active citizenship, awareness, biodiversity, civic engagement, community service, critical thinking, diversity, engaged, equity, ethics, inclusion, injustice, intercultural understanding, local talent, meaningful, multiple disciplinary application, perspectives, powerful, readability, relevant, responsibility, sensitivity, shared experience, social justice, social responsibility, timely, and tolerance*. (We do not believe that critical thinking, ethics, or tolerance are monopolies of any political party, and we strongly believe that they should be part of a college education. What we note

⁵⁴ Ohio State University First Year Experience, “Buckeye Book Community, Frequently Asked Questions,” https://fye.osu.edu/bbc_faqs.html; Ohio State University First Year Experience, “Buckeye Book Community, Selections from Previous Years,” <https://fye.osu.edu/bbcPastbooks.html>.

⁵⁵ Salem State University, “First Year Reading Experience (FYRE),” <http://www.salemstate.edu/fyre/>.

⁵⁶ University of La Verne, “One Book, One University,” <http://sites.laverne.edu/learning-communities/one-book-one-university/>.

and critique here is the use of this hijacked vocabulary to forward progressive political projects.) These programmatic keywords generally reinforce the leftward skew in the content of book selections. In 2015, Webster University (Missouri) provided what may be the clearest example of this process. The Webster selection committee chose their reading

with the intention of raising awareness and encouraging discussions that will enhance our students' critical thinking skills and intercultural competence, helping us all to be more engaged global citizens. By exploring these readings, we hope to promote a society in which citizens challenge injustice and value diversity and inclusion.

Common reading programs state their goals with words that make a leftward skew in the book selections just about a sure thing.

The book they chose was the anthology of *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*.⁵⁷

These programmatic keywords reinforce other skews. The calls for *civic engagement*, *community service*, *relevance*, and *responsibility* filter out books concerned with the disinterested life of the mind—that delight in mental speculation upon what the world beyond the campus considers unimportant. The demand for a reading that is about something in the world leads to endless memoirs and works of popular nonfiction concerned with life beyond the college walls. Even a memoir such as Liz Murray's *Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard*, whose point is the value of going to college, is entirely about the struggle to get to Harvard, and not the character of her life once she has arrived.

The desire for *multiple disciplinary application*⁵⁸ also produces no end of popular fiction and nonfiction on scientific and medical subjects—among others, *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout*; *What Should We Be Worried About?: Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night*; and *The Remedy: Robert Koch, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Quest to Cure Tuberculosis*. Students who read such works only learn that the happy marriage of the arts and sciences produces middlebrow prose that explains that science is really quite important nowadays.

The only keyword that has positive effects on book selection is *local talent*. The desire to choose works by authors associated with the college or the area, whether as professors, alumni, or residents, provides more individuality than do the repeated selections of *The Other Wes Moore*, *Just Mercy*, and *Enrique's Journey*. At its best, the desire for local talent results in engaging selections such as Owensboro Community and Technical College's (Kentucky) choice in 2015 of Maurice Manning's

⁵⁷ Webster University, "Common Reading Program Launched in First Year Seminars," August 24, 2015, <http://news.webster.edu/academics/2015/common-reading-first-year-experience.html>.

⁵⁸ We did not invent this awkward phrase: "The selection of this book was based on criteria that included readability, relevance, multiple disciplinary application, author availability, and civic engagement." The College at Brockport, State University of New York, "Summer Reading Program," <http://www.brockport.edu/srp/>.

book of poems meditating upon Daniel Boone, *A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c.* More frequently, it results in books that hit all the usual themes, but with local variations. In 2015 Florida International University (FIU) chose alumnus Richard Blanco's memoir, *The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood*. Blanco's work deals with his childhood growing up as a gay, Cuban, immigrant poet, and is apparently affirming as Blanco overcomes the attendant adversities. It is a cliché of the common reading genre—but it is a cliché read by no students in the country save those of FIU, and one that would at least root them in the college as an actual institution and community.

Timely Propaganda

Common reading choices continue to reflect the issues of the day. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* became the most popular common reading several years ago as a byproduct in the educational arena of progressive agitation in favor of the Affordable Care Act.⁵⁹ The selections in the last two years continue to reflect the latest headlines. The sharp rise of selections on African American themes in 2015-16 coincides with the Ferguson protests and the ensuing Black Lives Matter campaign; and we doubt that, absent Ferguson, Augustana College, Hampshire College (Massachusetts), and Norfolk State University (Virginia) all would have decided in 2015 to assign James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. The campaign to amnesty illegal immigrants likewise has produced a sharp uptick of books on themes of immigration, particularly illegal immigration. The popularity of Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* (6 selections in 2014-15 and 5 in 2015-16) evidently derives from this campaign; so too do selections such as Cristina Henríquez's *The Book of Unknown Americans* and Joshua Davis' *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream*. The rise of the transgender movement, with its insistence on contingent sexuality, probably inspired a faint echo in Bluffton University's (Ohio) choice of Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It*, a 1991 novel on a woman who falls in love with a cyborg.

Common reading selections are standardized enough that we believe we can predict what will be popular in the next few years. We wager that Ta-Nehesi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (published July 2015) will be one of the five most-frequently selected common readings for 2016-17, and will continue in the top ten for 2017-18. Hilary Clinton's presidential campaign will probably inspire a significant uptick of readings on a feminist theme (none of which will be Carly Fiorina's

Common reading selections are standardized enough that we believe we can predict what will be popular in the next few years.

59 Stanley Kurtz, "Obama's Secret Weapon: Henrietta Lacks," *National Review Online*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/356139/obamas-secret-weapon-henrietta-lacks-stanley-kurtz>; Thorne, Turscak, and Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014*, pp. 22-23.

Tough Choices), and the Bataclan massacre in Paris will give a resurgence of popularity to Eboo Patel's *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. The transgender movement's role in fighting the most prominent current sexual identity campaign will make Katie Rain Hill's *Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition* the common reading at several colleges next year, and Bruce Jenner's forthcoming memoir will be a popular common reading selection when it is published.

Two further points are worth noting:

- Homosexuality is treated rarely; abortion not at all. We infer that these remain less popular parts of the progressive agenda.
- A corollary is that the environment and racial diversity are not entirely popular in and of themselves, but rather that they are a lowest-common-denominator of progressive advocacy—those subject matters that command widest support precisely because they are considered most innocuous.

Do Common Reading Programs Work?

Common reading programs largely aspire toward unmeasurable goals. In our previous edition, we discussed University of Mississippi Professor of Psychology Tom Carskadon's "Carskadon Index," which measures student enjoyment of a book—but "enjoyment" has no necessary correlation with "long-term influence" or "educational value."⁶⁰ One might be able to test for whether reading a summer book helped prepare incoming students for college, by assigning the book to only half of an incoming class, but apparently no college has tried this experiment yet. Common readings' other goals don't lend themselves toward measurement—we have no caliper for community building, conversation, social activism, or thoughtfulness. Even if the aim is crude propaganda, there is no way to tell if it actually works.⁶¹ One reason to integrate common readings into actual courses, and to shift the selection criteria of common readings toward the purely academic, is to make it possible to test their efficacy.

Common reading programs largely aspire toward unmeasurable goals.

A very rough judgment that common reading programs are not working comes from those colleges that discontinue them. Purdue University gained some notoriety in 2014 by shutting down its common reading program without warning, and President Mitch Daniels explicitly noted that "no

⁶⁰ Thorne, Turscak, and Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014*, pp. 22-23.

⁶¹ With the exception noted above of the increased popularity of the fossil fuel divestment campaign at the University of Tennessee, which does seem to have been directly linked to assigning Bill McKibben's *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* as the 2013-14 common reading.

one produced any evidence it was having great success.”⁶² Purdue is not alone: a great many more programs have also shut down in the last few years, including Drexel University (Pennsylvania), Elizabethtown College (Pennsylvania), Hawaii Pacific University, Middlebury College (Vermont), and Murray State University (Kentucky). Most schools on our list keep their programs, and each year some new colleges adopt common reading programs—but the steady trickle of discontinuations silently registers many institutional judgments that they do no particular good.

Barriers to Choosing Better Books

As we mentioned in our last edition, common readings generally are chosen by committees with few English professors on them, and tasked to select a book for its broad appeal as much as for its quality.

The common readings that emerge from these committees usually are homogenous and bland. The desire to appeal to incoming students who have rarely if ever read an adult book on their own also leads selection committees to choose low-grade “accessible” works that are presumed to appeal to “book virgins” who will flee actual college-level reading. Since common reading programs are generally either voluntary or mandatory without an enforcement mechanism, such “book virgins” have to be wooed with simple, unchallenging works.⁶³ This was our conclusion two years ago: the lay of the land is still much the same.

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Controversies

There have been fewer controversies about common readings in the last two years than there were in former years. Duke University ignited a small brouhaha in 2015 by choosing Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*. While members of the committee expected that Bechdel’s “treatment of sexual identity”—her discussion of her father’s closeted homosexuality and her own lesbianism—would be stimulatingly controversial,⁶⁴ the actual hullabaloo arose because freshman Brian Grasso declined to read the book on the grounds that it contained pornographic imagery. Grasso’s refusal then aroused a chorus of sophisticates to tell him in peremptory tones that he would know it was not

⁶² Allie Grasgreen “Common Reading Canned,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 26, 2014, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/03/26/after-abrupt-cut-purdue-faculty-call-restoration-common-reading-program>.

⁶³ Thorne, Turscak, and Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014*, pp. 27-30.

⁶⁴ “Fun Home’ Picked for Class of 2019 Summer Reading,” *DukeToday*, April 1, 2015, <https://today.duke.edu/2015/04/summerreading2019>.

pornography but art, if only he would look.⁶⁵ This controversy is notable because it illustrates that the imperative to avoid offense failed to kick in at Duke—the Duke selection committee presumably did not even imagine that sexually explicit imagery *per se* could offend. Other categories of offensiveness probably would trump artistry: we do not think the Duke selection committee would select a graphic adaptation of a memoir about sexual assault, no matter how artistically the scene was depicted. Be that as it may; on the whole, the imperatives toward blandly inspiring readings have tended to reduce controversy.

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Common reading selection committees' predilection toward memoirs and biographies continues to expose students to true stories that are not entirely true. In 2014-15, Collin College (Texas), Hesston College (Kansas), and the University of Alaska Anchorage all selected Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (2012) as their common reading. It has since emerged that the subject of Harden's book, Shin Dong-hyuk, although subject to tortures in much the same manner as described, somewhat massaged the truth.⁶⁶ Even if Dong-hyuk's account is broadly accurate in its depiction of his life within the North Korean camp system, the episode highlights the continuing risk associated with assigning memoirs as common readings—that the selection committee will make the community experience be an exercise in the dangers of taking a plausible narrative as the truth.

Trigger Warnings

The University of Kentucky has pioneered a new trend in common readings: a trigger warning. Its 2015-16 selection is *Picking Cotton* by Jennifer Thompson-Cannino, Ronald Cotton, and Erin Torneo, and the University warns the reader that the content might be upsetting:

Please note that the following book carries a trigger warning: The content deals with an account of a sexual assault and may be triggering to some people.⁶⁷

There is something odd about assigning a common reading and then attaching a trigger warning to it; it indicates a lack of coordination at the University of Kentucky. We suspect this tension at Kentucky and elsewhere will be resolved by confining common readings to ever blander content.

65 Brian Grasso, "I'm a Duke Freshman. Here's Why I Refused to Read 'Fun Home,'" *The Washington Post*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/25/im-a-duke-freshman-heres-why-i-refused-to-read-fun-home/>; Jacob Brogan, "No, Duke Freshman, Fun Home Is Not Pornographic," *Slate*, August 26, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/08/26/the_duke_freshman_who_refuses_to_read_fun_home_is_wrong_to_call_it_pornographic.html; Emily Shire, "Listen Up, Duke Freshmen: 'Fun Home' Is Not 'Porn,'" *The Daily Beast*, August 24, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/24/listen-up-duke-freshmen-fun-home-is-not-porn.html>.

66 Anna Fifield, "Prominent N. Korean defector Shin Dong-hyuk Admits Parts of Story Are Inaccurate," *The Washington Post*, January 17, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/prominent-n-korean-defector-shin-dong-hyuk-admits-parts-of-story-are-inaccurate/2015/01/17/fc69278c-9dd5-11e4-bcfb-059ec7a93dde_story.html.

67 University of Kentucky Common Reading Experience, "Introduction to the Common Reading Experience," <http://www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/NewStudentPrograms/CRE4/aboutcre.php#7>.

METHODS

What We Included

Our study of common readings during the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 covers 377 assignments at 366 colleges and universities for the first year and 361 assignments at 350 colleges and universities for the second year. Our data includes common readings for every college and university we could find—including readings for honor colleges, but not for sub-units of the university such as departments of education. We included books assigned as summer readings, whether to freshmen or to all students. Generally these books are outside the regular curriculum, but a few of them are tied to first-year courses—for example, to Luther College’s Paideia Program first-year course. Although in the past we did not include books tied to readings assigned in a core curriculum, this year we have included Columbia University’s assignment of an English translation of the first six books of Homer’s *The Iliad* to its incoming undergraduate class, since it is specifically designated as a summer reading.⁶⁸ Columbia’s decision does make *The Iliad* the common reading for its incoming class, and this wonderful effect should not be removed from our charts simply because it is not formally labeled as a Common Reading. We hope that Columbia’s choice will prove a model to its peers.

We do not include two universities that have provided a reading list of interesting books for their students to select among, rather than choosing just one book for their students to read. Harvard University’s College Admissions Reading List includes 87 choices, many of them the usual sorts of common reading selections (Susan Cain’s *Quiet*, Dave Eggers’ *Zeitoun*), but also including Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, Henry James’ *Portrait of a Lady*, and Wislawa Szymborska’s *View With a Grain of Sand*.⁶⁹ The University of California Berkeley’s Summer Sampler is far less grueling—only 15 choices—and it ranges from a banal choice such as Edward Humes’ *Garbology* to the far more interesting options of *Hrafinkel’s Saga* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.⁷⁰ We do not include Harvard and UC Berkeley in our databases, but their decision to have samplers that include good works rather than one mediocre reading is a choice other colleges should consider imitating, even though the suggested readings in their samplers are purely optional.

A few institutions assigned multiple books; hence the difference between the number of assignments and the number of institutions. In 2014, Lehigh University (Pennsylvania), Owensboro Community and Technical College, Rockhurst University (Missouri), Stanford University, State University of New York, Cortland (New York), University of Alaska Anchorage, and University of Northern Iowa all assigned 2 to 3 books; in 2015, the University of Northern Iowa departed from the list and The King’s College (New York) joined it: Lehigh University, Owensboro Community and Technical

68 Columbia University, “Summer Reading,” <https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/summerreading>.

69 Harvard University, “College Admissions Reading List,” <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~sica/reading.htm>.

70 University of California Berkeley, “Berkeley Summer Reading,” <http://reading.berkeley.edu/index.html>.

College, Rockhurst University, Stanford University, State University of New York, Cortland, The King's College, and University of Alaska Anchorage all assigned 2 to 4 books. We have included all these assignments, and we also commend these institutions for using multiple books to create more intensive, more complex, and more interesting common readings.

How We Categorized the Books

Each book is categorized by **Author, Title, Publication Date, Genre, Publisher, First Subject Category, Second Subject Category, First Theme, and Second Theme.**

We now include up to two subject categories and two themes for each book, as a way to be more precise in our description of the common readings. Inevitably such categorization lacks nuance: we categorize Richard Blanco's *The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood* under Homosexuality and Artistic Life, when Immigration would be a perfectly plausible substitute for either of those two categories. It also flattens works: we put Shakespeare's *Hamlet* under Family Dysfunction/Separation, which is a true but not a full definition. We take our subject categories to be meaningful, but we draw conclusions from them (as should the reader) with a grain of salt.

Subject Category defines what the book is explicitly about; **Theme** notes aspects of the book that we take to have been of interest to the selection committees or are of interest to us. For example, selection committees place great emphasis on *diversity* as a euphemism for mentioning various non-white ethnic groups at home or abroad; we have therefore identified a number of ethnic, geographic, and religious subject matters as themes. Selection committees do not explicitly state their interest in whether a work is in the graphic medium, has a film or TV adaptation,⁷¹ or has an association with NPR, but we think these are significant facts that ought to be noted, and so we have included them as well.

Each common reading program is categorized by Institution Name, Type of Institution, Top Ranking, Program Name, College Theme, Intended Audience, Mandatory or Optional, and Author Visit.

We classify each college and university by Type—public, private sectarian, private nonsectarian, and community colleges. We also see whether they are ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* among either the top 100 National Universities or the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges.⁷² We have attempted to be comprehensive, although we have undoubtedly missed a few programs. We would be grateful for the names of common reading programs we have missed, so we may include them in our next report.

71 Committees seem to have a predilection for books turned into movies or TV shows, apparently on the grounds that students will be more interested in reading something that they've already seen. Unfortunately, such choices can enable slacking: students can watch the adaptation instead of reading the book, and hope they can slide through. We can't quite recommend that common reading committees avoid all books that have been adapted into a visual medium—that would rule out most of Shakespeare!—but so far as modern works are concerned, it probably wouldn't hurt to give a preference to books where the only work-around is Cliff Notes.

72 "U.S. News College Ranking Trends 2015," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/local/us-news-college-ranking-trends-2015/1819/>.

Here are the different elements we measure in this study:

Book	Institution	Programs
Title	Name	Author speaking
Author	Type	Mandatory vs. optional
Publication year	Whether ranked in top 100 <i>U.S. News & World Report</i>	First-year vs. community
Subject category		
Genre		
Theme		

Our **subject categories** largely overlap those of previous years, but with some alterations. We have merged some categories—Adventure and Sports, Pursuit of Happiness and Self-Help—so as to keep our total number of subject categories to a limit of 30 in each year.

THE BOOKS

Our analysis of the books assigned as common reading in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 tracks which books were most widely-assigned, as well as their publication dates, genres, main subjects, and additional themes.

Most Widely-Assigned Books

MOST WIDELY ASSIGNED BOOKS

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Book	Number of Times Assigned	Type	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Other Wes Moore</i>	17	<i>The Other Wes Moore</i>	16
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i>	8	<i>Just Mercy</i>	14
<i>Ready Player One</i>	7	<i>The Circle</i>	6
<i>The Circle</i>	7	<i>March: Book One</i> or <i>March: Book One</i> and <i>March: Book Two</i>	6
<i>Enrique's Journey</i>	6	<i>Enrique's Journey</i>	5
<i>I Am Malala</i>	6	<i>Garbology</i>	5
<i>Orange Is the New Black</i>	6	<i>Outcasts United</i>	5
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i>	6	<i>The Good Food Revolution</i>	5
		<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i>	5
		<i>Whistling Vivaldi</i>	5

All these most-widely assigned books have been published since 2006. All are memoirs and nonfiction, save for Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011) and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), which are novels on the joy of gaming and on the danger modern technology poses to privacy.

In 2014-15, 3 other books were assigned 5 times, 4 books were assigned 4 times, 12 books were assigned 3 times, and 33 books were assigned 2 times. In 2015-16, 4 books were assigned 4 times, 16 books were assigned 3 times, and 18 books were assigned 2 times. These numbers suggest that the homogeneity of the common reading genre is more a result of the sort of book selected than the result of every college picking the same few books.

The Other Wes Moore

Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (2010) is by far the most frequently assigned book of the last two years, with 17 assignments in 2014-15 and 16 in 2015-16. This memoir of the contrasting fates of two Wes Moores—both born African American and poor in Baltimore, both flirting with criminality in their youth, but one redeemed to become a military officer and a Rhodes Scholar and the other imprisoned for life for felony murder—rings the changes of the common reading genre. A recently published memoir of African American experience, emphasizing poverty, family dysfunction, and crime, with a nod to the positive value of African tradition, *The Other Wes Moore* is an uplifting account of triumph over adverse circumstance that lets us know that there but for fortune go you and go I, and that it takes a community to raise a man properly. Also, the author is available for campus visits.

The homogeneity of the common reading genre is more a result of the sort of book selected than the result of every college picking the same few books.

The Other Wes Moore is popular in proportion to its soft edges: the anodyne message is that we should care and do something about the problems of African Americans in inner cities, but the policy recommended is left vague—although it acts as background music for the de-incarceration movement. The contrast between the two Wes Moores is presented as one between the different amounts of support from friends and family that the two Wes Moores received growing up, but the memoirist can also be read as a latter-day Horatio Alger, a traditionally American hero who picks himself up from poverty by pluck and perseverance. Our memoirist has succeeded as warrior, scholar, and public servant: he is an impeccably admirable paratrooper, Rhodes Scholar, and Foreign Service Officer. Blending themes of communalism and individual striving, presenting a well-rounded hero whom the reader cannot help but admire, informing the reader of an American problem that calls for action, *The Other Wes Moore* understandably has great appeal to common reading selection committees.

The Other Wes Moore's popularity preceded the Baltimore protests of 2015, but they doubtless have boosted the profile of the book's relevance. Both *The Other Wes Moore* and its sequel *The Work* should have a strong commercial future for the next several years.

Publication Dates

Any categorization by publication year is inescapably arbitrary in the ranges it chooses. We think it worth noting how few books are older than the students. We divide by decade going back to 1990—

the large majority of college students have been born since that date.⁷³ We then provide two further categories, one for the rest of the twentieth century, and one for those vanishingly few selections published even earlier.

The majority of common reading selections have been published since 2010, and the vast majority since 1990. In 2014-15, only 20 out of 377 assignments (5%) were published before 1990; in 2015-16, only 22 out of 361 assignments (6%) were published before 1990.

PUBLICATION DATES

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Publication Year	Number of Assignments	Publication Year	Number of Assignments
Pre-1900	7	Pre-1900	5
1900-1989	13	1900-1989	17
1990-1999	14	1990-1999	24
2000-2009	123	2000-2009	96
2010-2014	219	2010-2015	218
Multiple	1	Multiple	0
Total	377	Total	361

In 2014-15, the median publication date was 2010; the largest number of books (65) were published in 2013, followed by 58 in 2010, 56 in 2012, and 31 apiece from 2009 and 2011. A further 9 had been published in 2014 itself.

In 2015-16, the median publication date was 2010; the largest number of books (62) were published in 2014, followed by 42 apiece in 2010 and 2013, and 36 in 2012. Another 18 had been published in full or in part in 2015. (One assignment included works from 2011 and 2015, and four others the first two parts of *March*, published in 2013 and 2015.)

⁷³ In fall 2012, students 25 and older were approximately 15% of degree-seeking undergraduates. Devon Haynie, "10 Colleges With the Most Older Students," *U. S. News & World Report*, January 7, 2014, <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/the-short-list-college/articles/2014/01/07/10-colleges-with-the-most-students-25-and-over>.

The entire list of common reading selections published from antiquity through 1990 appears below:

2014-2015

Title	Author	Publication Date	Assigning Institution
<i>Iliad</i>	Homer	800 BC?	Columbia University
<i>Hamlet</i>	Shakespeare, William	1623	Colorado College
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Shakespeare, William	1623	Southern Utah University
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Shelley, Mary	1818	Utah State University
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i>	Douglass, Frederick	1845	Le Moyne College (New York)
<i>Twelve Years a Slave</i>	Northup, Solomon	1853	Hampshire College
<i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i>	Tolstoy, Leo	1884	The King's College (New York)
<i>Brave New World</i>	Huxley, Aldous	1932	Wartburg College (Iowa)
<i>The Power and the Glory</i>	Greene, Graham	1940	Belmont Abbey College (North Carolina)
<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>	Frankl, Viktor E.	1946	Rockhurst University (Missouri)
<i>1984</i>	Orwell, George	1949	Luther College (Iowa)
<i>The Illustrated Man</i>	Bradbury, Ray	1951	Eastfield College (Texas)
<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Bradbury, Ray	1953	Troy University (Alabama)
<i>Inherit the Wind</i>	Lawrence, Jacob and Robert E. Lee	1955	State University of New York, Cortland
<i>Sonny's Blues</i>	Baldwin, James	1957	Saint Michael's College (Vermont)
<i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i>	Moody, Anne	1968	Texas State University
<i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i>	Moody, Anne	1968	Minnesota State University, Mankato
<i>I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson</i>	Robinson, Jackie and Alfred Duckett	1972	University of California, Los Angeles
<i>Kindred</i>	Butler, Octavia	1979	University of South Carolina, Upstate
<i>Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965</i>	Williams, Juan	1987	Washburn University (Kansas)

2015-2016

Title	Author	Publication Date	Assigning Institution
<i>Iliad</i>	Homer	800 BC?	Columbia University
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Shakespeare, William	1623	Southern Utah University
<i>The Life and Diary of David Brainerd</i>	Edwards, Jonathan, ed.	1749	The King's College (New York)
<i>The Fisherman and His Wife</i>	Grimm Brothers, ed.	1812	The King's College (New York)
<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i>	Douglass, Frederick	1845	Le Moyne College (New York)
<i>A Farewell to Arms</i>	Hemingway, Ernest	1929	University of Kansas
<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>	Hammett, Dashiell	1929	Eastfield College (Texas)
<i>The Big Sea</i>	Hughes, Langston	1940	University of Pennsylvania
<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>	Frankl, Viktor E.	1946	Rockhurst University (Missouri)
<i>A Sand County Almanac</i>	Aldo, Leopold	1949	State University of New York, Cortland
<i>Invisible Man</i>	Ellison, Ralph	1952	New York University (College of Arts and Science)
<i>The Long Loneliness</i>	Dorothy Day	1952	Carroll College (Montana)
<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Bradbury, Ray	1953	University of Houston, Victoria (Texas)
<i>The Fire Next Time</i>	Baldwin, James	1962	Augustana College (Illinois)
<i>The Fire Next Time</i>	Baldwin, James	1962	Hampshire College
<i>The Fire Next Time</i>	Baldwin, James	1962	Norfolk State University (Virginia)
<i>Why We Can't Wait</i>	King, Martin Luther, Jr.	1964	Elon University (North Carolina)
<i>Slaughterhouse Five</i>	Vonnegut, Kurt	1969	Cornell University
<i>And the Earth Did Not Devour Him</i>	Rivera, Tomás	1971	Texas State University
<i>House on Mango Street</i>	Cisneros, Sandra	1984	State University of New York, Fredonia
<i>Maus I</i>	Spiegelman, Art	1986	Western Michigan University
<i>This Boy's Life</i>	Wolff, Tobias	1989	Stanford University

Genres

We classify common reading by genre: article, biography, epic poem, fairy tale, memoir, newspaper, nonfiction, novel, play, poetry, and short stories. Biography, memoirs and nonfiction together made up 268 out of 377 assignments (71%) in 2014-15, and 247 out of 361 assignments (74%) in 2015-16.

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Genre	Number of Assignments	Genre	Number of Assignments
Article	0	Article	1
Biography	27	Biography	20
Epic Poem	1	Epic Poem	1
Fairy Tale	0	Fairy Tale	1
Memoir	111	Memoir	117
Newspaper	1	Newspaper	1
Nonfiction	130	Nonfiction	130
Novel	91	Novel	75
Play	6	Play	5
Poetry	1	Poetry	5
Short Stories	9	Short Stories	5
Total	377	Total	361

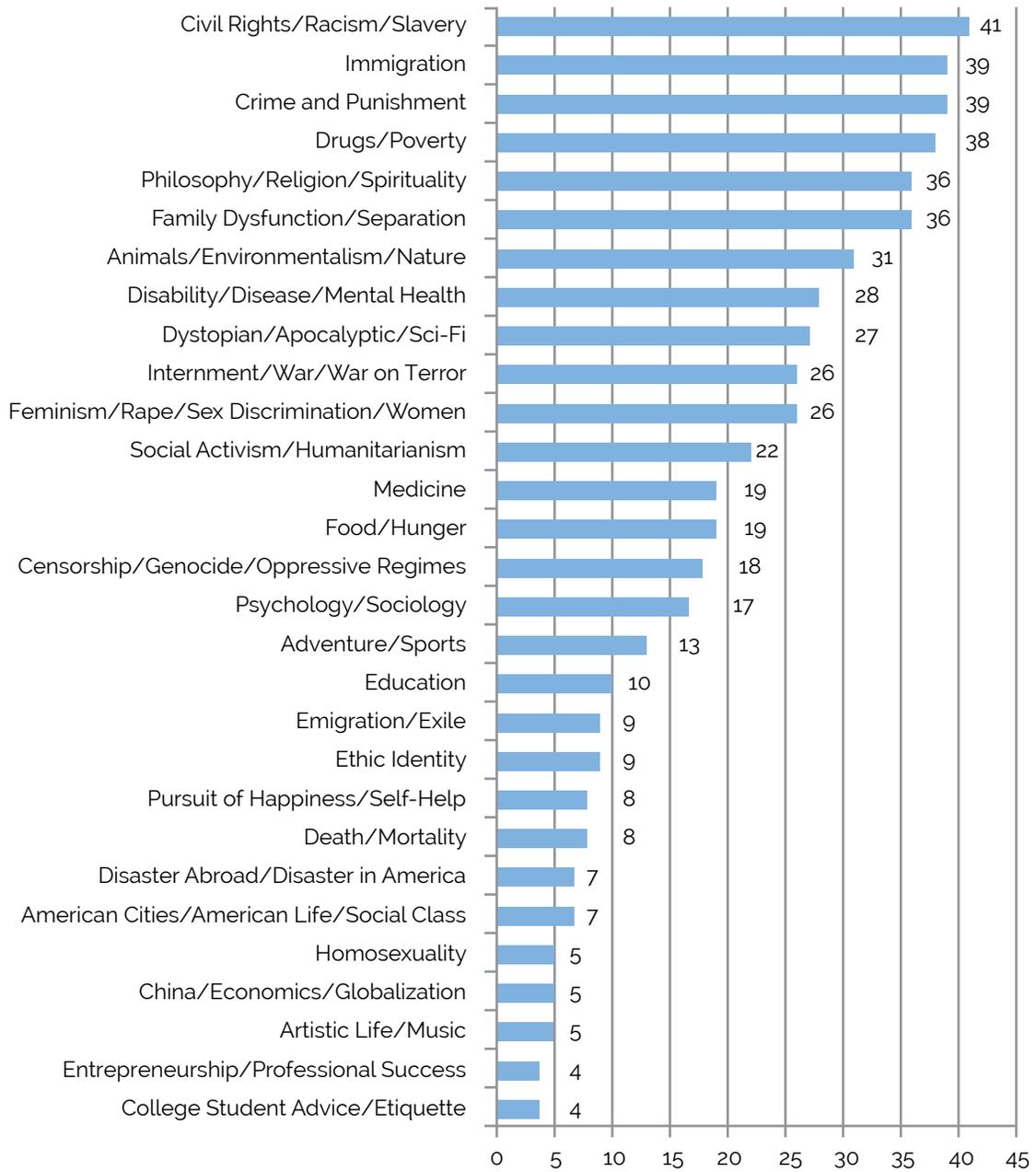
Subject Categories

We divided the common readings into 30 subject categories. Since each book could be assigned up to two categories, the total number of subject categories is greater than the number of assignments. In 2014-15, there were 597 assigned subject categories; in 2015-16, there were 580 assigned subject categories. The most popular subject categories in 2014-15 were Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery (41), Immigration (39), Crime and Punishment (39), Drugs/Poverty (38), Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality (36), and Animals/Environmentalism/Nature (31); in 2015-16, the most popular subject categories were Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery (64), Crime and Punishment (53), Family Dysfunction/Separation (40), Animals/Environmentalism/Nature (36) Drugs/Poverty (35), Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality (34), and Immigration (32).

2014-2015

Subject Category	Number of Assignments
Adventure/Sports	13
American Cities/American Life/Social Class	7
Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	31
Artistic Life/Music	5
Censorship/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	18
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	41
College Student Advice/Etiquette	4
Crime and Punishment	39
Death/Mortality	8
Disability/Disease/Mental Health	28
Disaster Abroad/Disaster in America	7
Drugs/Poverty	38
Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi	27
China/Economics/Globalization	5
Education	10
Entrepreneurship/Professional Success	4
Ethnic Identity	9
Emigration/Exile	9
Family Dysfunction/Separation	36
Feminism/Rape/Sex Discrimination/Women	26
Food/Hunger	19
Homosexuality	5
Immigration	39
Internment/War/War on Terror	26
Innovation/Media/Science/Technology	41
Medicine	19
Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality	36
Psychology/Sociology	17
Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	8
Social Activism/Humanitarianism	22

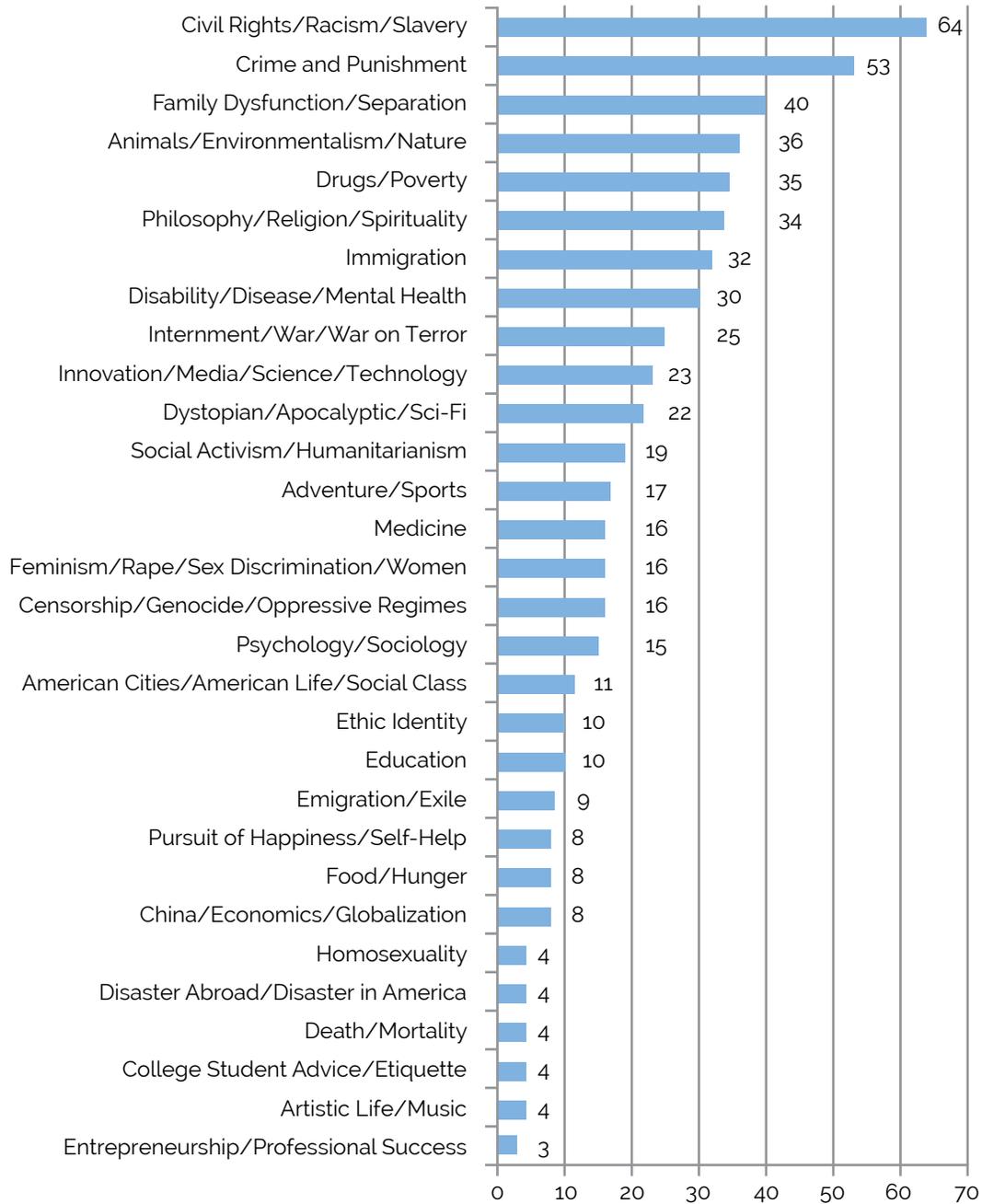
2014-2015 ASSIGNMENTS BY SUBJECT CATEGORY



2015-2016

Subject Category	Number of Assignments
Adventure/Sports	17
American Cities/American Life/Social Class	11
Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	36
Artistic Life/Music	4
Censorship/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	16
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	64
College Student Advice/Etiquette	4
Crime and Punishment	53
Death/Mortality	4
Disability/Disease/Mental Health	30
Disaster Abroad/Disaster in America	4
Drugs/Poverty	35
Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi	22
China/Economics/Globalization	8
Education	10
Entrepreneurship/Professional Success	3
Ethnic Identity	10
Exile/Emigration	9
Family Dysfunction/Separation	40
Feminism/Rape/Sex Discrimination/Women	16
Food/Hunger	8
Homosexuality	4
Immigration	32
Innovation/Media/Science/Technology	23
Internment/War/War on Terror	25
Medicine	16
Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality	34
Psychology/Sociology	15
Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	8
Social Activism/Humanitarianism	19

2015-2016 ASSIGNMENTS BY SUBJECT CATEGORY



Themes

We have also recorded 21 further themes prominent among these assignments. Most of these register the persisting interest in diversity, defined by non-white ethnicity at home and abroad, but the remainder register other aspects of common readings worth noting. Many common readings discuss books of which a **film or television version** exists, an increasing number are **graphic novels** or memoirs, many have a **protagonist under 18** or are simply **young-adult novels**, and a significant number have an association with **National Public Radio (NPR)**. We have also included **Hurricane Katrina**, the **Iraq War**, and the **Vietnam War** as themes, since they seem to be popular subjects among common reading selections. In brief, the themes register the common reading genre's obsession with race, its infantilization of its students, its middlebrow taste, and its progressive politics. In 2014-15, the most popular themes were African American (61), Film/Television version exists (27), Protagonist Under 18 (25), African (23), and Latin American (23). In 2015-16, the most popular themes were African American (99), Protagonist Under 18 (36), Latin American (30), Film/Television version exists (15), African (13), and Muslim-American (13).

In brief, the themes register the common reading genre's obsession with race, its infantilization of its students, its middlebrow taste, and its progressive politics.

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Themes	Number of Assignments	Themes	Number of Assignments
African	23	African	13
African American	61	African American	99
African Diaspora	1	African Diaspora	2
Asian	2	Asian	0
Asian-American	10	Asian-American	7
East Asian	7	East Asian	3
European	9	European	10
Film/Television version exists	27	Film/Television version exists	15
Graphic	11	Graphic	12
Hurricane Katrina	5	Hurricane Katrina	4
Iraq War	11	Iraq War	6
Islamic World	18	Islamic World	11
Latin American	23	Latin American	30
Muslim-American	10	Muslim-American	13
Native American	14	Native American	4
NPR	14	NPR	9
Oceanian	0	Oceanian	1
Protagonist Under 18	25	Protagonist Under 18	36
South Asian	9	South Asian	1
Southeast Asian	2	Southeast Asian	2
Vietnam War	2	Vietnam War	1
Young Adult Novel	5	Young Adult Novel	1
Total	289	Total	280

What's Different These Last Two Years

The last two years have seen a progressive shift toward the already popular subject categories of Racism/Civil Rights/Slavery and Crime and Punishment, and toward African American themes; this shift has been exemplified and substantially driven by the popularity of Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore* and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*. African American themes were 35% of total themes in 2015-16; this is a high number compared to 2014-15's figure of 21%, and we are wary of claiming that this shift will be more than a temporary spike. The focus on protagonists under 18 is also rising sharply, driven by books such as Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey* and Joshua Davis' *Spare Parts*. The shift toward protagonists under 18 reflects the enduring desire to seek out "relatable" books, and therefore has the makings of a more long-lasting trend.

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Honorable Mentions

Every college that assigned a work written before 1990 is to be commended for assigning books written before their students were born. So too is every college that assigned more than one book. We also wish to commend several colleges for book choices that are especially good. These include:

Bates College (Maine), for its choice in 2015-16 of Danielle Allen's close reading of the Declaration of Independence in *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (2014).

- Baylor University (Texas), for its 2015-16 choice of Alan Jacobs' *The Pleasures of Reading in the Age of Distraction* (2011). While the format threatens to devolve into the literary equivalent of the paeans for slow eating and microcraft beer, and we think Jacobs gives too much weight to the failings of Great Books lovers, this is a worthy argument by a humane scholar.
- The College of Wooster (Ohio), for its choice in 2014-15 of Yu Hua's *China in Ten Words* (2011); and Concordia College, for its choice in 2015-16 of Evan Osnos' *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* (2014). The College of Wooster and Concordia College are alone in considering that their students might benefit from a basic knowledge of a country that is the heir to an enormously rich civilization, home to one-sixth of humanity, and America's most powerful rival in the world.
- Hofstra University, for its choice in 2014-15 of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (2010). A serious work of philosophy and cultural exploration, the book has the added benefit of educating students about the nature and importance of honor.

- Owensboro Community and Technical College, for its choice in 2015-16 of Maurice Manning's historically aware and locally rooted poetry collection *A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c.* (2004).
- Pennsylvania State University, University Park, and Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington, for their choice in 2015-16 of Russell Gold's *The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World* (2014). Gold's book considers fracking not only in terms of its environmental effects but also as a technological and economic triumph by modern Americans.
- Queens University of Charlotte (North Carolina), for its choice in 2014-15 of Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son* (2012). This novel is more than just an exposé of the horrors of North Korean life; for literary artistry and psychological insight, it deserved its Pulitzer.

We particularly wish to commend Utah Valley University for giving institutional support to students who wish to push themselves beyond the level of the standard common reading. Utah Valley's Classical Book Selection is worth reading in its entirety:

In addition to the primary freshman reading book selection, President Holland selects a classical selection for those students who desire to engage with a more complex text at a higher intellectual level. The classical selection for 2015-2016 is *Major Barbara*, by George Bernard Shaw. Far more than just an ambiguous discussion of religion and ethics, this 3-act play is a sparkling example of its Shaw's [sic] unique gift for presenting social theories in an engaging format.

The classical selection is also incorporated each year into UVU's Honors Program activities and presented in a theatrical production by UVU's theater department.⁷⁴

Utah Valley's initiative seems an excellent model for colleges who wish to stretch themselves beyond the standard common reading, but are not yet willing to commit to having the entire freshman class read a classic work.

THE COLLEGES

We are interested in the sorts of colleges that assign common readings. We therefore also have categorized the colleges that assign common readings by type and by whether they are top-ranked in *U.S. News & World Report*.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Utah Valley University, "Freshman Reading Program," <http://www.uvu.edu/firstyear/freshmanreading/>.

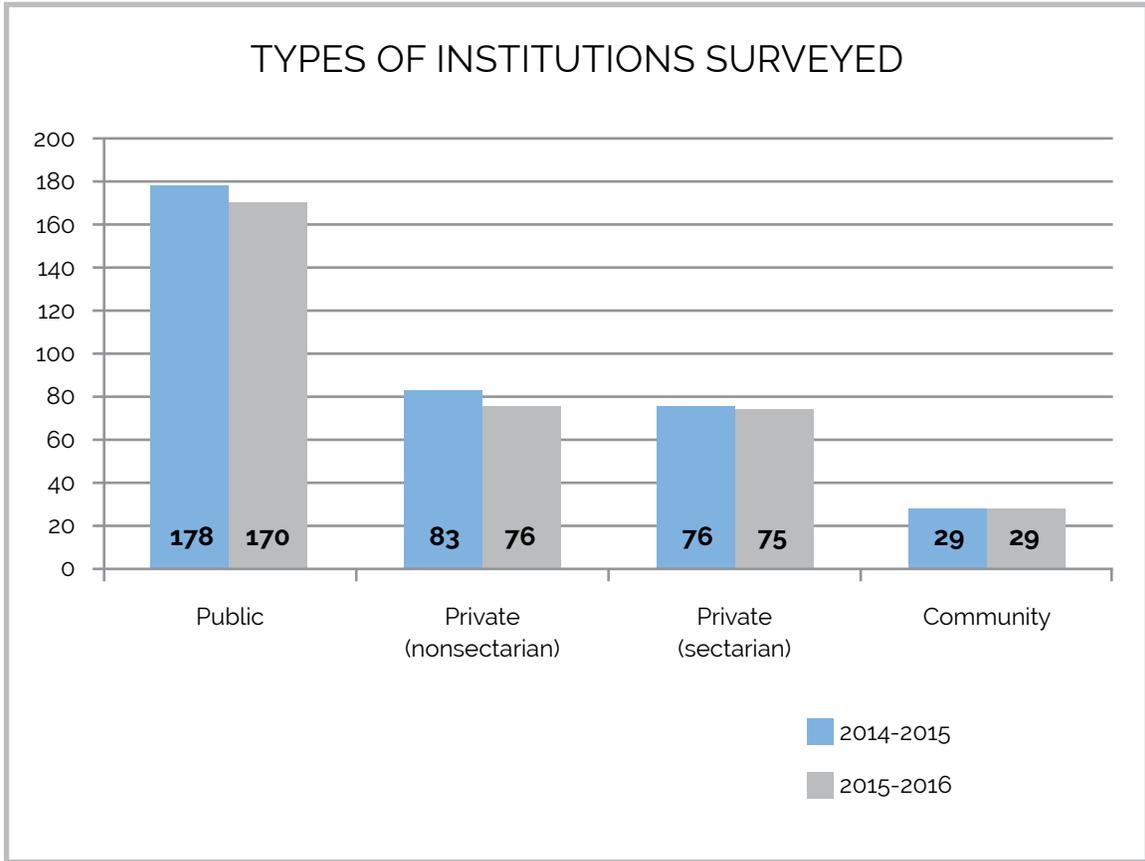
⁷⁵ "U.S. News College Ranking Trends 2015," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/local/us-news-college-ranking-trends-2015/1819/>.

Type

We classify each institution as one of four types: public university, private sectarian (religious), private nonsectarian, and community college. We have not separated out women’s colleges or historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in this report, as there are too few represented in our database for us to draw meaningful conclusions.

INSTITUTION TYPE

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Type	Number	Type	Number
Public	178	Public	170
Private (nonsectarian)	83	Private (nonsectarian)	76
Private (sectarian)	76	Private (sectarian)	75
Community	29	Community	29
Total	366	Total	350



Rankings

A substantial number of these colleges are on *U.S. News and World Report's* list of the top 100 National Universities and top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges. Our list includes more than one half of the top 100 National Universities in both 2014-15 and 2015-16, and almost a quarter of the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges in those two years.

RANKING CATEGORY

2014-2015		2015-2016	
Type	Number	Type	Number
National Universities	51	National Universities	52
National Liberal Arts Colleges	24	National Liberal Arts Colleges	24
Unranked	291	Unranked	274
Total	366	Total	350

Readings at Elite Institutions

Common readings selected at the top-most colleges (by *U.S. News and World Report* ranking) are broadly similar to those at other colleges. Excluding Harvard, which offers the option of browsing among 87 readings to its incoming freshman, and Columbia, which always gives *The Iliad* as its summer reading, below are the summer readings assigned at the nation's top universities and liberal arts colleges.

Top Universities

Princeton University

2014-15: Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*

2015-16: Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*

Stanford University

2014-15:

Richard A. Muller, *Physics for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines*

Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*

Lauren Redniss, *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout*

2015-16:

Walter Isaacson, *The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*

Lalita Tademy, *Cane River*

Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*



Duke University

2014-15: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

2015-16: Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

University of Pennsylvania

2014-15: Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*

2015-16: Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*

Johns Hopkins University

2014-15: Tal Ben-Shahar, *Happier*

2015-16: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*

Top Liberal Arts Colleges

Williams College

2014-15: Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

2015-16: Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother*

Amherst College

2014-15: Claude Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*

2015-16: Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*

Pomona College

2014-15: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

2015-16: Sonia Sotomayor, *My Beloved World*

Davidson College

2014-15: Wes Moore, *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*

2015-16: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

Vassar College

2014-15: Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

2015-16: Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*

ANALYSIS: THE STATUS QUO

Colleges overwhelmingly assign books for students who are presumed to regard reading as a strange and difficult activity, to which they must be introduced with careful thought and great caution.⁷⁶ Since these colleges usually do not dare to require the students to read the books they assign, or make the requirement hollow by failing to test for it, they instead have to allure the students with the sweetener of easy, exciting reading. The colleges therefore tend to assign no-fuss digestibles—memoirs and nonfiction, young adult books, science fiction, and comic books, books with young protagonists and books where the students might already have seen the movie, and affirming books that make the students feel good about themselves and what they can do with their college education.

Mission statements for common reading programs further limit the selected texts. Common reading programs that require *an author available for a campus visit* have to select a recent work, and probably from an author associated with a book publisher specializing in the commercial genre of common reading books. The desire to create *community* limits the common readings to the most anodyne of topics, excludes any intellectual topic interesting enough to be controversial, and has a marked tendency to redefine *community* around a shared catechism of belief rather than around a shared love of inquiry into truth. The emphasis on fostering non-academic values such as *community*, *civic engagement*, and *social justice* leads to selecting books that emphasize collective effort for non-academic pursuits rather than for the solitary disengagement that is a fundamental component and delight of the life of the mind. College, this sort of common reading tells the incoming student, is a place to indulge a jolly, earnest desire to change the world for the better—and nothing more.

The common reading committees have distinct tastes that tend to narrow the possibilities for texts yet further. Partly their tastes are traditionally American—as early as 1920, H. L. Mencken criticized American fiction for its unending optimism, for its cheery desire to inspire as it tells of adversity overcome and hope rewarded, for mistrusting the life of the mind, and for denying that sorrow and sin are inescapable aspects of the human condition.⁷⁷ Mencken denounced these themes in the then-dominant modes of saccharine religiosity and Horatio-Alger-enterprise; but, *mutatis mutandis*, common readings now celebrate an equally saccharine secularized humanitarianism and Horatio-Alger-social activism. (The common reading selections of stylized denunciations by latter-day muckrakers of the evils of the world are part of this genre: outrage about suffering will lead to action, and ultimately a solution.) Independent of their political leanings, common readings are overwhelmingly the sort of God-never-shuts-a-door-but-He-opens-a-window material that would have given that old curmudgeon Mencken apoplexy. Common readings partake almost universally of this American tradition of perpetual optimism.

⁷⁶ This section of Analysis as a whole significantly recapitulates the Analysis of Thorne, Turscak, and Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014*, pp. 49-52.

⁷⁷ H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan, “Repetition Generale,” *Smart Set* 61, 1 (1920), pp. 53-54.

The common reading committees' obsession with suffering protagonists rather than on achievement is only partly traditional. The interest in affliction is distinguished and ancient—it traces back not least to the martyrologies that underlie Jewish sacred history and the Gospel account of Christ's Passion. Yet the endless emphasis on suffering rather than on achievement is a peculiar tic of the modern genre. A gruesomely large number of memoirs assigned as common readings display protagonists with missing limbs, stories of war are more likely to tell of wounds than of valor, and mental or physical dysfunction recurs as a subject again and again. These accounts are assigned with no sense that the interest in other people's suffering might be prurient, that the desire to have a memoirist display his wounds is obscene, or that there is dignity in privacy at least as much as in an exhibition of the inward self.⁷⁸ Moreover, while suffering is often the predicate of achievement, the emphasis on suffering is remarkably large.

College reading committees overwhelmingly select books that align with the liberal and progressive worldview that pervade academia. Race is always a predicate of identity, and presents a problem to be solved. The environment is always a Pauline in peril, and in need of saving. Illegal immigrants contribute so much to society, and would contribute so much more if

College reading committees overwhelmingly select books that align with the liberal and progressive pieties that pervade academia.

only they were legalized. A book associated with the NPR or the NEA Big Read must be good. The urge for consensus and soft edges makes most common readings cautiously liberal; a significant minority are daringly progressive; books that challenge the liberal worldview in any fashion are few and far between. Beyond ideology, simple political partisanship is the most plausible explanation for curious absences from the common reading genre. For a notable example, there are still no common readings about the Deepwater Horizon (BP) Oil Spill (2010), while books on the effects of Hurricane Katrina (2005) continue to be selected; the absence of the one and the continuing popularity of the other does not seem explicable for any reason save that the spill occurred during a Democratic presidency and the hurricane during a Republican one. The presence of Sonia Sotomayor's *My Beloved World* (2013) and the absence of Clarence Thomas' *My Grandfather's Son* (2007), both the memoirs of members of racial minorities who triumphed over adversity to reach the summit of success among the judiciary, likewise is most simply explained as a register of political partisanship. Such skews may or may not be deliberate exclusion in any particular case: while some of the liberal skew must be a matter of virtue signaling, at other times it apparently just doesn't occur to the committees that other books exist.

College reading committees also generally choose English-language books written by Americans. This applies both to classics and to modern works. Even where the subject matter is foreign, the

⁷⁸ Cf. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Act II, Scene 3.

writers generally write in English, and are part of the English-language culture. The reliance on English-language works renders these selections parochial.

Finally, college reading committees are predictable in these preferences just summarized. The predictability is best measured by the existence of the common reading genre, with a marketing language and a range of books designed to appeal to the committees. Publishers know college reading committees so well that they can sell books to them, by the thousands, along with well-packaged author visits. The common reading committees are supposed to choose a book that makes students think as individuals—but they think in so standardized a manner themselves in choosing books that they have reduced themselves to the consumers of an equally standardized product in the marketplace.

The common reading genre, in sum, is *parochial, contemporary, commercial, optimistic, juvenile, obsessed with suffering, and progressive*. Not every selected text embraces all these categories—a few escape all of them—but these adjectives define the characteristic common reading. It is a gateway to becoming a reader of middlebrow best sellers, but not an introduction to the life of the mind.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

We have both old and new recommendations in this year's edition of *Beach Books*. The old recommendations we will repeat briefly; the new ones we will expand upon, for emphasis and for fuller explanation. We recognize the difficulty of acting on all these recommendations immediately; nevertheless, we present them both as ideals and as programs suitable for careful, long-term implementation.

The 10 recommendations we repeat without elaboration are:

1. Seek diversity—the intellectual kind.
2. Seek books that are neither too long nor too short.
3. Seek works that are not contemptuous of humanity or dyed in profound cynicism.
4. In fiction, seek works that exemplify elegance of language and a degree of complexity, along with moral seriousness.
5. In nonfiction, seek works that exemplify important ideas lucidly argued and writers who take their rhetorical task seriously.

6. Pay deliberate attention to important books from earlier eras.
7. Consider that the book you choose will be more than a reading for the students. It will also be a public representation of the college's academic standards, values, and reputation.
8. All members of the committee should read the books they weigh as finalists for selection. Reviews and blurbs are not enough.
9. Consult with others who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books.
10. Consult outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars' list (See Appendix IV: Recommended Books for College Common Reading) or Modern Library's list of 100 Best Novels and 100 Best Nonfiction.⁷⁹

The 11 recommendations we provide at greater length are:

Altered Mission Statements

Colleges should excise all non-academic goals from the mission statements of their common reading committees. So long as the committees are directed to seek out books that build *community*, are *civically engaged*, further *social justice*, and the like, they will seek out mediocre books that have nothing to do with the education of the individual character, and nothing to do with college as such. Exclusively academic mission statements will also make it practicable to assess the efficiency of common reading programs.

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Smaller Committees, Faculty Only

The larger the committee, the more likely the book will be boring. The more administrators on the committee, the less concerned the committee will be with the life of the mind. Reduce the size of committees to no more than 5 members, composed exclusively of faculty who are widely read and committed to reading.

Don't Choose a Book for Its Subject Matter

Readings chosen for their subject matter are characteristically, if not inevitably, dull, often poorly written, and seldom distinguished.

⁷⁹ Modern Library, "Top 100," <http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/>.

Adult Books

If the message in a book can be conveyed to a child, don't assign it to adults. If the book is easy enough to be read in high school, don't use it in a college.

Better Readings

Colleges should choose better books.⁸⁰ By *better*, we mean *complex prose capable of conveying complex thought, more beautiful prose, and more challenging subject matter*. This should not be taken to extremes—some books are too long or too obscure. Yet better works can be chosen. If you want a short, hopeful book, why not Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, where tragedy and death lead by the providence of God to good in the world and the reform of people's souls?—and with far greater literary style than is on tap in most common readings. If students must read short narratives about the cruelty and hypocrisy of the world, why not read *Lazarillo de Tormes*?—which as a side-note tells you something of the wonderfully alien world of sixteenth-century Spain. There is no end of books students can read, which share very little in common save that they would serve far better to draw out students—to educate them—than does a typical book of the common reading genre.

Multiple Readings

Assign students more than one book—perhaps a classic and a modern book that focus on a similar topic. If students read books with conflicting conclusions, it will make it more natural for students to disagree with one another and with their professors.

Local Readings

Choose readings having to do with the institution or the locale of a college. It would be better not to choose books by professors or administrators, as that allows the appearance of conflict of interest—books by alumni would be better, and so would notable books by deceased administrators and faculty—but better a book by one of a college's professors than a generic choice pushed by a publisher.

Translated Readings

The common reading genre is remarkably parochial. There are hardly any works of literature in translation, and the modern memoirs and nonfiction are also almost exclusively written in English. English-language culture is probably the largest and most encompassing in the world—but even its multitudes have limits. Seek out books translated from another language; it will increase the intellectual variety.

⁸⁰ Portions of the Recommendations section as a whole significantly recapitulate the Recommendations of Thorne, Turseck, and Wood, *Beach Books: 2013-2014*, pp. 53-54.

Cultivate Impartiality in Judging Offensiveness

Offensiveness should not be a criterion, but doubtless will be. If it must remain so, reading committees should make a greater effort to consider what is offensive to people unlike themselves. To ban a racial epithet but not a pornographic image is one-sided censorship. We do not want reading committees to play the role of Comstock, but if they must, they should play the role impartially.

Integrated Readings

To some extent, students will rise to the demand of a difficult work. As every army knows, the very difficulty of basic training does a great deal to build *esprit de corps*—community built by challenge successfully met. Practically speaking, however, college students have been coddled for so long that they have lost a great deal of their old willingness to seek out learning of their own free will. Colleges therefore should integrate summer readings far more tightly with courses, common or otherwise, so as to yoke common reading with some sort of test that affects a student's grade.⁸¹ We must take the colleges at their word: if their students are incapable of reading challenging books of their own volition, then they must be required to do so. This, surely, is a bare minimum of a college's duty to its students.

Better Students

More broadly, the current state of common reading programs suggests that colleges should reconsider their admissions standards. Something is wrong with a college where the average student will not read a challenging book for pleasure. Fewer

Colleges should select a student body minimally amenable to education.

But Better is not a principle to be pursued too far—we cannot entirely empty the colleges—but, if they do not want to confirm doubts about their academic quality, colleges should select a student body minimally amenable to education.

⁸¹ Neither rewards nor a testing regime have been panaceas in American endeavors to promote the reading of good books. Cf. Tom Sawyer's acquisition of a Bible in Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Ch. 4. We recommend the incentive of testing as a tool, but we take a liberal education to be aimed ultimately at inspiring students to read good books of their own free will.

ALTERNATIVES

We urge common reading committees to broaden their horizons when selecting books—and we wish to provide some concrete alternatives. In this section, we provide some lengthier thoughts on different ways that common readings can be altered, and include a number of specific book recommendations. These alternatives and recommendations are hardly a canon, but rather suggestions intended to inspire counter-suggestions on the parts of common reading committee members—to get common reading selectors to think outside the box and broaden the too-narrow confines of the common reading genre.

The Public Domain Alternative

The traditional canon—defined at the lowest common denominator as *books we still think are pretty good a century after they were written*—continues to be a proxy for a minimum level of quality by dint of having survived time’s winnowing. There are enough works in the canon to provide variety—a book for every season and occasion. Precisely because such books are *not* contemporary, because their subject matter is either the ahistorical or the alien past, they serve the excellent purpose of drawing students out of the limitations of the here-and-now, to learn about worlds which are new, alien, and wonderful. Each such book also serves double duty, since it both teaches students about the subject of the book and introduces them to the continuing conversation of Western Civilization. Not every book in the canon is appropriate for a common reading—Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* would be heavy going—but within reasonable limits, a canonical text is a better choice than a modern one.

The choice of a canonical text also offers an easy way to avoid the common reading genre’s entanglement with commerce. Commerce is a lovely thing between freely consenting adults—but the point of the common reading genre, as indeed of all books for the academic market, is the direction of captive readers and captive dollars toward the cash register of one or the other publisher. Even if common reading committees avoid the publishers’ mind-deadening marketing lures, there remains something unseemly in acting as a procurer for some publisher—or indeed, in deciding which starving writer most deserves the payday of selection for all a freshman class to read. Colleges should avoid this morass altogether—and they can do so by choosing a classical text.

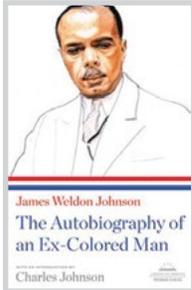
Happily, American copyright law provides a reasonable *terminus ad quem*. All works from 1923 onward are subject to copyright; therefore, colleges should restrict their choices to works published before 1923. They will save on the expenses of author tours, save on the expense of paying for books in copyright, and avoid the ethical quandary associated with choosing among interested publishers. Dover Thrift Editions will become rich, and free (if poorly transcribed) ebooks of the classics will become popular—but this is a small moral

All works from 1923 onward are subject to copyright; therefore, colleges should restrict their choices to works published before 1923.

hazard compared to that associated with choosing among publishers for their facility in selecting uplifting memoirs.

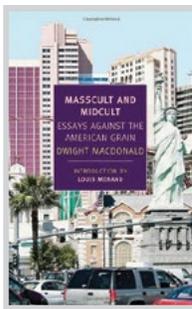
The Modern Classics Alternative

If they must choose books within copyright, colleges should consider modern classics—defined loosely as good books written in the twentieth century before the students were born, and more tightly as good books written before the members of the selection committee were born. Such modern classics can be more *accessible* and *relatable* to students, while preserving an aspiration



toward literary quality. They will also serve to sever common reading selection from utter commercialism, contemporaneity, and mediocrity.

The Modern Classics Option may also be referred to as the “throw money at the Library of America and New York Review Books option.” These—and more generally those publishers who specialize in reprinting fine modern works—have an excellent backlist that would serve common reading committees well. Go to the Library of America paperback collections, and you will find James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, John Muir’s *My First Summer in the Sierra and Selected Essays*, and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. Go to New York Review Books Classics and you will find Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim*, Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *A Time To Keep Silence*, and Dwight Macdonald’s *Masscult and Midcult*. We do not wish to argue the merits of these particular works; the point is rather that the backlist of modern classics offers a wealth of books to students, almost any of which would offer more of an education than yet another inspiring memoir written in 2014.



The Mature Alternative

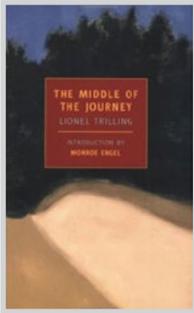
Common readings ought to include at least some works that contain a serious confrontation with death, failure, and despair that cannot be explained away as a social condition to be righted or reduced to the potted gloom of *some days you can’t make a nickel*. “My poor fool is hang’d!” says Lear, and dies with no solace for the knowledge that his daughter is dead⁸²—but what common reading lets us know that we can die without comfort? Likewise absent from common readings is knowledge of evil as something more powerful and more dangerous than a mere label to be applied to our political opponents of the day, and as a reality not to be dispelled by the bright assurance that we have

Students should know something of the sorrow and wickedness that no amount of communal uplift will eradicate from our souls.

⁸² William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act V, Scene 3.

simply misunderstood the matter and a devil is nothing but a sick angel. Students should know something of the sorrow and wickedness that no amount of communal uplift will eradicate from our souls. They need not dwell upon them morbidly, but the shadow of such griefs and sins should make at least a small appearance in the bright, sunlit uplands of common readings.

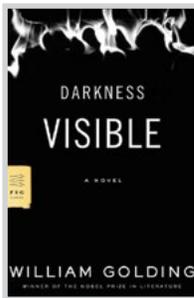
Mature Suggestions



The Middle of the Journey

Lionel Trilling (1947)

Trilling's novel turns into flesh and blood the debate between radicalism (here Communist), liberalism, and conservatism. Aside from Trilling's brilliant *roman à clef* description of Whittaker Chambers, the novel's virtue lies in its forceful argument that progressive politics are founded upon an evasion of acknowledging sorrow and death.



Darkness Visible

William Golding (1979)

Golding's novel tells of a Blitz-burned child who grows into a man who sees angels, and of two daughters of the 1960s who in their different ways become possessed by evil. Golding poses the question of whether the novel's protagonists are mad or sane—and whether *mad* and *sane* are insufficient ways of talking about faith, goodness, and evil.

The No-Memoirs Alternative

Contemporary memoirs are now popular in common readings on the grounds that a memoir is a particularly accessible genre, and so will help draw incoming students to the habit of reading. Students can immerse themselves in the point of view of someone familiar, and not worry about either the difficulties of cultural and temporal distance, or subtleties such as the distinction between an author and a narrator. If they can think of a book as being a nice guy sort of like themselves just talking to them, then the memoir can be the bridge to a deeper appreciation of books. This rationale lies behind the prevalence of the first-person point of view in common readings.

A common criticism of such books is that the choice of memoirs acts as implicit progressive propaganda—that it is not coincidental that, for example, Carroll College (Montana) will assign Dorothy Day's *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist* rather than Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's *The Story of a Soul*. The lengthy list of left-leaning memoirs in the common reading genre lends credence to that charge, but that is not the deepest problem with memoirs as a genre. The problem with memoirs is that unless they are selected with great care, they tend to shut down thought rather than to open it up.

Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home*, regularly (and sometimes controversially) assigned as a common reading these last few years, provides a good illustration of the memoir problem. *Fun Home*, now a successful Broadway production, is in many ways a reasonable choice for a common reading—by the standards of the genre, a good one. Bechdel and her family were serious readers, and her memoir is filled with references to serious literature—F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. None of these allusions is casual: books mattered to the Bechdels, and the books they read shaped their thoughts and lives. The relationship of the Bechdel family's love of books to their cold familial dysfunctionality might actually dissuade a reader from literary involvement; nevertheless, a common reading selection committee must be delighted with the hope that students reading *Fun Home* will be inspired to actually read the books Bechdel mentions, and more generally be inspired to take any books they read seriously, as something that might affect their character. This ambition might be better achieved by actually assigning Fitzgerald or Camus or Wilde—but we understand the logic behind using Bechdel as a gateway to the Greats.

Neither is *Fun Home* simply propaganda. Bechdel doesn't present homosexuals or homosexuality as latter-day numens, whose goodness is inherent in their group classification. Her father, gay and closeted, is presented as a deeply unpleasant man: cold and raging, a distant father, and a pederast who escaped imprisonment by the grace of the local judge's wink and nod. Beyond this, Bechdel shows us how during a family visit to Christopher Street her pubescent (at most) brother had to flee a propositioning chickenhawk on the street—and that this was so much to be expected that her father was terrified to learn that her brother had gone out on the street by himself. Perhaps this is simply to say that Bechdel restricts the category of the numinous to lesbians, rather than to homosexuals of both sexes—but it does open up the memoir to the idea that homosexuality is not a guarantor of goodness. Bechdel's moral vision is complex and her fidelity to truth admirable.

Fun Home also lets the reader know to some extent that a memoir should not be taken as gospel truth. Bechdel reproduces the old letters by her father, and legal documents about him, as a way to buttress her inherently fallible memory. She thus invites the reader to know that she is not omniscient. She also explicitly addresses the fact that she does not remember everything perfectly—that she might be rewriting the past to fit her own preconceptions. “Perhaps my eagerness to claim him as ‘gay’ in the way I am ‘gay,’ as opposed to bisexual or some other category, is just a way of keeping him to myself—a sort of inverted Oedipal complex.” (p. 230) The memoir genre is all too apt to assume an unquestioned authority; Bechdel invites her readers, to this extent, to question her authorial omniscience.

But only to that extent. Ultimately, Bechdel has a truth to tell—a belief in her own self, a belief in what she truly is. For her, again and again, that truth is homosexuality:

- “Your father tell the truth? Please.” (p. 59);
- “the implosive spasm so staggeringly complete and perfect that for a few brief moments I could not question its inherent moral validity” (p. 171);

- “I suppose that a lifetime spent hiding one’s erotic truth could have a cumulative renunciatory effect.” (p. 228);
- “But I like to think they went to the mat for this book *because* they were lesbians, because they knew a thing or two about erotic truth.” (p. 229);
- “‘Erotic truth’ is a rather sweeping concept. I shouldn’t pretend to know what my father’s was.” (p. 230)

Bechdel holds much up to doubt in *Fun Home*, but not *erotic truth* as a concept in general, or her erotic truth as an argument in particular. She does not “question its inherent moral validity,” and neither can the reader—unless the reader questions Bechdel’s entire character, which she has staked upon the validity of erotic truth.

Bechdel holds much up to doubt in *Fun Home*, but not *erotic truth* as a concept in general, or her erotic truth as an argument in particular.

A common reading is supposed to provoke discussion—and what use is that discussion if it does not include a query of every truth argued in the text? Yet how is the freshman supposed to frame the query of Bechdel’s erotic truth? It must be along these lines: “Everything you believe about yourself is not necessarily true. You are not necessarily the person you believe yourself to be. The truth of your self is as subject to the judgment of human beings as any other truth—and we, as readers, may and must criticize what you hold dear, your affirmation of your self. Precisely because you will not question your erotic truth, we must.” The same applies to any other intimate truth a memoir reveals—and the point of a memoir, after all, is the intimate revelation of the inward self to the reader. A good student—a good reader—should always use a memoir as a means to criticize the memoirist’s self, to question the dearest truths he perceives about himself. A central purpose of a liberal education, after all, is to develop the ability to criticize a text—to address questions of it, to seek out its truth by the means of discussion and argument.

In other words, a proper discussion of Bechdel’s memoir requires being grossly impolite to her *in absentia*, and to any student present who has decided to stake his own character on a similarly simpleminded affirmation of “erotic truth.” Such impoliteness is essential for a proper education—but practically speaking, it is difficult to expect from a freshman suddenly thrust among a circle of strangers. Common good manners mean that incoming freshmen, faced with a memoir, will be less likely to speak critically about a book, since that would require them to speak critically of the author’s character.⁸³ Any memoir, by the nature of what it requires in the way of proper discussion, must either be carefully taught so as to encourage this rudeness—or instead teach incoming students

⁸³ This point was also made by Cynthia (Cindy) Pury. Cynthia (Cindy) Pury, comment on Brendan Boyle’s “Tolstoy in the Slaughterhouse,” September 22, 2011, *Inside Higher Ed*, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/09/22/tolstoy-slaughterhouse#comment-332340503>.

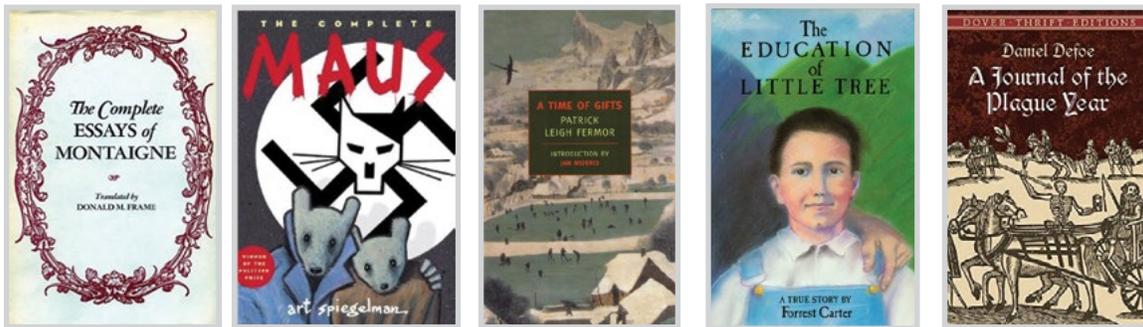
that polite silence is preferable to searching discussion.

If students discussing common readings indeed were asked to criticize a memoirist's truth, this would be a wonderfully educative experience. But we get the very strong sense that most memoirs are assigned precisely because of their inhibitory effect—that politeness is supposed to make you defer to the memoiristic truth, for the character of the memoirist is meant to provide uncriticizable authority. Consider the questions in College of Charleston's *Fun Home Reading Companion*: “What happens when we repress important truths about ourselves and about those around us? ... What does Bechdel suggest we risk by denying our erotic truth?”⁸⁴ These are affirmations of Bechdel's assertion about the nature of erotic truth, and not remotely a genuine critique. The charge that the choice of left-leaning memoirs is meant to act as left-leaning advocacy acquires its heft from the unfortunate truth that students are not encouraged to question the most sacred truths of memoirists.

Unless students are urged to discuss memoirs as impolitely and searchingly as possible, it would be better not to assign memoirs at all.

The charge that the choice of left-leaning memoirs is meant to act as left-leaning advocacy acquires its heft from the unfortunate truth that students are not encouraged to question the most sacred truths of memoirists.

Memoir Suggestions



If a memoir is to be assigned, it would be best to assign a memoir that opens itself enough to critique. Montaigne's *Essays* are the template for all such openness to uncertainty and critique, but they are a bit advanced for freshmen, and not precisely memoirs. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986-91) is quite good on these grounds. The “memoirist,” Art's father Vladek Spiegelman, is not presented as a good person—Art Spiegelman expresses hatred for him on occasion, we are shown that his suffering did not make him good, and indeed he most likely would not have survived the

⁸⁴ College of Charleston, *Fun Home Reading Companion*, <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/documents/readingguide.pdf>.

Holocaust if he had not been often-enough ruthless in pursuit of his own survival. The book's own imagery reinforces the not always pleasant stance of the narrator: it is no accident that Poles are drawn as pigs, unflattering and *trayf*. We are also shown the unreliability of memoir: Spiegelman shows us how he assembles these materials, and directly addresses the unreliability of his father's memory. Doubtless there are some aspects of the memoir that are not meant to be questioned—we strongly doubt *Maus* is ever assigned so as to encourage an earnest debate on the advisability of the Holocaust. Yet more than most memoirs, *Maus* encourages the reader to question the authority of the memoirist, to set aside the supposed certainties and virtues of character's authority. It is on these grounds a good memoir to assign.

Acknowledgment of the distance between the act of writing and the actual memory is the indispensable quality of a good memoir. Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time of Gifts* (1977) does this quite well: "Nothing remains from that first day in Germany but a confused memory of woods and snow and sparse villages in the dim Westphalian landscape and pale sunbeams dulled by cloud" [ch. 2, p. 38]. Lacking that, a memoir ought at the very least to possess a narrator who confounds the reader and invites questioning of his character. In pursuit of this goal, students might be introduced point-blank to the idea that purported memoirs lie. It is probably still too sensitive to teach a class on Asa Earl Carter's faux-memoir of Cherokee boyhood, *The Education of Little Tree* (1976), but common reading programs could use Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) as one of the original examples of how purported memoir can shift between fact and fiction, and an illustration of how actual documents can be used to support fictive invention.

CONCLUSION

We would be flattered if common reading selection committees chose from the list of books we recommend (see Appendix IV for 80 titles we suggest). We would strongly approve if they chose any classic books, expected their students to read mature books, and selected students who can meet those expectations. We would also welcome evidence that selection committees are exercising independent judgment rather than simply rewarding publishers for their effective marketing. Even if they will not adopt our standards, each committee should develop its own, unique taste, and thereby model for its students how to be thoughtful, individual readers rather than consumers.

We would like to emphasize our conviction that common reading programs can achieve the substance of their existing goals—to introduce students to college expectations, to improve their writing, to create a sense of college community that in turn has a positive effect on student retention—while also choosing better, more challenging, and more intellectually diverse books. The colleges we commend provide an existing best practices standard: it would be a significant achievement, and a practicable one, if common reading programs generally were to adopt that standard. We also think that if common reading programs would push themselves even a little bit beyond the common reading genre’s current boundaries, the effects would be wonderful indeed. We have presented a variety of alternatives that are meant to provide common reading programs a mid-way point between their current practices and our ideals, and our list of recommended books in Appendix IV also contains further suggestions for common reading committees that are willing to move a little way in the direction we suggest. We hope at least some common reading programs will consider these suggestions as worthy of an experiment.

We continue to champion the use of books by the greatest authors of the past, from Shakespeare to Austen to Achebe: we have faith in students’ capacities to rise to the mental challenge such works provide; in students’ desires to challenge themselves and learn; and in these books’ powers to allure a student reader. We also continue to expect that colleges ought to provide a robust model of the life of the mind, exemplified by the choice of the very best works for common reading. We would assign these books if we could. We fear that most common reading programs have a far lower estimate of what their students can do and what their institutions should do, and that they will dismiss these most challenging suggestions out of hand. But how can they learn to hope for better if no one provides them an impossible dream for which to strive? We proclaim that our Dulcinea is the most beautiful lady of letters upon the earth, and we hope that by championing her we will bring our common readers to affirm this too.

Common reading programs can achieve the substance of their existing goals—to introduce students to college expectations, to improve their writing, to create a sense of college community that in turn has a positive effect on student retention—while also choosing better, more challenging, and more intellectually diverse books.

AFTERWORD

BY PETER WOOD

Between the ages of six and ten, some children discover a love of reading and begin to read widely and sometimes precociously. Others come under the spell of a genre: books about horses, wizards, ghosts, or some other stock of plots and characters that play off against the quotidian realities of a young person's life. Still other children, usually entering adolescence, glimpse through some book a bit of the real world itself and are prompted to read further and further.

However they come to it, these children grow into readers and by the time they reach college they have developed an ease with reading a whole book cover to cover. They know what they like and why; they can explain why one book falls short where another soars; and their minds are furnished with examples, good and bad. Chances are also good that these students have read some of the same books. Readers can talk with other readers about books without embarrassment. They also interest one another in books they haven't yet read. College for this cohort of young readers is an ascent to a place where they can find each other as well as adults who have read more widely still and can deepen their understanding and appreciation. Re-reading at age 18 a book that first dawned as a revelation at age 12 can be another kind of revelation.

The programs that we have examined in our annual editions of *Beach Books* are plainly not aimed at any of these students who have already developed good habits of reading. Colleges and universities once assumed that many of their students were good readers and that those who fell short, fell short by only a small margin. This assumption, however, has been retired. In talking to the directors of common reading programs across the country we encountered a very different view of the students admitted to colleges. In this view, many of the students have never read a whole book—they are “book virgins.” Among those who have read books, according to this view, the level of reading skill is low. We can probably infer from this that both the number of books the students have read and the quality of those books are also low.

This view seems widespread among common reading program directors, but is it well-founded? Are students really, as a whole, so divorced from reading books? There are many other observers who share this view, but there is also some evidence on the other side. In 2009 the National Endowment for the Arts published *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy*,⁸⁵ which took note of a countervailing trend of increasing numbers of young adults engaged in “literary reading.” NEA Chairman Dana Gioia wrote in the preface:

The youngest group (ages 18-24) has undergone a particularly inspiring transformation from a 20 percent decline in 2002 to a 21 percent increase in 2008—a startling level of change.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy* (2009), <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/ReadingonRise.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Dana Gioia, “Preface,” National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy* (2009), p. 1.

One contributing factor to that seven-year increase was the NEA's own common reading program, the Big Read. The NEA results were encouraging more in the direction of the trends than in absolute numbers. It found the overall adult literary reading rate had climbed from 46.7 percent in 2002 to 50.2 percent in 2008.

That about half of the American population read at least one book in 2008 is praiseworthy, but by comparison, "at least 90 percent of Icelanders age 16 or older read at least one book a year for pleasure," according to a study mentioned by *The New York Times* in 2015.⁸⁷ Iceland, with a population of just over 300,000 probably represents the outer limit of mass literacy. Indeed, according to the BBC, about one in ten Icelanders publish at least one book in their lifetime, and Icelanders even have a proverb:

"Ad ganga med bok I maganum"—everyone gives birth to a book. Literally, everyone "has a book in their stomach."⁸⁸

Americans might harbor a similar idea. A 2002 survey suggested that 81 percent of us believe we could or should write a book.⁸⁹ Now that self-publishing is relatively easy and inexpensive, perhaps a significant portion of those 200 million Americans will indeed write a book.⁹⁰ It is thus conceivable that more Americans will write a book than will ever read one.

The 2009 NEA report dealt with "literary reading." Other surveys typically examine total book consumption, with no distinctions among literary works, self-help books, devotionals, cookbooks, and so on. By that more inclusive standard, the number of readers of course is higher. A 2015 Pew Research Center study found that 72 percent of Americans had read a book in the last year.⁹¹ That, however, represented a decline from 79 percent in 2014. Notably the Pew study found that 80 percent of Americans in the age bracket 18 to 29 had read a book in the last year—69 percent had read book in print and 34 percent an e-book. Of those whose highest educational attainment was graduation from high school, 61 percent had read a book; of those who had attended "some college," 81 percent had read a book; and among college graduates, 90 percent had read a book.

What about literary reading? The NEA followed up its optimistic 2009 report with a study in 2012, *The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (SPPA) reporting that the percentage of adults engaged in literary reading ("novels or short stories, poetry, and plays") had fallen back to the 2002 level of 47

87 Dean Nelson, "In Iceland, a Literary Tour Explores Rich History," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/travel/reykjavik-iceland-tours.html?_r=0.

88 Rosie Goldsmith, "Iceland: Where One in 10 people Will Publish a Book," *BBC News*, October 14, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24399599>.

89 Joseph Epstein, "Think You Have a Book in You? Think Again," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/28/opinion/think-you-have-a-book-in-you-think-again.html>.

90 Justine Tal Goldberg, "200 Million Americans Want to Publish Books, But Can They?," *Publishing Perspectives*, May 26, 2011, http://publishingperspectives.com/2011/05/200-million-americans-want-to-publish-books/#.VpAm_dKAOkp.

91 "Women, Young Adults, Those With Higher Education and Income More Likely to Have Read a Book," *Pew Research Center*, October 16, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/19/slightly-fewer-americans-are-reading-print-books-new-survey-finds/ft_15-10-12_whoreadbook/.

percent. The percentage of 18 to 24 year olds who engaged in literary reading was almost identical to the population at large (47.9 percent as opposed to 47.0 percent). Those with “some college” read at the rate of 50.5 percent, and college graduates at the rate of 63 percent.

These numbers do represent a significant drop from thirty years earlier, when the NEA found 56.4 percent of Americans engaged in literary reading. Moreover, people who read more heavily in their youth appear to continue the habit. The 2012 study found the highest percentage of literary reading in the age cohort 55 to 64, where 52 percent had read at least one literary work in the preceding year.

Taken all in all, the numbers reported by NEA in 2009 and 2013, by Pew in 2015, and in other surveys point to a very large number of Americans past adolescence who engage voluntarily in literary reading. America isn’t Iceland, but it clearly is a nation with enough readers of college-age that it ought not to be impossible for colleges and universities to expect their admitted students to undertake some moderately difficult books.

How many actual “book virgins” are there among 18-year olds? I’ve not found any estimate, but the available statistics from NEA and Pew suggest that the percentage among college enrollees must be fairly small. Some 66 percent of high school graduates enroll in college. In fall 2015, 20.2 million students enrolled. At least 9,675,000 of them had read a literary work not assigned for school in the previous year; and 16,160,000 had read at least one book of any kind in the previous year. Should college common reading programs be designed to appeal to the remaining 4,040,000 students who have demonstrated no interest in or competence in reading books?

To ask this question is almost to answer it. Common reading programs cannot by themselves install a motivation to read or a habit of reading, and norming the “first year experience,” as it is now often called, to the habits and aspirations of the least achieving students is a grave mistake—one that sacrifices the educational horizons of the vast majority of students in what is doubtless a mostly futile quest to build a fire out of sodden leaves. Instead of inspiring non-readers to read, the compromised choices of most common reading programs merely dispirit the students who already do read.

There is something worse here than a lost opportunity, though there is that too. What’s worse is that many of these common reading programs enunciate to freshmen a combination of messages that foster listlessness at exactly the moment when the students need to summon courage and determination. Common readings that are at a low intellectual level signal to capable students that the college does not take their minds seriously. Common readings that are at a low literary or rhetorical level signal to capable students that good writing does not matter much to the college. Common readings that indulge advocacy for favored causes signal to capable students that the college cares more about ensuring their conformity to political correctness than it does about opening the door to genuine exploration of ideas.

This report shows the prevalence of these mistakes, and data acquired by repeated surveys by NEA, Pew, and other researchers deprives colleges of their main excuse for stocking common reading programs with feather-weight books. The time has come for colleges and universities to get serious about this. If they want to build intellectual communities, they should build with the solid brick of good books.

APPENDIX I: COMMON READING SELECTIONS 2014-2015: FULL LIST BY INSTITUTION NAME

College/University	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Adams State University (CO)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Adelphi University	<i>Thank You for Your Service</i> Finkel, David 2013	Nonfiction War <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Agnes Scott College	<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2008	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Sex Discrimination <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>
Albion College	<i>Here, Bullet</i> Turner, Brian 2005	Poetry War <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Alvernia University	<i>Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream</i> Shepard, Adam 2007	Memoir Poverty
Amarillo College	<i>Blue Hole Back Home</i> Jordan-Lake, Joy 2008	Novel Immigration <i>South Asian theme</i>
American University	<i>The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media</i> Gladstone, Brooke 2011	Nonfiction Technology/Media <i>Graphic</i>
Amherst College	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Appalachian State University	<i>Clapton's Guitar: Watching Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument</i> St. John, Allen 2005	Nonfiction Music

Aquinas College (Michigan)	<i>About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students</i> Aquinas TRIO Students 2013	Nonfiction College Student Advice Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Arcadia University	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Armstrong State University	<i>Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream</i> Shepard, Adam 2007	Memoir Poverty
Assumption College	<i>The Glass Castle: A Memoir</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
Auburn University at Montgomery	<i>Big Fish</i> Wallace, Daniel 1998	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Augustana College	<i>The Round House</i> Erdrich, Louise 2012	Novel Crime and Punishment Racism <i>Native American theme</i>
Austin Peay State University	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Avila University	<i>They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan</i> Ajak, Benjamin and Bensen Deng, Alephonsian Deng, Judy Bernstein 2005	Memoir War Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Babson College	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Baker University	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>

Ball State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Bard College at Simon's Rock	<i>Monstress: Stories</i> Tenorio, Lysley 2012	Short Stories Ethnic Identity Immigration <i>Asian-American theme</i>
Barry University	<i>The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Personalized Medicine</i> Collins, Francis 2009	Nonfiction Science Medicine
Barton College	<i>A Land More Kind Than Home</i> Cash, Wiley 2012	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Baruch College	<i>How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia</i> Hamid, Mohsin 2013	Novel Entrepreneurship <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Bates College	<i>The Remedy: Robert Koch, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Quest to Cure Tuberculosis</i> Goetz, Thomas 2014	Nonfiction Medicine
Bay State College	<i>An Invisible Thread: The True Story of an 11-Year-Old Panhandler, a Busy Sales Executive, and an Unlikely Meeting with Destiny</i> Schroff, Laura and Alex Tresniowski 2009	Memoir Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Baylor University	<i>The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to Be an Educated Human Being (Selections)</i> Gamble, Richard ed. 2007	Nonfiction Education
Becker College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Bellevue College	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Belmont Abbey College	<i>The Power and the Glory</i> Greene, Graham 1940	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Oppressive Regimes <i>Latin American theme</i>
Berry College	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Immigration Women <i>Latin American theme</i>
Bluffton University	<i>What the Best College Students Do</i> Bain, Ken 2012	Nonfiction College Student Advice
Boise State University	<i>The Odyssey of KP2: An Orphan Seal and a Marine Biologist's Fight to Save a Species</i> Williams, Terrie M. 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Boston College	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Bowling Green State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Brenau University	<i>A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power</i> Carter, Jimmy 2014	Nonfiction Women Sex Discrimination
Brookhaven College	<i>Global Weirdness: Severe Storms, Deadly Heat Waves, Relentless Drought, Rising Seas, and the Weather of the Future</i> Climate Central 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Brooklyn College (CUNY)	<i>Little Failure: A Memoir</i> Shteyngart, Gary 2014	Memoir Immigration Disability/Disease <i>European theme</i>

Bucknell University	<i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> Hamid, Mohsin 2007	Novel Immigration <i>Muslim-American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Buena Vista University	<i>They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan</i> Ajak, Benjaminand Bensen Deng, Alephonsian Deng, Judy Bernstein 2005	Memoir War Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Butler University	<i>Ties That Bind: Stories of Love and Gratitude from the First Ten Years of StoryCorps</i> Isay, Dave 2013	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Butte College	<i>The Distance Between Us</i> Grande, Reyna 2012	Memoir Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences	<i>Josie's Story: A Mother's Inspiring Crusade to Make Medical Care Safe</i> King, Sorrel 2009	Memoir Medicine
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization
Caldwell College	<i>Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness</i> Kidder, Tracy 2000	Biography Genocide Immigration <i>African theme</i>
California Lutheran University	<i>Waldron Island Reflections</i> Lauridsen, Morten 2013	Nonfiction Music Environmentalism/Nature
California State University, Bakersfield	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
California State University, Chico	<i>The Distance Between Us</i> Grande, Reyna 2012	Memoir Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>

California State University, Los Angeles	<i>Shanghai Girls</i> See, Lisa 2009	Novel Immigration Women <i>East Asian theme</i> <i>Asian-American theme</i>
California State University, Northridge	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
California State University, Sacramento	<i>Blasphemy: New and Collected Stories</i> Alexie, Sherman 2012	Short Stories Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
California State University, San Marcos	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Carroll College (Montana)	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
Case Western Reserve University	<i>Zoobiquity: The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health</i> Horowitz, Barbara Natterson and Kathryn Bowers 2012	Nonfiction Science Environmentalism/Nature
Castleton State College (Vermont)	<i>In the Neighborhood: The Search for Community on an American Street, One Sleepover at a Time</i> Lovenheim, Peter 2010	Nonfiction Sociology
Catawba College	<i>This Is Water</i> Wallace, David Foster 2005	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Century College	<i>Hope's Boy</i> Bridge, Andrew 2008	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Mental Health
Chadbourne Residential College (University of Wisconsin-Madison)	<i>Cockeyed: A Memoir of Blindness</i> Knighton, Ryan 2006	Memoir Disability/Disease
Chaffey College	<i>Daytripper</i> Ba, Gabriel and Fabio Moon 2011	Novel Mortality <i>Graphic</i> <i>Latin American theme</i>

Clemson University	<i>Machine Man</i> Barry, Max 2009	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Technology/Media
Cleveland State University	<i>Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time</i> Speck, Jeff 2012	Nonfiction American Cities Environmentalism/Nature
Coastal Carolina University	<i>Playing the Enemy [Invictus]: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation</i> Carlin, John 2008	Nonfiction Racism Sports <i>African theme</i>
College of Charleston	<i>The Good Soldiers</i> Finkel, David 2009	Nonfiction War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
College of the Redwoods	<i>War Dances</i> Alexie, Sherman 2009	Short Stories Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
College of Wooster	<i>China in Ten Words</i> Hua, Yu 2011	Nonfiction Oppressive Regimes <i>East Asian theme</i>
Collin College	<i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i> Harden, Blaine 2012	Biography Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>East Asian theme</i>
Colorado College	<i>Hamlet</i> Shakespeare, William 1623	Play Family Dysfunction/Separation
Colorado Mountain College	<i>Cabin Fever: A Suburban Father's Search for the Wild</i> Fate, Tom Montgomery 2011	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature
Columbia University	<i>The Iliad</i> Homer	Epic Poem War <i>European theme</i>
Community College of Baltimore County	<i>The Laramie Project</i> Kaufman, Moises 2001	Play Homosexuality
Concordia College	<i>Not a Drop to Drink</i> McGinnis, Mindy 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Environmentalism/Nature <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Concordia University Texas	<i>Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption</i> Thompson-Cannino, Jennifer, Ronald Cotton, Erin Torneo 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Cornell University	<i>Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio</i> Lakhous, Amara 2006	Novel Ethnic Identity Immigration <i>European theme</i> <i>Middle Eastern theme</i>
Corning Community College	<i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i> Beavan, Colin 2009	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature
Cosumnes River College	<i>Bottlemania: Big Business, Local Springs, and the Battle Over America's Drinking Water</i> Royte, Elizabeth 2011	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Cuesta College	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Culver-Stockton College	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Cumberland University	<i>Mindset: The New Psychology of Success</i> Dweck, Carol 2006	Nonfiction Psychology Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
Curry College	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>
Cuyahoga Community College	<i>Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time</i> Speck, Jeff 2012	Nonfiction American Cities Environmentalism/Nature

Davenport University	<i>Just Don't Fall – How I Grew Up, Conquered Illness and Made It Down the Mountain</i> Sundquist, Josh 2010	Memoir Disability/Disease Sports
Davidson College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Defiance College	<i>Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World</i> McGonigal, Jane 2010	Nonfiction Sociology Technology/Media
Duke University	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
East Carolina University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Eastern Illinois University	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Professional Success <i>Latin American theme</i>
Eastern Kentucky University	<i>Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age</i> Powers, William 2010	Nonfiction Technology/Media Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
Eastfield College	<i>The Illustrated Man</i> Bradbury, Ray 1951	Short Stories Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Eckerd College	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Edgewood College	<i>Orphan Train</i> Kline, Christina Baker 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Native American theme</i>

Elon University	<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i> Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer 2000	Memoir Innovation Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
Emmanuel College (Massachusetts)	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Endicott College	<i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i> Malcolm Gladwell 2008	Nonfiction Sociology
Eureka College	<i>The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business</i> DuHigg, Charles 2011	Nonfiction Psychology
Evergreen State College	<i>Crow Planet: Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness</i> Haupt, Lyanda Lynn 2009	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature American Cities
Fairmont State University	<i>The Price of Justice: A True Story of Greed and Corruption</i> Leamer, Laurence 2013	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Environmentalism/Nature
Fashion Institute of Technology	<i>Relish: My Life in the Kitchen</i> Knisley, Lucy 2013	Memoir Food <i>Graphic</i>
Fayetteville State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Florida Gulf Coast University	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Florida International University	<i>No Turning Back: One Man's Inspiring True Story of Courage, Determination, and Hope</i> Anderson, Bryan and David Mack 2011	Memoir War Disability/Disease <i>Iraq War theme</i>

Florida State University	<i>This Is Our Story</i> Adelson, Wendi 2011	Nonfiction Immigration Slavery
Fort Lewis College	<i>Dead Man Walking</i> Prejean, Helen 1994	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Framingham State University	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Internment Exile/Emigration <i>Asian-American theme</i>
Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering	<i>Zeitoun</i> Eggers, Dave 2009	Biography Disaster in America Crime and Punishment <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
George Mason University	<i>How Full Is Your Bucket?</i> Rath, Tom and Donald O. Clifton 2004	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
George Washington University	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Georgetown University	<i>All Our Names</i> Mengestu, Dinaw 2014	Novel Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Georgia College	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Georgia Institute of Technology	<i>The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling</i> Chiang, Ted 2013	Short Story Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Technology/Media
Georgia State University	<i>March: Book One</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Goucher College	<i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i> Hamid, Mohsin 2007	Novel Immigration <i>Muslim-American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>

Grace College	<i>God's Double Agent: The True Story of a Chinese Christian's Fight for Freedom</i> Fu, Bob and Nancy French 2013	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>East Asian theme</i>
Grand Valley State University	<i>Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital</i> Fink, Sheri 2013	Nonfiction Disaster in America Medicine <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Gustavus Adolphus College	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization
Hamline University	<i>Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us about Sex, Diet, and How We Live</i> Zuk, Marlene 2013	Nonfiction Science Food
Hampshire College	<i>Twelve Years a Slave</i> Northup, Solomon 1853	Memoir Slavery <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Hartwick College	<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Environmentalism/Nature <i>African theme</i>
Henderson State University	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>South Asian theme</i>
Hesston College	<i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i> Harden, Blaine 2012	Biography Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>East Asian theme</i>
Hiram College	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
Hofstra University	<i>The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen</i> Appiah, Kwame Anthony 2010	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality

Holy Names University	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Hood College	<i>A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School</i> Lanier, Carlotta Wells and Lisa Frazier Page 2009	Memoir Racism Civil Rights <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Humboldt State University	<i>War Dances</i> Alexie, Sherman 2009	Short Stories Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
Illinois College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Illinois Wesleyan University	<i>The Madonnas of Echo Park</i> Skyhorse, Brando 2010	Novel Ethnic Identity <i>Latin American theme</i>
Indiana University East	<i>For the Love of Cities: The Love Affair Between People and Their Places</i> Kageyama, Peter 2011	Nonfiction American Cities
Indiana University, Bloomington (Kelley School of Business)	<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i> Boo, Katherine 2012	Nonfiction Poverty <i>South Asian theme</i>
Indiana University, Northwest	<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> Alexander, Michelle 2009	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Indiana University, Southeast	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Ithaca College	<i>The Good Lord Bird</i> McBride, James 2013	Novel Slavery <i>African American theme</i>

Jacksonville University	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Johns Hopkins University	<i>Happier</i> Ben-Shahar, Tal 2007	Nonfiction Psychology Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
Johnson State College	<i>A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean</i> McClure, Tori Murden 2009	Memoir Adventure Women
Juniata College	<i>It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens</i> Boyd, Danah 2014	Nonfiction Technology/Media <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Kalamazoo College	<i>We Need New Names</i> Buluwayo, NoViolet 2013	Novel Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African theme</i>
Kansas State University	<i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2006	Nonfiction Disability/Disease Medicine <i>European theme</i>
Kent State University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Kingsborough Community College	<i>Just Kids</i> Smith, Patti 2010	Memoir Artistic Life Homosexuality
Lackawanna College	<i>Saddle Up, Charlie: Charlie Wysocki's Journey From Gridiron Glory Into Mental Illness</i> Walters, C. Terry and Charlie Wysocki 2012	Memoir Mental Health Sports <i>African American theme</i>

LaGuardia Community College	<i>Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years</i> Delany, Sarah L., A. Elizabeth Delany, and Amy Hill Hearth 1993	Memoir Racism Sex Discrimination <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Lansing Community College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Lasell College	<i>The Boston Globe (6 Month Subscription)</i> 2014	Newspaper Uncategorized
Le Moyne College	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> Douglass, Frederick 1845	Memoir Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Lehigh University	<i>Class Matters</i> Correspondents of <i>The New York Times</i> 2005	Nonfiction Social Class
Lehigh University	<i>Now You See It...Stories from Cokesville, PA</i> Monk, Bathsheba 2006	Short Stories Working Life
Lesley University	<i>Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet</i> McKibben, Bill 2010	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Linfield College	<i>Ignorance: How It Drives Science</i> Firestein, Stuart 2012	Nonfiction Science
Lock Haven University	<i>Into the Wild</i> Krakauer, Jon 1996	Nonfiction Adventure Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Lone Star College, Kingwood	<i>Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts</i> Tavris, Carol and Elliot Aronson 2007	Nonfiction Psychology

Lone Star College, Montgomery	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Loras College	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Louisiana Tech University	<i>All American: Two Young Men, the 2001 Army-Navy Game and the War They Fought in Iraq</i> Eubanks, Steve 2013	Nonfiction War Sports <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Loyola Marymount University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Loyola University, Chicago	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
Luther College	<i>1984</i> Orwell, George 1949	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Oppressive Regimes <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Lynchburg College	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> Green, John 2012	Novel Disability/Disease <i>Film/Television version exists</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Macalester College	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Marietta College	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>

Marist College	<i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2006	Nonfiction Disability/Disease Medicine <i>European theme</i>
Marquette University	<i>March: Book One</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2008	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Sex Discrimination <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>
MassBay Community College	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Immigration Women <i>Latin American theme</i>
Meredith College	<i>The Invention of Wings</i> Kidd, Sue Monk 2014	Novel Slavery Feminism <i>African American theme</i>
Metropolitan State University of Denver	<i>Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets</i> Phelps, Carissa 2012	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Miami University (Ohio)	<i>Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy</i> Watson, Bruce 2010	Nonfiction Racism Civil Rights <i>African American</i>
Michigan State University	<i>March: Book One</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Michigan Technological University	<i>In the Sanctuary of Outcasts</i> White, Neil 2009	Memoir Disability/Disease Crime and Punishment
Middle Tennessee State University	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>

Millersville University	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Minnesota State University, Mankato	<i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i> Moody, Anne 1968	Memoir Civil Rights Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Mississippi State University	<i>The Invisible Girls</i> Theborge, Sarah 2013	Memoir Immigration Disability/Disease <i>African theme</i>
Missouri State University	<i>The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL</i> Greitens, Eric 2011	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism War
Mitchell College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Molloy College	<i>One Amazing Thing</i> Divakaruni, Chitra 2009	Novel Disaster in America <i>Asian-American theme</i>
Monroe Community College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Montana State University	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Montclair State University	<i>Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives</i> Mullainathan, Sendhil and Eldar Shafir 2013	Nonfiction Poverty Psychology
Moraine Valley Community College	<i>World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War</i> Brooks, Max 2006	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Moravian College	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>

Mount Holyoke College	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Mountainview College	<i>The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains</i> Carr, Nicholas 2010	Nonfiction Technology/Media
Nassau Community College	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
New College of Florida	<i>The 5 Elements of Effective Thinking</i> Burger, Edward B. and Michael Starbird 2012	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
New York Institute of Technology	<i>Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct</i> Forni, P.M. 2002	Nonfiction Etiquette
New York University (College of Arts and Science)	<i>Regeneration</i> Barker, Pat 1991	Novel War Medicine
Norfolk State University	<i>The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration</i> Wilkerson, Isabel 2010	Nonfiction Racism <i>African American theme</i>
North Carolina A&T State University	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
North Carolina Central University	<i>The Kite Runner</i> Hosseini, Khaled 2002	Novel Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
North Carolina State University	<i>Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food</i> Ronald, Pamela C. and Raoul W. Adamchak 2008	Nonfiction Food Science

North Central College	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2012	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Northeastern University	<i>Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital</i> Fink, Sheri 2013	Nonfiction Disaster in America Medicine <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Northern Arizona University	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Northern Illinois University	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Northern Kentucky University	<i>How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i> Bayoumi, Moustafa 2008	Biography Racism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Northern State University	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Northwestern University	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Notre Dame of Maryland University	<i>Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard</i> Murray, Liz 2010	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Occidental College	<i>The Speech: The Story Behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream</i> Younge, Gary 2013	Nonfiction Civil Rights <i>African American theme</i>

Ohio State University	<i>The Glass Castle: A Memoir</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
Oklahoma City University	<i>Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years With a Midwife in Mali</i> Holloway, Kris 2006	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Medicine <i>African theme</i>
Otterbein College	<i>Running the Rift</i> Benaron, Naomi 2010	Novel Genocide Sports <i>African theme</i>
Owensboro Community and Technical College	<i>A Parchment of Leaves</i> House, Silas 2002	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Racism <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Rape theme</i>
Owensboro Community and Technical College	<i>Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World</i> Salatin, Joel 2011	Nonfiction Food Environmentalism/Nature
Pace University	<i>Life of Pi</i> Martel, Yann 2001	Novel Hunger <i>South Asian theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Pacific Lutheran University	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Animals
Parkland College	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Pellissippi State Community College	<i>The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2013</i> Mukherjee, Siddhartha and Tim Folger 2013	Nonfiction Science Environmentalism/Nature
Pennsylvania State University, Abington	<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Exile/Emigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Pennsylvania State University, Altoona	<i>The Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore</i> Sloan, Robin 2012	Novel Technology/Media
Pennsylvania State University, Berks	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine	<i>What Should We Be Worried About?: Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night</i> Brockman, John, ed. 2014	Nonfiction Science
Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington	<i>This I Believe: Life Lessons</i> Gediman, Dan and Mary Jo Gediman 2011	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Pennsylvania State University, University Park	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Pomona College	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Princeton University	<i>Meaning in Life and Why It Matters</i> Wolf, Susan 2010	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Providence College	<i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i> Gladwell, Malcolm 2008	Nonfiction Sociology
Queens University of Charlotte	<i>The Orphan Master's Son</i> Johnson, Adam 2012	Novel Oppressive Regimes <i>East Asian theme</i>
Queensborough Community College	<i>Until I Say Goodbye: My Year of Living with Joy</i> Spencer-Wendel, Susan and Bret Witter 2013	Memoir Disability/Disease Mortality
Ramapo College	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Rhode Island College	<i>Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain</i> Sacks, Oliver 2007	Nonfiction Music Mental Health
Rice University	<i>Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change</i> Bogre, Michelle 2011	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Technology/Media
Rockhurst University	<i>Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age</i> Powers, William 2010	Nonfiction Technology/Media Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
Rockhurst University	<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> Frankl, Viktor E. 1946	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>European theme</i>
Rockhurst University	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
Rocky Mountain College	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>
Roger Williams University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Rollins College	<i>My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student</i> Nathan, Rebekah 2006	Memoir Education
Rowan University	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2012	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Rutgers University, School of Arts and Science Honors Program	<i>World Made by Hand</i> Kunstler, James Howard 2008	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Environmentalism/Nature

Sacred Heart University	<i>Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do</i> Sandel, Michael J. 2009	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Saint Louis University	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>South Asian theme</i>
Saint Mary's College of California	<i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> Ozeki, Ruth 2013	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Exile/Emigration <i>Asian-American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Saint Michael's College	<i>Sonny's Blues</i> Baldwin, James 1957	Short Story Racism Drugs <i>African American theme</i>
Salem State University	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Salisbury University	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Sam Houston State University	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
San Jose State University	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Professional Success <i>Latin American theme</i>
Seton Hall University	<i>Radium Girls</i> Gregory, D.W. 2003	Play Science Disability/Disease
Shepherd University	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>

Sierra Nevada College	<i>Being Flynn (Another Bullshit Night in Suck City)</i> Flynn, Nick 2010	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Skidmore College	<i>What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets</i> Sandel, Michael J. 2012	Nonfiction Economics
Smith College	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
South Dakota State University (honors college)	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Southern Connecticut State University	<i>Fear and What Follows: The Violent Education of a Christian Racist</i> Parrish, Tim 2013	Memoir Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Southern Methodist University	<i>We Need New Names</i> Buluwayo, NoViolet 2013	Novel Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African theme</i>
Southern Utah University	<i>Twelfth Night</i> Shakespeare, William 1623	Play Family Dysfunction/Separation
Springfield College	<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Environmentalism/Nature <i>African theme</i>
St. Bonaventure University	<i>The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change</i> Braun, Adam 2014	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help
St. Cloud State University	<i>Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War</i> Scranton, Roy and Matt Gallagher 2013	Short Stories War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>

St. Edwards University	<i>Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness</i> Cahalan, Susannah 2012	Memoir Mental Health
St. John's University (New York)	<i>Walk in Their Shoes: Can One Person Change the World?</i> Jim Ziolkowski 2013	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Education
Stanford University	<i>My Year of Meats</i> Ozeki, Ruth 1997	Novel Food Technology/Media <i>Asian-American theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>
Stanford University	<i>Physics for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines</i> Muller, Richard A. 2006	Nonfiction Science Environmentalism/Nature
Stanford University	<i>Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout</i> Redniss, Lauren 2010	Biography Science Women <i>European theme</i>
State University of New York, Brockport	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2012	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think About Our Lives</i> Wilson, David Sloan 2007	Nonfiction Science
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>Inherit the Wind</i> Lawrence, Jacob and Robert E. Lee 1955	Play Science Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2013</i> Mukherjee, Siddhartha and Tim Folger 2013	Nonfiction Science Environmentalism/Nature

State University of New York, New Paltz	<i>Collection of graduation speeches by David Foster Wallace, Neil Gaiman, Toni Morrison, J. K. Rowling, and Kurt Vonnegut selected by the Composition Committee</i>	Nonfiction Uncategorized
State University of New York, Old Westbury	<i>The Buddha in the Attic</i> Otsuka, Julie 2011	Novel Immigration Women <i>Asian-American theme</i>
State University of New York, Oneonta	<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2000	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>Graphic</i> <i>Islamic World theme</i>
State University of New York, Oswego	<i>The Round House</i> Erdrich, Louise 2012	Novel Crime and Punishment Racism <i>Native American theme</i>
State University of New York, Potsdam	<i>The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times</i> Loeb, Paul 2004	Nonfiction Psychology
State University of New York, University at Buffalo	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Sweet Briar College	<i>Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness</i> Kidder, Tracy 2000	Biography Genocide Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Tennessee Tech University	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Texas A&M University	<i>The Shadow Factory: The NSA from 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America</i> Bamford, James 2008	Nonfiction Technology/Media War on Terror

Texas A&M University, Kingsville	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization Poverty
Texas Christian University	<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2000	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>Graphic</i> <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Texas State University	<i>Coming of Age in Mississippi</i> Moody, Anne 1968	Memoir Civil Rights Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Texas Woman's University	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
The Citadel	<i>A Few Good Men</i> Sorkin, Aaron 1990	Play War Crime and Punishment <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
The College of New Jersey	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
The College of Saint Scholastica	<i>Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People</i> Banaji, Mahzarin R. and Anthony G. Greenwald 2013	Nonfiction Psychology
The King's College	<i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i> Tolstoy, Leo 1884	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Disability/Disease <i>European theme</i>
Thomas College	<i>An Invisible Thread: The True Story of an 11-Year-Old Panhandler, a Busy Sales Executive, and an Unlikely Meeting with Destiny</i> Schroff, Laura and Alex Tresniowski 2009	Memoir Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Trinity University	<i>Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong</i> Bonner, Raymond 2012	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Troy University	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i> Bradbury, Ray 1953	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Censorship <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Tufts University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Tulane University	<i>Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America's Children</i> Carr, Sarah 2013	Nonfiction Education Disaster in America <i>African American theme</i> <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
University of Akron	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Alabama, Birmingham	<i>Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work</i> Heath, Chip and Dan Heath 2013	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help Psychology
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i> Harden, Blaine 2012	Biography Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>East Asian theme</i>
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<i>The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media</i> Gladstone, Brooke 2011	Nonfiction Technology/Media <i>Graphic</i>
University of Arizona (honors college)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of Arkansas	<i>What It Is Like to Go to War</i> Marlantes, Karl 2011	Memoir War <i>Vietnam War theme</i>

University of California, Los Angeles	<i>I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson</i> Robinson, Jackie and Alfred Duckett 1972	Memoir Racism Sports <i>African American theme</i>
University of California, Merced	<i>The West Without Water: What Past Floods, Droughts, and Other Climatic Clues Tell Us About Tomorrow</i> Ingram, B. Lynn and France Malamud-Roam 2013	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
University of California, Santa Barbara	<i>The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America</i> Egan, Timothy 2009	Nonfiction Disaster in America Environmentalism/Nature
University of Central Florida	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
University of Cincinnati	<i>Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do</i> Sandel, Michael J. 2009	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
University of Colorado, Denver	<i>The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement</i> Saul, Nick and Andrea Curtis 2013	Nonfiction Food Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
University of Connecticut	<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i> Pollan, Michael 2006	Nonfiction Food
University of Delaware	<i>Thank You for Your Service</i> Finkel, David 2013	Nonfiction War <i>Iraq War theme</i>
University of Florida	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>

University of Houston, Downtown	<i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> Gaines, Ernest 1993	Novel Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Houston, Victoria	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of Idaho	<i>Stealing Buddha's Dinner</i> Nguyen, Bich Minh 2007	Memoir Immigration Food <i>Asian-American theme</i>
University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Iowa	<i>The Distance Between Us</i> Grande, Reyna 2012	Memoir Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Kansas	<i>The Center of Everything</i> Moriarty, Laura 2003	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
University of Kentucky	<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Exile/Emigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of La Verne	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of Louisiana, Monroe	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
University of Louisville	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>

University of Maine (honors college)	<i>Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet</i> McKibben, Bill 2010	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
University of Maryland, Baltimore County	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of Maryland, College Park	<i>Instant: The Story of Polaroid</i> Bonanos, Christopher 2012	Nonfiction Innovation Technology/Media
University of Massachusetts, Amherst	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Michigan, Flint	<i>Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America</i> Kozol, Jonathan 2012	Nonfiction Poverty <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
University of Mississippi	<i>The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II</i> Kiernan, Denise 2013	Nonfiction War Women
University of Montana, Missoula	<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Vietnam War theme</i> <i>Southeast Asian theme</i>
University of Mount Olive	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>South Asian theme</i>
University of New Haven	<i>Start Something That Matters</i> Mycoskie, Blake 2011	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Entrepreneurship <i>Latin American theme</i>

University of New Mexico	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
University of New Orleans	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2012	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	<i>The Round House</i> Erdrich, Louise 2012	Novel Crime and Punishment Racism <i>Native American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Charlotte	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Greensboro	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>South Asian theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Pembroke	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Wilmington	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of Northern Iowa	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of Northern Iowa	<i>The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You</i> Pariser, Eli 2011	Nonfiction Technology/Media
University of Oregon	<i>The Emotional Life of Your Brain</i> Davidson, Richard J. and Begley, Sharon 2012	Nonfiction Mental Health Science
University of Pennsylvania	<i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i> Fadiman, Anne 1997	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity Medicine <i>Asian American theme</i>

University of Rhode Island	<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease Mortality
University of Richmond	<i>The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement</i> Saul, Nick and Andrea Curtis 2013	Nonfiction Food Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
University of South Alabama	<i>Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project</i> Isay, Dave 2007	Nonfiction American Life NPR theme
University of South Carolina	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of South Carolina, Aiken	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Carolina, Upstate	<i>Kindred</i> Butler, Octavia 1979	Novel Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Florida	<i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i> Iversen, Kristen 2012	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	<i>Daytripper</i> Ba, Gabriel and Fabio Moon 2011	Novel Mortality <i>Graphic</i> <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Vermont	<i>Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation</i> Pollan, Michael 2013	Nonfiction Food
University of Virginia (School of Engineering & Applied Science)	<i>Ingenious: A True Story of Invention, Automotive Daring and the Race to Revive America</i> Fagone, Jason 2013	Nonfiction Innovation Environmentalism/Nature

University of West Florida	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>
University of Wisconsin, Madison	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>
Utah State University	<i>Frankenstein</i> Shelley, Mary 1818	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
Utah Valley University	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Valley City State University	<i>Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking</i> Cain, Susan 2012	Nonfiction Psychology
Vanderbilt University	<i>Salvage the Bones</i> Ward, Jesmyn 2010	Novel Disaster in America Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i> <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Vassar College	<i>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</i> Bechdel, Alison 2006	Memoir Homosexuality Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Graphic</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Ventura College	<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Vietnam War theme</i> <i>Southeast Asian theme</i>
Villanova University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Virginia Commonwealth University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>South Asian theme</i>
Wake Forest University	<i>Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct</i> Forni, P.M. 2002	Nonfiction Etiquette
Wallace State Community College	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> Green, John 2012	Novel Disability/Disease <i>Film/Television version exists</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Wartburg College	<i>Brave New World</i> Huxley, Aldous 1932	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Oppressive Regimes
Washburn University	<i>Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965</i> Williams, Juan 1987	Nonfiction Civil Rights Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Washington State University (University College)	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Washington University in St. Louis	<i>Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights</i> Yoshino, Kenji 2006	Nonfiction Civil Rights Homosexuality <i>Asian-America theme</i>
Webster University	<i>The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal</i> Mooney, Jonathan 2007	Memoir Disability/Disease
Wentworth Institute of Technology	<i>The Song of Achilles</i> Miller, Madeline 2011	Novel Homosexuality War <i>European theme</i>
Westchester Community College	<i>Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games</i> Lomong, Lopez 2012	Memoir Immigration Sports <i>African theme</i>

Western Carolina University	<i>Serena</i> Rash, Ron 2008	Novel Environmentalism/Nature Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Western Michigan University	<i>Life of Pi</i> Martel, Yann 2001	Novel Hunger <i>South Asian theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Western New England University	<i>The Glass Castle: A Memoir</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
Western Washington University	<i>The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics</i> Brown, Daniel James 2013	Nonfiction Sports
Westfield State University	<i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i> Fadiman, Anne 1997	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity Medicine <i>Asian American theme</i>
Westminster College (honors program)	<i>Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking</i> Cain, Susan 2012	Nonfiction Psychology
Whitman College	<i>Reservation Blues</i> Alexie, Sherman 1995	Novel Music Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
William Paterson University	<i>The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains</i> Carr, Nicholas 2010	Nonfiction Technology/Media
William Peace University	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Williams College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>

Wingate University	<i>On That Day, Everybody Ate: One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti</i> Trost, Margaret 2008	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African Diaspora theme</i>
Winona State University	<i>The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table</i> McMillan, Tracy 2012	Nonfiction Poverty Food
Winthrop University	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization
Wofford College	<i>Night Talk</i> Cox, Elizabeth 1997	Novel Racism <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Wright State University	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> Green, John 2012	Novel Disability/Disease <i>Film/Television version exists</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Xavier University (Cincinnati)	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
Xavier University of Louisiana	<i>The Dressmaker of Khair Khana: Five Sisters, One Remarkable Family, and the Woman Who Risked Everything to Keep Them Safe</i> Lemmon, Gayle Tzemach 2011	Biography Oppressive Regimes Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Young Harris College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>

APPENDIX II: COMMON READING SELECTIONS 2015-2016: FULL LIST BY INSTITUTION NAME

College/University	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Adams State University (CO)	<i>Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future</i> Reich, Robert B. 2011	Nonfiction Economics
Adelphi University	<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Racism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Albion College	<i>How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America</i> Laymon, Kiese 2013	Nonfiction Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Alvernia University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Amarillo College	<i>Between Shades of Gray</i> Ruta, Sepetys 2011	Novel Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>European theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
American University	<i>Chasing Chaos: My Decade In and Out of Humanitarian Aid</i> Alexander, Jessica 2013	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
Amherst College	<i>This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate</i> Klein, Naomi 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Economics
Appalachian State University	<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Exile/Emigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Aquinas College (Michigan)	<i>About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students</i> Aquinas TRIO Students 2013	Nonfiction College Student Advice Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality

Arcadia University	Not My Father's Son: A Memoir Cumming, Alan 2014	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation
Armstrong State University	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Assumption College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Auburn University at Montgomery	<i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2006	Nonfiction Disability/Disease Medicine <i>European theme</i>
Augustana College	<i>The Fire Next Time</i> Baldwin, James 1962	Nonfiction Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Austin Peay State University	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization Poverty
Avila University	<i>The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster</i> Katz, Jonathan M. 2013	Nonfiction Disaster Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African Diaspora theme</i>
Baker University	<i>The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness</i> Wiesenthal, Simon 1997	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>European theme</i>
Ball State University	<i>Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America</i> Dumas, Firoozeh 2003	Memoir Immigration <i>Muslim-American theme</i>

Bard College at Simon's Rock	<i>Geek Sublime: The Beauty of Code, the Code of Beauty</i> Chandra, Vikram 2014	Nonfiction Technology/Media Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Barton College	<i>Strange as this Weather Has Been: A Novel</i> Pancake, Ann 2007	Novel Environmentalism/Nature
Baruch College	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Animals
Bates College	<i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> Allen, Danielle 2014	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Bay State College	<i>Stronger</i> Bauman, Jeff with Bret Witter 2014	Memoir Disability/Disease War on Terror
Baylor University	<i>The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to Be an Educated Human Being (Selections)</i> Gamble, Richard ed. 2007	Nonfiction Education
Baylor University	<i>The Pleasures of Reading in the Age of Distraction</i> Jacobs, Alan 2011	Nonfiction Sociology
Becker College	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Bellarmino University	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Bellevue College	<i>The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics</i> Brown, Daniel James 2013	Nonfiction Sports

Berry College	<i>God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine</i> Sweet, Victoria 2012	Memoir Medicine
Bluffton University	<i>He, She, and It</i> Piercy, Marge 1991	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Environmentalism/Nature
Boise State University	<i>A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention</i> Richtel, Matt 2014	Nonfiction Technology/Media Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Boston College	<i>The Road to Character</i> Brooks, David 2015	Nonfiction Psychology Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
Brenau University	<i>March: Book One</i> and <i>March: Book Two</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013-15	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Brookhaven College	<i>A Crime So Monstrous: Face-to-Face with Modern-Day Slavery</i> Skinner, E. Benjamin 2008	Nonfiction Slavery
Brooklyn College (CUNY)	<i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> Ozeki, Ruth 2013	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Exile/Emigration <i>Asian-American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Bucknell University	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Buena Vista University	<i>The Demon in the Freezer: A True Story</i> Preston, Richard 2002	Nonfiction Medicine War on Terror
Bunker Hill Community College	<i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> Henriquez, Cristina 2014	Novel Immigration Disability/Disease <i>Latin American theme</i>

Butler University	<i>Ties That Bind: Stories of Love and Gratitude from the First Ten Years of StoryCorps</i> Isay, Dave 2013	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Butte College	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences	<i>Josie's Story: A Mother's Inspiring Crusade to Make Medical Care Safe</i> King, Sorrel 2009	Memoir Medicine
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona	<i>Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom</i> MacKinnon, Rebecca 2012	Nonfiction Technology/Media
California Lutheran University	<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Vietnam War theme</i>
California State University, Bakersfield	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
California State University, Chico	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
California State University, Los Angeles	<i>The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music</i> Lopez, Steve 2008	Memoir Racism Mental Health <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
California State University, Northridge	<i>Every Day</i> Levithan, David 2012	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
California State University, Sacramento	<i>Weed Land: Inside America's Marijuana Epicenter and How Pot Went Legit</i> Hecht, Peter 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Medicine

California State University, San Marcos	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Carroll College (Montana)	<i>The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist</i> Dorothy Day 1952	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Case Western Reserve University	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Castleton State College (Vermont)	<i>In the Sea There Are Crocodiles</i> Akbari, Enaiatollah 2011	Biography Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Catawba College	<i>Even Artichokes Have Doubts</i> Keegan, Marina 2011	Article College Student Advice
Chaffey College	<i>Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992</i> Smith, Anna Deveare 1994	Play Crime and Punishment American Cities <i>African American theme</i>
Clemson University	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Animals
Cleveland State University	<i>Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work</i> Laskas, Jeanne Marie 2012	Nonfiction American Lives
Coastal Carolina University	<i>A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention</i> Richtel, Matt 2014	Nonfiction Technology/Media Social Activism/ Humanitarianism

College of Charleston	<i>Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy</i> Watson, Bruce 2010	Nonfiction Racism Civil Rights <i>African American theme</i>
College of the Redwoods	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
College of William and Mary	<i>Island of the Colorblind</i> Sacks, Oliver 1997	Memoir Disability/Disease <i>Oceanian theme</i>
College of Wooster	<i>Purple Hibiscus</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2003	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Collin College	<i>The Dog Stars</i> Heller, Peter 2012	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Disability/Disease
Colorado College	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Colorado Mountain College	<i>Badluck Way: A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West</i> Andrews, Bryce 2014	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature
Columbia University	<i>The Iliad</i> Homer	Epic Poem War <i>European theme</i>
Community College of Baltimore County	<i>Prayers for the Stolen</i> Clement, Jennifer 2014	Novel Women Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
Concordia College	<i>Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China</i> Osnos, Evan 2014	Nonfiction China <i>East Asian theme</i>
Cornell University	<i>Slaughterhouse Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death</i> Vonnegut, Kurt 1969	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi War

Corning Community College	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Cosumnes River College	<i>Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States</i> Holmes, Seth M. 2013	Nonfiction Immigration Food <i>Latin American theme</i>
Cuesta College	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Cumberland University	<i>How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i> Bayoumi, Moustafa 2008	Biography Racism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Curry College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Cuyahoga Community College	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
Davenport University	<i>My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change</i> Bracken, Sam 2012	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Davidson College	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Duke University	<i>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</i> Bechdel, Alison 2006	Memoir Homosexuality Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Graphic</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
East Carolina University	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Eastern Illinois University	<i>Ties That Bind: Stories of Love and Gratitude from the First Ten Years of StoryCorps</i> Isay, Dave 2013	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Eastern Kentucky University	<i>Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age</i> Powers, William 2010	Memoir Technology/Media
Eastfield College	<i>The Maltese Falcon</i> Hammett, Dashiell 1929	Novel Crime and Punishment
Eckerd College	<i>Fire Shut Up in My Bones</i> Blow, Charles M. 2014	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Homosexuality <i>African American theme</i>
Edgewood College	<i>The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors</i> Mills, James, E. 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Elms College (College of Our Lady of the Elms)	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Elon University	<i>Why We Can't Wait</i> King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1964	Nonfiction Civil Rights Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African American theme</i>
Emmanuel College (Massachusetts)	<i>Against Football: A Reluctant Manifesto</i> Almond, Steve 2014	Nonfiction Sports
Endicott College	<i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i> Malcolm Gladwell 2008	Nonfiction Sociology
Eureka College	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Evergreen State College	<i>Thinking in an Emergency</i> Scarry, Elaine 1993	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality

Fairmont State University	<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2000	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>Graphic</i> <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Fashion Institute of Technology	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization Poverty
Fayetteville State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Florida Gulf Coast University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Florida International University	<i>The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood</i> Blanco, Richard 2014	Memoir Homosexuality Artistic Lives <i>Latin American theme</i>
Fort Lewis College	<i>Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism</i> Grandin, Temple 1995	Memoir Disability/Disease Environmentalism/Nature
Framingham State University	<i>In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex</i> Philbrick, Nathaniel 2000	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Adventure <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering	<i>Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation</i> Deci, Edward and Richard Flaste 1995	Nonfiction Psychology
George Mason University	<i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> Gaines, Ernest 1993	Novel Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Georgetown University	<i>Noontide Toll: Stories</i> Gunesequera, Romesh 2014	Short Stories War <i>South Asian theme</i>

Georgia College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Georgia Institute of Technology	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism
Georgia State University	<i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2006	Nonfiction Disability/Disease Medicine <i>European theme</i>
Goucher College	<i>The Power of Mindful Learning</i> Langer, Ellen 1997	Nonfiction Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
Grace College	<i>Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World</i> Bob Goff 2012	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Grand Valley State University	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Gustavus Adolphus College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Hamline University	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Animals
Hampshire College	<i>The Fire Next Time</i> Baldwin, James 1962	Nonfiction Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Hartwick College	<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Social Activism Environmentalism <i>African theme</i>
Henderson State University	<i>March: Book One</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>

Hesston College	<i>Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island</i> Calcaterra, Regina 2013	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
High Point University	<i>The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters</i> Moore, Wes 2015	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>
Hiram College	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Immigration Feminism <i>Latin American theme</i>
Hofstra University	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i> Parks, Suzan-Lori 2001	Play Family Dysfunction/Separation Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Holy Names University	<i>Dear Marcus: A Letter to the Man Who Shot Me</i> McGill, Jerry 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Disability/Disease <i>African American theme</i>
Hood College	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Technology/Media <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Humboldt State University	<i>The Yellow Birds</i> Powers, Kevin 2012	Novel War <i>Middle Eastern theme</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Illinois College	<i>Burning Bright: Stories</i> Rash, Ron 2010	Short Stories Poverty
Illinois Wesleyan University	<i>The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University</i> Roose, Kevin 2009	Memoir Education Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Indiana University East	<i>Positive</i> Rawl, Paige 2014	Memoir Disability/Disease <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Indiana University, Bloomington (Kelley School of Business)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi

Indiana University, Northwest	<i>Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families</i> Carroll, Andrew 2006	Nonfiction War <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Indiana University, Southeast	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Jacksonville University	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Johns Hopkins University	<i>The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2008	Memoir Poverty <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Johnson State College	<i>The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change</i> Braun, Adam 2014	Memoir Social Activism Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
Juniata College	<i>Little Brother</i> Doctorow, Cory 2008	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi War on Terror <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Kalamazoo College	<i>The Empathy Exams</i> Jamison, Leslie 2014	Nonfiction Medicine Psychology
Kansas State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Kent State University	<i>The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice</i> Ebrahim, Zak and Jeff Giles 2014	Memoir War on Terror Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Kingsborough Community College	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>

Lackawanna College	<i>Thirteen Reasons Why</i> Asher, Jay 2007	Novel Mental Health Crime and Punishment <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Lansing Community College	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Lasell College	<i>The Boston Globe (6 Month Subscription)</i> 2015	Newspaper Uncategorized
Le Moyne College	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> Douglass, Frederick 1845	Memoir Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Lehigh University	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Lehigh University	<i>The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive</i> Christian, Bryan 2011	Memoir Technology/Media
Linfield College	<i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Lock Haven University	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism
Lone Star College, Kingwood	<i>Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts</i> Tavris, Carol and Elliot Aronson 2007	Nonfiction Psychology
Louisiana Tech University	<i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i> Malcolm Gladwell 2008	Nonfiction Sociology
Loyola Marymount University	<i>Southland</i> Revoyr, Nina 2003	Novel Racism Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i> <i>Asian-American theme</i>

Loyola University, Chicago	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Luther College	<i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> Henriquez, Cristina 2014	Novel Immigration Disability/Disease <i>Latin American theme</i>
Lynchburg College	<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Racism Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Macalester College	<i>Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America's Children</i> Carr, Sarah 2013	Nonfiction Education Disaster in America <i>African American theme</i> <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Marietta College	<i>The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters</i> Moore, Wes 2015	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>
Marist College	<i>Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books</i> Nafisi, Azar 2003	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Women <i>Middle Eastern theme</i>
Marymount Manhattan College	<i>The Colossus of New York</i> Whitehead, Colson 2003	Nonfiction American Cities
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	<i>Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time</i> Speck, Jeff 2012	Nonfiction American Cities Environmentalism
MassBay Community College	<i>The Hanging Judge</i> Ponsor, Michael 2013	Novel Crime and Punishment <i>Latin American theme</i>
Meredith College	<i>A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School</i> Lanier, Carlotta Wells and Lisa Frazier Page 2009	Memoir Racism Civil Rights <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Metropolitan State University of Denver	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Miami University (Ohio)	<i>The 46 Rules of Genius: An Innovator's Guide to Creativity</i> Neumeier, Marty 2014	Nonfiction Innovation Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
Michigan State University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Michigan Technological University	<i>Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea</i> Demick, Barbara 2009	Nonfiction Oppressive Regimes <i>East Asian theme</i>
Middle Tennessee State University	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Millersville University	<i>Memory of Water: A Novel</i> Itäranta, Emmi 2014	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Environmentalism/Nature <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Minnesota State University, Mankato	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Mississippi State University	<i>Same Kind of Different as Me: A Modern-Day Slave, an International Art Dealer, and the Unlikely Woman Who Bound Them Together</i> Hall, Ron, Denver Moore, Lynn Vincent 2006	Memoir Poverty Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African American theme</i>
Missouri State University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Mitchell College	<i>Just Don't Fall – How I Grew Up, Conquered Illness and Made It Down the Mountain</i> Sundquist, Josh 2010	Memoir Disability/Disease Sports
Molloy College	<i>March: Book One</i> and <i>March: Book Two</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013-15	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Monroe Community College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Montana State University	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American theme</i>
Montclair State University	<i>Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock</i> Margolick, David 2011	Nonfiction Civil Rights Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Moraine Valley Community College	<i>Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant</i> N., José Ángel 2014	Memoir Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
Moravian College	<i>Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992</i> Smith, Anna Deveare 1994	Play Crime and Punishment American Cities <i>African American theme</i>
Mount Holyoke College	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Immigration Racism <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Mountainview College	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Immigration Feminism <i>Latin American theme</i>
Nassau Community College	<i>March: Book One</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
New College of Florida	<i>To the Mountaintop: My Journey Through the Civil Rights Movement</i> Hunter-Gault, Charlayne 2012	Memoir Civil Rights Racism <i>African American theme</i>

New York University (College of Arts and Science)	<i>Invisible Man</i> Ellison, Ralph 1952	Novel Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Norfolk State University	<i>The Fire Next Time</i> Baldwin, James 1962	Nonfiction Racism <i>African American theme</i>
North Carolina A&T State University	<i>Mens et Manus: A Pictorial History of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University</i> 2015	Nonfiction Education <i>African American theme</i>
North Carolina State University	<i>Stand Up That Mountain: The Battle to Save One Small Community in the Wilderness Along the Appalachian Trail</i> Leutze, Jay Erskine 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
North Central College	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Northeastern University	<i>From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant</i> Gilvarry, Alex 2012	Novel Immigration War on Terror <i>Asian-American theme</i>
Northern Arizona University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Northern Illinois University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Northern Kentucky University	<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Social Activism Environmentalism <i>African theme</i>
Northern State University (Honors Program)	<i>Without You, There Is No Us: My Time with the Sons of North Korea's Elite</i> Kim, Suki 2014	Memoir Oppressive Regimes <i>East Asian theme</i>

Northwestern University	<i>The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America</i> King, Thomas 2012	Nonfiction Racism <i>Native American theme</i>
Notre Dame of Maryland University	<i>Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital</i> Fink, Sheri 2013	Nonfiction Disaster in America Medicine <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Occidental College	<i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
Ohio State University	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Oklahoma City University	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Otterbein College	<i>Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work</i> Laskas, Jeanne Marie 2012	Nonfiction American Lives
Owensboro Community and Technical College	<i>A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c.</i> Manning, Maurice 2004	Poetry Environmentalism/Nature American Life
Owensboro Community and Technical College	<i>Orphan Train</i> Kline, Christina Baker 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Native American theme</i>
Pace University	<i>This I Believe: Life Lessons</i> Gediman, Dan and Mary Jo Gediman 2011	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>

Pacific Lutheran University	<i>Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster</i> Krakauer, Jon 1997	Memoir Disaster Sports
Parkland College	<i>Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work</i> Crawford, Matthew 2009	Memoir Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness Economics
Pellissippi State Community College	<i>The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America</i> Biggers, Jeff 2005	Nonfiction American Life
Pennsylvania State University, Abington	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Pennsylvania State University, Altoona	<i>The Art of Asking: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help</i> Palmer, Amanda 2014	Memoir Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
Pennsylvania State University, Berks	<i>What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20: A Crash Course on Making Your Place in the World</i> Seelig, Tina 2009	Nonfiction College Student Advice Entrepreneurship
Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism
Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington	<i>The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World</i> Gold, Russell 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Technology/Media
Pennsylvania State University, University Park	<i>The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World</i> Gold, Russell 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Technology/Media

Pomona College	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Professional Success <i>Latin American theme</i>
Princeton University	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Providence College	<i>Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do</i> Sandel, Michael J. 2009	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Queens University of Charlotte	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Queensborough Community College	<i>Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption</i> Thompson-Cannino, Jennifer, Ronald Cotton, Erin Torneo 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Ramapo College	<i>Deep Down Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle That Set Them Free</i> Tobar, Hector 2014	Nonfiction Disaster <i>Latin American theme</i>
Regis College, Boston	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
Rhode Island College	<i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> Diaz, Junot 2007	Novel Ethnic Identity Oppressive Regimes <i>Latin American theme</i>
Rice University	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Psychology Racism
Rockhurst University	<i>Becoming Human</i> Vanier, Jean 1999	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Disability/Disease
Rockhurst University	<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> Frankl, Viktor E. 1946	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>European theme</i>

Rockhurst University	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
Rocky Mountain College	<i>Badluck Way: A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West</i> Andrews, Bryce 2014	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature
Roger Williams University	<i>In the Shadow of the Banyan</i> Ratner, Vaddey 2010	Novel Oppressive Regimes <i>Southeast Asian theme</i>
Rollins College	<i>StrengthsQuest</i> Gallup, Inc. Annual edition	Nonfiction College Student Advice
Rowan University	<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Environmentalism
Rutgers University, School of Arts and Science Honors Program	<i>Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness</i> Kidder, Tracy 2000	Biography Genocide Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Sacred Heart University	<i>Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail</i> Strayed, Cheryl 2012	Memoir Environmentalism/Nature Adventure <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Saint Louis University	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
Saint Mary's College of California	<i>Breakfast with Buddha</i> Merullo, Roland 2007	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Saint Michael's College	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Disability/Disease
Salem State University	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Technology/Media <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

Salisbury University	<i>Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything</i> Foer, Joshua 2011	Memoir Psychology
Sam Houston State University	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
San Jose State University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Seton Hall University	<i>The Ledge</i> Davidson, Jim and Kevin Vaughan 2011	Memoir Adventure Death
Shepherd University	<i>Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other</i> Turkle, Sherry 2011	Nonfiction Technology/Media
Sierra Nevada College	<i>Refresh, Refresh</i> Novgorodoff, Danica, James Ponsoldt, Benjamin Percy 2009	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation War <i>Graphic</i> <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Skidmore College	<i>Einstein's Dreams</i> Lightman, Alan 1992	Novel Science
Smith College	<i>The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future</i> Oreskes, Naomi, Eric Conway 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
South Dakota State University (honors college)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Southern Methodist University	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Disability/Disease
Southern Utah University	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> Shakespeare, William 1623	Play Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>

Springfield College	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Poverty Disability/Disease <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult Novel</i>
St. Bonaventure University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
St. Cloud State University	<i>Oryx and Crake</i> Atwood, Margaret 2003	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Disability/Disease <i>Southeast Asian theme</i>
St. Edwards University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
St. John's University (New York)	<i>Humans of New York: Stories</i> Stanton, Brandon 2015	Nonfiction American Lives
Stanford University	<i>Cane River</i> Tademy, Lalita 2001	Novel Slavery Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Stanford University	<i>The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution</i> Isaacson, Walter 2014	Nonfiction Technology/Media Innovation
Stanford University	<i>This Boy's Life</i> Wolff, Tobias 1989	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
State University of New York, Brockport	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>A Sand County Almanac</i> Aldo, Leopold 1949	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh</i> Grant, Gerald 2011	Nonfiction American Cities Education <i>African American theme</i>

State University of New York, Cortland	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
State University of New York, Cortland	<i>This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate</i> Klein, Naomi 2014	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Economics
State University of New York, Fredonia	<i>House on Mango Street</i> Cisneros, Sandra 1984	Novel Ethnic Identity Women <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
State University of New York, New Paltz	<i>Letters of Note: An Eclectic Collection of Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience</i> Usher, Shaun 2013	Nonfiction Uncategorized
State University of New York, Old Westbury	<i>March: Book One and March: Book Two</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013-15	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
State University of New York, Oneonta	<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Exile/Emigration <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
State University of New York, Oswego	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Animals
State University of New York, University at Buffalo	<i>Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard</i> Murray, Liz 2010	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Tennessee Tech University	<i>The Start-up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself, and Transform Your Career</i> Hoffman, Reid, and Ben Casnocha 2012	Nonfiction Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness Entrepreneurship

Texas A&M University	<i>The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table</i> McMillan, Tracy 2012	Nonfiction Poverty Food
Texas Christian University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Texas State University	<i>And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (Y no se lo tragó la tierra)</i> Rivera, Tomás 1971	Short Stories Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
Texas Woman's University	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
The Citadel	<i>A Few Good Men</i> Sorkin, Aaron 1990	Play War Crime and Punishment <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
The College of New Jersey	<i>The Nature of College: How a New Understanding of Campus Life Can Change the World</i> Farrell, James J. 2010	Nonfiction Education Environmentalism/Nature
The College of Saint Scholastica	<i>Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People</i> Banaji, Mahzarin R. and Anthony G. Greenwald 2013	Nonfiction Psychology
The King's College	<i>The Fisherman and His Wife</i> Grimm Brothers, ed. 1812	Fairy Tale Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>European theme</i>
The King's College	<i>The Life and Diary of David Brainerd</i> Edwards, Jonathan, ed. 1749	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Thomas College	<i>Dear Marcus: A Letter to the Man Who Shot Me</i> McGill, Jerry 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Disability/Disease <i>African American theme</i>

Trinity University	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
Troy University	<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Exile/Emigration African theme Protagonist Under 18
Tufts University	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism Muslim-American theme
Tulane University	<i>Men We Reaped</i> Ward, Jesmyn 2013	Memoir Poverty Racism African American theme
University of Akron	<i>Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction</i> Sheff, David 2008	Memoir Drug Addiction Family Dysfunction/Separation
University of Alabama, Birmingham	<i>The Chimp and the River: How AIDS Emerged from an African Forest</i> Quammen, David 2015	Nonfiction Medicine Environmentalism/Nature African theme
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<i>Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel</i> Ford, Jamie 2009	Novel Exile/Emigration War Asian American theme
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Racism Family Dysfunction/Separation African American theme
University of Arkansas	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports Muslim-American theme
University of California, Los Angeles	<i>Bad Feminist</i> Gay, Roxane 2014	Nonfiction Feminism African American theme

University of California, Merced	<i>Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm</i> Masumoto, David Mas 1995	Memoir Food <i>Asian-American theme</i>
University of California, Santa Barbara	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Central Florida	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of Cincinnati	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of Connecticut	<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> Alexander, Michelle 2009	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Delaware	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Florida	<i>Double Take: A Memoir</i> Connolly, Kevin Michael 2009	Memoir Disability/Disease Sports
University of Houston, Downtown	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Immigration Feminism <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Houston, Victoria	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i> Bradbury, Ray 1953	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Censorship <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Idaho	<i>All the Light We Cannot See</i> Doerr, Anthony 2014	Novel War Oppressive Regimes <i>European theme</i>
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

University of Iowa	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Kansas	<i>A Farewell to Arms</i> Hemingway, Ernest 1929	Novel War <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Kentucky	<i>Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption</i> Thompson-Cannino, Jennifer, Ronald Cotton, Erin Torneo 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of La Verne	<i>A Conservationist Manifesto</i> Sanders, Scott Russell 2009	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
University of Louisiana, Monroe	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
University of Louisville	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR</i>
University of Maine (honors college)	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> Ishiguro, Kazuo 2005	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Medicine <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Maryland, Baltimore County	<i>An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness</i> Jamison, Kay 1995	Memoir Mental Health
University of Maryland, College Park	<i>Head Off & Split and "The Battle of and for the Black Face Boy"</i> Finney, Nikky 2011/2015	Poetry Ethnic Identity Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Massachusetts, Amherst	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>Muslim-American theme</i>
University of Michigan, Flint	<i>Dead Man Walking</i> Prejean, Helen 1994	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Film/Television version exists</i>

University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development	<i>Rez Life</i> Treuer, David 2012	Nonfiction Poverty Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
University of Mississippi	<i>The Education of a Lifetime</i> Khayat, Robert 2013	Memoir Education Sports
University of Montana, Missoula	<i>The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival</i> Vaillant, John 2010	Nonfiction Environmentalism/Nature
University of Mount Olive	<i>A Home on the Field: How One Championship Soccer Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America</i> Cuadros, Paul 2006	Memoir Immigration Sports <i>Latin American</i>
University of Mount Union	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of New Haven	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Science Medicine <i>African American</i>
University of New Mexico	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of New Orleans	<i>Aunt Alice vs. Bob Marley: My Education in New Orleans</i> Kennedy, Kareem 2010	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Charlotte	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Mortality
University of North Carolina, Greensboro	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization Poverty

University of North Carolina, Pembroke	<i>Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption</i> Thompson-Cannino, Jennifer, Ronald Cotton, Erin Torneo 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Wilmington	<i>Chasing Chaos: My Decade In and Out of Humanitarian Aid</i> Alexander, Jessica 2013	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
University of Northern Iowa	<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
University of Oregon	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Disability/Disease
University of Pennsylvania	<i>The Big Sea</i> Hughes, Langston 1940	Memoir Artistic Life Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Rhode Island	<i>Mindset: The New Psychology of Success</i> Dweck, Carol 2006	Nonfiction Psychology Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness
University of Richmond	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Alabama	<i>Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement that Changed America</i> Gaillard, Frye 2004	Nonfiction Civil Rights <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Carolina	<i>Where'd You Go, Bernadette</i> Semple, Maria 2012	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Mental Health <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of South Carolina, Aiken	<i>The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir</i> Rodriguez, Gaby 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of South Carolina, Upstate	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

University of South Florida	<i>The Complete Persepolis</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2007	Memoir Oppressive Regimes Exile/Emigration <i>Graphic</i> <i>Islamic World theme</i>
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	<i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> Henriquez, Cristina 2014	Novel Immigration Disability/Disease <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Vermont	<i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i> Fadiman, Anne 1997	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity Medicine <i>Asian American theme</i>
University of Virginia (School of Engineering & Applied Science)	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Technology/Media <i>Latin American Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of Wisconsin, Madison	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	<i>Meet Me Halfway - Milwaukee Stories</i> Morales, Jennifer 2015	Short Stories American Cities Ethnic Identity <i>African American theme</i>
University of Wisconsin, Whitewater (University Honors Program)	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Utah State University	<i>The Emerald Mile: The Epic Story of the Fastest Ride in History Through the Heart of the Grand Canyon</i> Fedarko, Kevin 2013	Memoir Adventure Environmentalism/Nature

Utah Valley University	<i>The Dressmaker of Khair Khana: Five Sisters, One Remarkable Family, and the Woman Who Risked Everything to Keep Them Safe</i> Lemmon, Gayle Tzemach 2011	Biography Oppressive Regimes Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Vanderbilt University	<i>The Madonnas of Echo Park</i> Skyhorse, Brando 2010	Novel Ethnic Identity <i>Latin American theme</i>
Vassar College	<i>Guantánamo Diary</i> Slahi, Mohamedou Ould 2015	Memoir War on Terror <i>Middle Eastern theme</i>
Ventura College	<i>Always Running: La Vida Loca</i> Rodriguez, Luis J. 1993	Memoir Crime and Punishment Ethnic Identity <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Villanova University	<i>The Distance Between Us</i> Grande, Reyna 2012	Memoir Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
Virginia Commonwealth University	<i>The Secret History of Wonder Woman</i> Lepore, Jill 2014	Nonfiction Feminism Family Dysfunction/Separation
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	<i>The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL</i> Greitens, Eric 2011	Memoir Social Activism War
Wake Forest University	<i>A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League</i> Suskind, Ron 1998	Nonfiction Poverty Education <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Wallace State Community College	<i>Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard</i> Murray, Liz 2010	Memoir Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Wartburg College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Washburn University	<i>March: Book One</i> and <i>March: Book Two</i> John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013-15	Memoir Civil Rights <i>Graphic</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Washington State University	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Washington University in St. Louis	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Racism <i>African American theme</i>
Webster University	<i>Readings for Diversity and Social Justice (Third Edition)</i> Adams, Maurianne, et al. 2013	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Wentworth Institute of Technology	<i>White Girls</i> Als, Hilton 2013	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity Homosexuality <i>African American theme</i>
West Virginia University	<i>World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War</i> Brooks, Max 2006	Novel Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi <i>Film/Television version exists</i>
Westchester Community College	<i>Double Take: A Memoir</i> Connolly, Kevin Michael 2009	Memoir Disability/Disease Sports
Western Carolina University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Western Michigan University	<i>Maus I</i> Spiegelman, Art 1986	Biography Oppressive Regimes Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Graphic</i> <i>European theme</i>
Western New England University	<i>The Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore</i> Sloan, Robin 2012	Novel Technology/Media
Western Washington University	<i>Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists</i> Martin, Courtney 2010	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism

Westfield State University	<i>The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates</i> Waal, Frans de 2013	Nonfiction Science Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Westminster College (honors program)	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Whitman College	<i>Brother, I'm Dying</i> Danticat, Edwidge 2007	Memoir Immigration Oppressive Regimes <i>African Diaspora theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
William Paterson University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
William Peace University	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization Poverty
Williams College	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Wingate University	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Immigration Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Winona State University	<i>American Born Chinese</i> Yang, Gene Luen 2008	Short Stories Immigration Ethnic Identity <i>Graphic</i> <i>Asian-American theme</i>
Winthrop University	<i>The Glass Castle: A Memoir</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
Wittenberg University	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

Wofford College	<i>Sparta</i> Robinson, Roxana 2013	Novel War Disability/Disease <i>Iraq War theme</i>
Wright State University	<i>The Cellist of Sarajevo</i> Galloway, Steven 2008	Novel War Music <i>European theme</i>
Xavier University of Louisiana	<i>Salvage the Bones</i> Ward, Jesmyn 2010	Novel Disaster in America Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i> <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i>
Young Harris College	<i>The Family Fang</i> Wilson, Kevin 2011	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation Artistic Lives

APPENDIX III: TITLES BY SUBJECT CATEGORY, 2014-2015 AND 2015-2016

Adventure

A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean (2014-15)

In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex (2015-16)

Into the Wild (2014-15)

The Emerald Mile: The Epic Story of the Fastest Ride in History Through the Heart of the Grand Canyon (2015-16)

The Ledge (2015-16)

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail (2015-16)

American Cities

Crow Planet: Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness (2014-15)

For the Love of Cities: The Love Affair Between People and Their Places (2014-15)

Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh (2015-16)

Meet Me Halfway - Milwaukee Stories (2015-16)

The Colossus of New York (2015-16)

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 (2015-16)

Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time (2014-15, 2015-16)

American Lives

A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c. (2015-16)

Class Matters (2014-15)

Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work (2015-16)

Humans of New York: Stories (2015-16)

Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project (2014-15)

Now You See It...Stories from Cokesville, PA (2014-15)

The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America (2015-16)

Animals/Environmentalism/Nature

A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c. (2015-16)

A Conservationist Manifesto (2015-16)



- A Sand County Almanac* (2015-16)
- Badluck Way: A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West* (2015-16)
- Bottlemania: Big Business, Local Springs, and the Battle Over America's Drinking Water* Cabin
- Crow Planet: Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness* (2014-15)
- Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2014-15)
- Fever: A Suburban Father's Search for the Wild* (2014-15)
- Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World* (2014-15)
- Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats* (2014-15)
- Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash* (2014-15, 2015-16)
- Global Weirdness: Severe Storms, Deadly Heat Waves, Relentless Drought, Rising Seas, and the Weather of the Future* (2014-15)
- He, She, and It* (2015-16)
- Ingenious: A True Story of Invention, Automotive Daring and the Race to Revive America* (2014-15)
- In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (2015-16)
- Memory of Water: A Novel* (2015-16)
- No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process* (2014-15)
- Not a Drop to Drink* (2014-15)
- Physics for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines* (2014-15)
- Serena* (2014-15)
- Stand Up That Mountain: The Battle to Save One Small Community in the Wilderness Along the Appalachian Trail* (2015-16)
- Strange as this Weather Has Been: A Novel* (2015-16)
- The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors* (2015-16)
- The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2013* (2014-15)
- The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America* (2014-15)
- The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World* (2015-16)
- The Chimp and the River: How AIDS Emerged from an African Forest* (2015-16)
- The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (2015-16)
- The Emerald Mile: The Epic Story of the Fastest Ride in History Through the Heart of the Grand Canyon* (2015-16)
- The Nature of College: How a New Understanding of Campus Life Can Change the World* (2015-16)
- The Odyssey of KP2: An Orphan Seal and a Marine Biologist's Fight to Save a Species* (2014-15)
- The Price of Justice: A True Story of Greed and Corruption* (2014-15)
- The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2015-16)

The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival (2015-16)

The West Without Water: What Past Floods, Droughts, and Other Climatic Clues Tell Us About Tomorrow (2014-15)

Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism (2015-16)

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate (2015-16)

Waldron Island Reflections (2014-15)

Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time (2014-15, 2015-16)

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves (2014-15, 2015-16)

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail (2015-16)

Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World (2014-15, 2015-16)

World Made by Hand (2014-15)

Zoobiquity: The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health (2014-15)

Artistic Lives

Just Kids (2014-15)

The Big Sea (2015-16)

The Family Fang (2015-16)

The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood (2015-16)

Censorship/Oppressive Regimes

1984 (2014-15)

Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China (2015-16)

All the Light We Cannot See (2015-16)

Between Shades of Gray (2015-16)

Brave New World (2014-15)

Brother, I'm Dying (2015-16)

China in Ten Words (2014-15)

Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West (2014-15)

Fahrenheit 451 (2014-15, 2015-16)

God's Double Agent: The True Story of a Chinese Christian's Fight for Freedom (2014-15)

In the Sea There Are Crocodiles (2015-16)

In the Shadow of the Banyan (2015-16)

Man's Search for Meaning (2014-15, 2015-16)

Maus I (2015-16)

Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea (2015-16)

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2014-15, 2015-16)

Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books (2015-16)

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2015-16)

The Complete Persepolis (2015-16)

The Dressmaker of Khair Khana: Five Sisters, One Remarkable Family, and the Woman Who Risked Everything to Keep Them Safe (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Kite Runner (2014-15)

The Orphan Master's Son (2014-15)

The Power and the Glory (2014-15)

Without You, There Is No Us: My Time with the Sons of North Korea's Elite (2015-16)

Civil Rights

A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School (2014-15, 2015-16)

Coming of Age in Mississippi (2014-15)

Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights (2014-15)

Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement that Changed America (2015-16)

Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock (2015-16)

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965 (2014-15)

Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy (2014-15, 2015-16)

March: Book One (2014-15, 2015-16)

March: Book Two (2015-16)

The Speech: The Story Behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream (2014-15)

To the Mountaintop: My Journey Through the Civil Rights Movement (2015-16)

Why We Can't Wait (2015-16)

College Student Advice

About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students (2014-15, 2015-16)

Even Artichokes Have Doubts (2015-16)

StrengthsQuest (2015-16)

What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20: A Crash Course on Making Your Place in the World (2015-16)

What the Best College Students Do (2014-15)

Crime and Punishment

A Few Good Men (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Lesson Before Dying (2014-15, 2015-16)



Always Running: La Vida Loca (2015-16)

Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong (2014-15)

Dead Man Walking (2014-15, 2015-16)

Dear Marcus: A Letter to the Man Who Shot Me (2015-16)

In the Sanctuary of Outcasts (2014-15)

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption (2015-16)

Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison (2014-15, 2015-16)

Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption (2014-15, 2015-16)

Southland (2015-16)

Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Hanging Judge (2015-16)

The Maltese Falcon (2015-16)

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Price of Justice: A True Story of Greed and Corruption (2014-15)

The Round House (2014-15)

The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas (2015-16)

Thirteen Reasons Why (2015-16)

Topdog/Underdog (2015-16)

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 (2015-16)

Weed Land: Inside America's Marijuana Epicenter and How Pot Went Legit (2015-16)

Zeitoun (2014-15)

Death/Mortality

Daytripper (2014-15)

Frankenstein (2014-15)

The Last Lecture (2014-15)

The Ledge (2015-16)

The Postmortal (2014-15, 2015-16)

Until I Say Goodbye: My Year of Living with Joy (2014-15)

Disability/Disease

Becoming Human (2015-16)

Cockeyed: A Memoir of Blindness (2014-15)

Dear Marcus: A Letter to the Man Who Shot Me (2015-16)

Double Take: A Memoir (2015-16)
In the Sanctuary of Outcasts (2014-15)
Island of the Colorblind (2015-16)
Just Don't Fall – How I Grew Up, Conquered Illness and Made It Down the Mountain (2014-15, 2015-16)
Little Failure: A Memoir (2014-15)
No Turning Back: One Man's Inspiring True Story of Courage, Determination, and Hope (2014-15)
Oryx and Crake (2015-16)
Positive (2015-16)
Radium Girls (2014-15)
Sparta (2015-16)
Station Eleven (2015-16)
Stronger (2015-16)
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2014-15, 2015-16)
The Book of Unknown Americans (2015-16)
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2014-15, 2015-16)
The Death of Ivan Ilyich (2014-15)
The Dog Stars (2015-16)
The Fault in Our Stars (2014-15)
The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World (2014-15, 2015-16)
The Invisible Girls (2014-15)
The Last Lecture (2014-15)
The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal (2014-15)
Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism (2015-16)
Until I Say Goodbye: My Year of Living with Joy (2014-15)

Disaster Abroad

Deep Down Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle That Set Them Free (2015-16)
Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster (2015-16)
The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster (2015-16)

Disaster in America

- Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital* (2014-15, 2015-16)
Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America's Children (2014-15, 2015-16)
One Amazing Thing (2014-15)
Salvage the Bones (2014-15, 2015-16)
The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America (2014-15)
Zeitoun (2014-15)

Drugs/Poverty

- A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* (2015-16)
An Invisible Thread: The True Story of an 11-Year-Old Panhandler, a Busy Sales Executive, and an Unlikely Meeting with Destiny (2014-15)
Aunt Alice vs. Bob Marley: My Education in New Orleans (2015-16)
Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction (2015-16)
Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity (2014-15)
Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard (2014-15, 2015-16)
Burning Bright: Stories (2015-16)
Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island (2015-16)
Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America (2014-15)
Men We Reaped (2015-16)
My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change (2015-16)
Rez Life (2015-16)
Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets (2014-15)
Same Kind of Different as Me: A Modern-Day Slave, an International Art Dealer, and the Unlikely Woman Who Bound Them Together (2015-16)
Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives (2014-15)
Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream (2014-15)
Sonny's Blues (2014-15)
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2014-15, 2015-16)
The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table (2014-15, 2015-16)
The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood (2015-16)
The Center of Everything (2014-15)
The Glass Castle: A Memoir (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates (2014-15, 2015-16)

Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes (2014-15, 2015-16)

Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi

1984 (2014-15)

Brave New World (2014-15)

Fahrenheit 451 (2014-15, 2015-16)

Frankenstein (2014-15)

Every Day (2015-16)

He, She, and It (2015-16)

Little Brother (2015-16)

Machine Man (2014-15)

Memory of Water: A Novel (2015-16)

Never Let Me Go (2015-16)

Not a Drop to Drink (2014-15)

Oryx and Crake (2015-16)

Ready Player One (2014-15, 2015-16)

Slaughterhouse Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death (2015-16)

Station Eleven (2015-16)

The Circle (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Dog Stars (2015-16)

The Illustrated Man (2014-15)

The Postmortal (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling (2014-15)

World Made by Hand (2014-15)

World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War (2014-15, 2015-16)

Economics

Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future (2015-16)

Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work (2015-16)

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate (2015-16)

What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets (2014-15)

Education

- A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* (2015-16)
- Hope Against Hope: Three Schools, One City, and the Struggle to Educate America's Children* (2014-15, 2015-16)
- Hope and Despair in the American City: Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh* (2015-16)
- I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2014-15, 2015-16)
- Mens et Manus: A Pictorial History of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University* (2015-16)
- My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* (2014-15)
- The Education of a Lifetime* (2015-16)
- The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to Be an Educated Human Being (Selections)* (2014-15, 2015-16)
- The Nature of College: How a New Understanding of Campus Life Can Change the World* (2015-16)
- The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University* (2015-16)
- Walk in Their Shoes: Can One Person Change the World?* (2014-15)

Entrepreneurship

- How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2014-15)
- Start Something That Matters* (2014-15)
- The Start-up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself, and Transform Your Career* (2015-16)
- What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20: A Crash Course on Making Your Place in the World* (2015-16)

Ethnic Identity

- Always Running: La Vida Loca* (2015-16)
- American Born Chinese* (2015-16)
- Blasphemy: New and Collected Stories* (2014-15)
- Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* (2014-15)
- Head Off & Split and "The Battle of and for the Black Face Boy"* (2015-16)
- House on Mango Street* (2015-16)
- Meet Me Halfway - Milwaukee Stories* (2015-16)
- Monstress: Stories* (2014-15)
- Reservation Blues* (2014-15)
- Rez Life* (2015-16)
- The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2015-16)
- The Madonnas of Echo Park* (2014-15, 2015-16)
- The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the*

Collision of Two Cultures (2014-15, 2015-16)

War Dances (2014-15)

White Girls (2015-16)

Etiquette

Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct (2014-15)

Exile/Emigration

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Tale for the Time Being (2014-15, 2015-16)

Between Shades of Gray (2015-16)

Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West (2014-15)

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel (2015-16)

In the Sea There Are Crocodiles (2015-16)

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Complete Persepolis (2015-16)

When the Emperor Was Divine (2014-15)

Family Dysfunction/Separation

A Parchment of Leaves (2014-15)

Aunt Alice vs. Bob Marley: My Education in New Orleans (2015-16)

Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction (2015-16)

Being Flynn (Another Bullshit Night in Suck City) (2014-15)

Big Fish (2014-15)

Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard (2014-15, 2015-16)

Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother (2014-15, 2015-16)

Etched in Sand: A True Story of Five Siblings Who Survived an Unspeakable Childhood on Long Island (2015-16)

Fire Shut Up in My Bones (2015-16)

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2014-15, 2015-16)

Hamlet (2014-15)

Hope's Boy (2014-15)

Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal (2014-15)

Maus I (2015-16)

My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change (2015-16)

Not My Father's Son: A Memoir (2015-16)

Orphan Train (2014-15, 2015-16)

Prayers for the Stolen (2015-16)

Purple Hibiscus (2015-16)

Refresh, Refresh (2015-16)

Runaway Girl: Escaping Life on the Streets (2014-15)

Salvage the Bones (2014-15, 2015-16)

Serena (2014-15)

The Center of Everything (2014-15)

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother (2015-16)

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Distance Between Us (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Family Fang (2015-16)

The Glass Castle: A Memoir (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir (2015-16)

The Secret History of Wonder Woman (2015-16)

The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice (2015-16)

This Boy's Life (2015-16)

Topdog/Underdog (2015-16)

Twelfth Night (2014-15)

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves (2014-15, 2015-16)

We Need New Names (2014-15)

Where'd You Go, Bernadette (2015-16)

Feminism/Sex Discrimination

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power (2014-15)

Bad Feminist (2015-16)

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide (2014-15)

Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years (2014-15)

Into the Beautiful North (2015-16)

The Invention of Wings (2014-15)

The Secret History of Wonder Woman (2015-16)

Food/Hunger

Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation (2014-15)

Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm (2015-16)

Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World (2014-15)

Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States (2015-16)

Life of Pi (2014-15)

My Year of Meats (2014-15)

Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us about Sex, Diet, and How We Live (2014-15)

Relish: My Life in the Kitchen (2014-15)

Stealing Buddha's Dinner (2014-15)

The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals (2014-15)

The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement (2014-15)

Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food (2014-15)

Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy (2014-15)

Genocide

Running the Rift (2014-15)

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness (2014-15, 2015-16)

Globalization

Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy (2014-15)

Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes (2014-15, 2015-16)

Homosexuality

Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights (2014-15)

Fire Shut Up in My Bones (2015-16)

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic (2014-15, 2015-16)

Just Kids (2014-15)

The Laramie Project (2014-15)

The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood (2015-16)

The Song of Achilles (2014-15)

White Girls (2015-16)

Immigration

A Home on the Field: How One Championship Soccer Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America (2015-16)

All Our Names (2014-15)

Americanah (2014-15, 2015-16)

American Born Chinese (2015-16)

And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (Y no se lo tragó la tierra) (2015-16)

Blue Hole Back Home (2014-15)

Brother, I'm Dying (2015-16)

Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio (2014-15)

Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother (2014-15, 2015-16)

Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States (2015-16)

From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant (2015-16)

Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America (2015-16)

Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant (2015-16)

Into the Beautiful North (2014-15, 2015-16)

Little Failure: A Memoir (2014-15)

Monstress: Stories (2014-15)

Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference (2014-15, 2015-16)

Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games (2014-15)

Shanghai Girls (2014-15)

Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream (2015-16)

Stealing Buddha's Dinner (2014-15)

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Book of Unknown Americans (2015-16)

The Buddha in the Attic (2014-15)

The Distance Between Us (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Invisible Girls (2014-15)

The Kite Runner (2014-15)

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2014-15)

They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan (2014-15)

This Is Our Story (2014-15)

We Need New Names (2014-15)

Innovation/Media/Technology

A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention (2015-16)

Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other (2015-16)

Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom (2015-16)

Geek Sublime: The Beauty of Code, the Code of Beauty (2015-16)

Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age (2014-15, 2015-16)

Ingenious: A True Story of Invention, Automotive Daring and the Race to Revive America (2014-15)

Instant: The Story of Polaroid (2014-15)

It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens (2014-15)

Machine Man (2014-15)

My Year of Meats (2014-15)

Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change (2014-15)

Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World (2014-15)

Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream (2015-16)

The 46 Rules of Genius: An Innovator's Guide to Creativity (2015-16)

The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World (2015-16)

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope (2014-15)

The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You (2014-15)

The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media (2014-15)

The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution (2015-16)

The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive (2015-16)

The Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains (2014-15)

The Shadow Factory: The NSA from 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America (2014-15)

The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling (2014-15)

Internment

When the Emperor Was Divine (2014-15)

Medicine

Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital (2014-15, 2015-16)

God's Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine (2015-16)

Josie's Story: A Mother's Inspiring Crusade to Make Medical Care Safe (2014-15, 2015-16)

Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years With a Midwife in Mali (2014-15)

Never Let Me Go (2015-16)

Regeneration (2014-15)

The Chimp and the River: How AIDS Emerged from an African Forest (2015-16)

The Demon in the Freezer: A True Story (2015-16)

The Empathy Exams (2015-16)

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World (2014-15)

The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Personalized Medicine (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Remedy: Robert Koch, Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Quest to Cure Tuberculosis (2014-15)

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures (2014-15, 2015-16)

Weed Land: Inside America's Marijuana Epicenter and How Pot Went Legit (2015-16)

Mental Health

An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness (2015-16)

Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness (2014-15)

Hope's Boy (2014-15)

Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain (2014-15)

Saddle Up, Charlie: Charlie Wysocki's Journey From Gridiron Glory Into Mental Illness (2014-15)

The Emotional Life of Your Brain (2014-15)

The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music (2015-16)

Thirteen Reasons Why (2015-16)

Where'd You Go, Bernadette (2015-16)

Music

Clapton's Guitar: Watching Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument (2014-15)

Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain (2014-15)

Reservation Blues (2014-15)

The Cellist of Sarajevo (2015-16)

Waldron Island Reflections (2014-15)

Professional Success

My Beloved World (2014-15, 2015-16)

Psychology

Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People (2014-15, 2015-16)

Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work (2014-15)

Happier (2014-15)

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (2014-15, 2015-16)

Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts (2014-15, 2015-16)

Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything (2015-16)

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking (2014-15)

Scarcity: The New Science of Having Less and How It Defines Our Lives (2014-15)

The Empathy Exams (2015-16)

The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times (2014-15)

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business (2014-15)

The Road to Character (2015-16)

Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us (2014-15, 2015-16)

Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation (2015-16)

Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help

The 46 Rules of Genius: An Innovator's Guide to Creativity (2015-16)

Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work (2014-15)

Hamlet's BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age (2014-15)

Happier (2014-15)

How Full Is Your Bucket? (2014-15)

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (2014-15, 2015-16)

Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work (2015-16)

The 5 Elements of Effective Thinking (2014-15)

The Art of Asking: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help (2015-16)

The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Power of Mindful Learning (2015-16)

The Road to Character (2015-16)

The Start-up of You: Adapt to the Future, Invest in Yourself, and Transform Your Career (2015-16)

Racism

Americanah (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Parchment of Leaves (2014-15)

Cane River (2015-16)

Citizen: An American Lyric (2015-16)

Coming of Age in Mississippi (2014-15)

Elizabeth and Hazel: Two Women of Little Rock (2015-16)

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965 (2014-15)

Fear and What Follows: The Violent Education of a Christian Racist (2014-15)

Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy (2014-15, 2015-16)

Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years (2014-15)

Head Off & Split and "The Battle of and for the Black Face Boy" (2015-16)

How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America (2014-15, 2015-16)

How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America (2015-16)

I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (2014-15)

Invisible Man (2015-16)

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption (2015-16)

Men We Reaped (2015-16)

Night Talk (2014-15)

Playing the Enemy [Invictus]: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation (2014-15)

Sonny's Blues (2014-15)

Southland (2015-16)

The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors (2015-16)

The Big Sea (2015-16)

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother (2015-16)

The Fire Next Time (2015-16)

The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America (2015-16)

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Round House (2014-15)

The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music (2015-16)

The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas (2015-16)

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration (2014-15)

To the Mountaintop: My Journey Through the Civil Rights Movement (2015-16)

Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us (2014-15, 2015-16)

Religion/Philosophy/Spirituality

About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students (2014-15, 2015-16)

Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Land More Kind Than Home (2014-15)

A Lesson Before Dying (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Tale for the Time Being (2014-15, 2015-16)

Becoming Human (2015-16)

Breakfast with Buddha (2015-16)

Dead Man Walking (2014-15, 2015-16)

Geek Sublime: The Beauty of Code, the Code of Beauty (2015-16)

God's Double Agent: The True Story of a Chinese Christian's Fight for Freedom (2014-15)

Inherit the Wind (2014-15)

Into the Wild (2014-15)

Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do (2014-15, 2015-16)

Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World (2015-16)

Man's Search for Meaning (2014-15, 2015-16)

Meaning in Life and Why It Matters (2014-15)

Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality (2015-16)

Purple Hibiscus (2015-16)

Same Kind of Different as Me: A Modern-Day Slave, an International Art Dealer, and the Unlikely Woman Who Bound Them Together (2015-16)

Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates (2015-16)

The Death of Ivan Ilyich (2014-15)

The Fisherman and His Wife (2015-16)

The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen (2014-15)

The Life and Diary of David Brainerd (2015-16)

The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist (2015-16)

The Power and the Glory (2014-15)

The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness (2015-16)

The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University (2015-16)

Thinking in an Emergency (2015-16)

This I Believe: Life Lessons (2014-15, 2015-16)

This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women (2014-15, 2015-16)



This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women (2014-15, 2015-16)

This Is Water (2014-15)

Ties That Bind: Stories of Love and Gratitude from the First Ten Years of StoryCorps (2014-15, 2015-16)

Why We Can't Wait (2015-16)

Science

Einstein's Dreams (2015-16)

Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think About Our Lives (2014-15)

Ignorance: How It Drives Science (2014-15)

Inherit the Wind (2014-15)

Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us about Sex, Diet, and How We Live (2014-15)

Physics for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines (2014-15)

Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout (2014-15)

Radium Girls (2014-15)

The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2013 (2014-15)

The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates (2015-16)

The Emotional Life of Your Brain (2014-15)

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Language of Life: DNA and the Revolution in Personalized Medicine (2014-15)

Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food (2014-15)

What Should We Be Worried About?: Real Scenarios That Keep Scientists Up at Night (2014-15)

Zoobiquity: The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health (2014-15)

Slavery

A Crime So Monstrous: Face-to-Face with Modern-Day Slavery (2015-16)

Cane River (2015-16)

Kindred (2014-15)

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Good Lord Bird (2014-15)

The Invention of Wings (2014-15)

This Is Our Story (2014-15)

Twelve Years a Slave (2014-15)

Social Activism/Humanitarianism

A Conservationist Manifesto (2015-16)

Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation (2014-15, 2015-16)

A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention (2015-16)

Chasing Chaos: My Decade In and Out of Humanitarian Aid (2015-16)

Do It Anyway: The New Generation of Activists (2015-16)

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide (2014-15)

Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal (2014-15)

Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World (2015-16)

Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years With a Midwife in Mali (2014-15)

On That Day, Everybody Ate: One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti (2014-15)

Photography as Activism: Images for Social Change (2014-15)

Readings for Diversity and Social Justice (Third Edition) (2015-16)

Stand Up That Mountain: The Battle to Save One Small Community in the Wilderness Along the Appalachian Trail (2015-16)

Start Something That Matters (2014-15)

The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster (2015-16)

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope (2014-15)

The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement (2014-15)

The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters (2015-16)

Walk in Their Shoes: Can One Person Change the World? (2014-15)

Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World (2014-15, 2015-16)

Sociology

In the Neighborhood: The Search for Community on an American Street, One Sleepover at a Time (2014-15)

Outliers: The Story of Success (2014-15, 2015-16)

Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World (2014-15)

The Pleasures of Reading in the Age of Distraction (2015-16)

Sports

Against Football: A Reluctant Manifesto (2015-16)

A Home on the Field: How One Championship Soccer Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America (2015-16)

All American: Two Young Men, the 2001 Army-Navy Game and the War They Fought in Iraq (2014-15)

Double Take: A Memoir (2015-16)

I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (2014-15)

Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster (2015-16)

Just Don't Fall – How I Grew Up, Conquered Illness and Made It Down the Mountain (2014-15, 2015-16)

Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference (2014-15, 2015-16)

Playing the Enemy [Invictus]: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation (2014-15)

Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games (2014-15)

Running the Rift (2014-15)

Saddle Up, Charlie: Charlie Wysocki's Journey From Gridiron Glory Into Mental Illness (2014-15)

The Education of a Lifetime (2015-16)

The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics (2014-15, 2015-16)

War

A Farewell to Arms (2015-16)

A Few Good Men (2014-15, 2015-16)

All American: Two Young Men, the 2001 Army-Navy Game and the War They Fought in Iraq (2014-15)

All the Light We Cannot See (2015-16)

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (2014-15, 2015-16)

Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War (2014-15)

Here, Bullet (2014-15)

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel (2015-16)

Noontide Toll: Stories (2015-16)

No Turning Back: One Man's Inspiring True Story of Courage, Determination, and Hope (2014-15)

Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families (2015-16)

Refresh, Refresh (2015-16)

Regeneration (2014-15)

Slaughterhouse Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death (2015-16)

Sparta (2015-16)

Thank You for Your Service (2014-15)

The Cellist of Sarajevo (2015-16)

The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II (2014-15)

The Good Soldiers (2014-15)

The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Iliad (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Song of Achilles (2014-15)

The Things They Carried (2014-15, 2015-16)

The Yellow Birds (2014-15, 2015-16)

They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan (2014-15)

What It Is Like to Go to War (2014-15)

War on Terror

From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant (2015-16)

Guantánamo Diary (2015-16)

Little Brother (2015-16)

Stronger (2015-16)

The Demon in the Freezer: A True Story (2015-16)

The Shadow Factory: The NSA from 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America (2014-15)

The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice (2015-16)

Women

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power (2014-15)

A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean (2014-15)

House on Mango Street (2015-16)

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban (2014-15, 2015-16)

Into the Beautiful North (2014-15)

Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Woman's Prison (2014-15, 2015-16)

Prayers for the Stolen (2015-16)

Shanghai Girls (2014-15)

Into the Beautiful North (2014-15)

Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books (2015-16)



The Buddha in the Attic (2014-15)

The Dressmaker of Khair Khana: Five Sisters, One Remarkable Family, and the Woman Who Risked Everything to Keep Them Safe (2014-15, 2015-16)

Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie, A Tale of Love and Fallout (2014-15)

The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II (2014-15)

The Taming of the Shrew (2015-16)

APPENDIX IV: RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR COLLEGE COMMON READING PROGRAMS

This appendix contains four sections. The first two consist of 80 books the NAS recommends unreservedly for colleges and universities with common reading programs. The first section contains 60 books appropriate in level of difficulty and length for any college freshman. The second section contains 20 more ambitious choices either because of length (i.e. *The Aeneid*) or intrinsic difficulty (i.e. *The Confidence Man*). For each book, we give several reasons as to why it would be a good choice for college common reading.

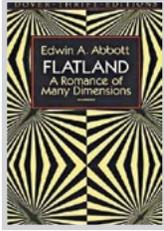
In compiling the books in these two sections, we had several considerations.⁹² We sought to follow our own recommendations listed above, and we also aimed to accommodate colleges that approach common reading assignments at different levels of difficulty, which is why we divided our list into two parts. Our goal is to offer constructive help.

We invite colleges and universities that have common reading programs, and those that are considering the idea, to use these first two sections as a resource. We believe an educationally worthy program could be built around any one of these books. Of course, our list is not intended to be exhaustive. It is, instead, a prompt to stimulate scholars who are convinced that their institutions can and should aim higher. We recognize that every college is different, and that there is no one book that would be a suitable common reading choice for all. Our list is not a list only of classics, though it includes some.

The last two sections list books that we do not recommend unreservedly, but that we think would stretch the boundaries of the common reading genre in good ways. The first of these contains shorter works, more appropriate for “book virgins” who are unused to reading full-length adult works. The second of these contains works that conform in most ways to the existing common reading genre, but push against a few of the genre’s conventions. We offer the works in these final two sections, offered in a spirit of compromise, in the hope that common reading committees also will find them useful.

⁹² The first version of this list was published in Peter Wood and Ashley Thorne, “Read These Instead: Better Books for Next Year’s Beaches,” National Association of Scholars, September 17, 2010, http://www.nas.org/articles/Read_These_Instead_Better_Books_for_Next_Years_Beaches.

60 Recommended Books Appropriate for any College Common Reading Program



Flatland

Edwin Abbott Abbott (1884)

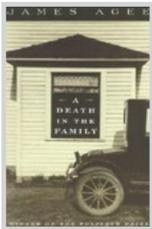
This short book is a mathematician’s foray into fiction with a story about two-dimensional creatures—squares, triangles, and such—living on a plane. Their conceptual horizons are challenged when a three-dimensional creature, a sphere, drops in. We picked it because it is a deft analogy for us three-dimensional creatures trying to imagine our four-or-more dimensional universe, it is one of few mathematical classics completely open to math-resistant students, and it is a subtle provocation to students to open their minds to unexpected intellectual possibilities. It also contains some mild but amusing social satire.



Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe (1958)

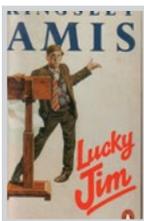
Among the first African novels written in English, *Things Fall Apart* depicts the Igbo of southern Nigeria during the period of initial Western colonization. The protagonist is an ambitious young man in a traditional village who gains fame through a feat of wrestling and goes on to become a powerful leader, only to see his world collapse. We picked it because it is a classic of indictment of colonialism but comes with the complicating twist that it is written in a colonial language by an author who has thoroughly absorbed a Western aesthetic sensibility, and because it puts the real questions of cultural relativism on the table.



A Death In The Family

James Agee (1957)

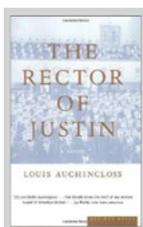
A posthumous autobiographical novel, *A Death in the Family* is based on the death of his father in an automobile accident when Agee was only six. The novel richly depicts life in Knoxville, Tennessee, around 1915. We picked it because of the sheer beauty of Agee’s writing and its emotional depth, its capacity to become a lasting presence in the lives of its readers, and the opportunity it affords independence-minded college students to think about the fragility of family and community and their own rootedness in the world.



Lucky Jim

Kingsley Amis (1954)

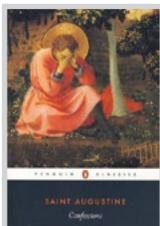
Jim Dixon is a medieval history lecturer (and first-generation college student) who does not like academia, does not like academics, and is faced with the horrible prospect of spending the rest of his life in the pompous, affected world of the university. The funniest campus novel ever written, *Lucky Jim* will inoculate students against the self-importance of college life.



The Rector Of Justin

Louis Auchincloss (1964)

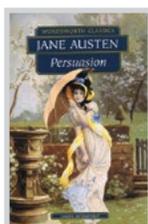
Auchincloss narrates from different points of view the life of Frank Prescott, founding headmaster of the fictional New England prep school Justin Martyr. Auchincloss brings us into the WASP world at the heart of American higher education, and shows us, in Frank Prescott's life, how the WASPs ultimately decided to open up their aristocratic world to the broader America. At a time when much is said in ignorance about the exclusions of the old American system of education, *The Rector of Justin* will allow students to begin to make an informed judgment.



Confessions

Augustine (398 A.D.)

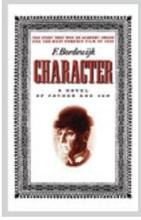
The *Confessions* is perhaps the very first autobiography, at least in the modern sense of someone examining the interior side of his life as well as the external events. We picked it because it shows a smart, ambitious student who thirsts for knowledge and who makes the most of his academic studies, it presents the challenge of taking ideas not just as cold objects of study but as insights that may have life-changing consequences, and it is one of the key books for understanding what is distinctive about Western civilization.



Persuasion

Jane Austen (1817)

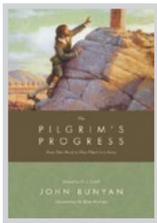
Anne Elliott prudently ended her engagement with Frederick Wentworth at the persuasion of her friend Lady Russell; years later, she meets Wentworth again and is given another opportunity to choose love. The last and finest of Austen's novels, *Persuasion* tells us that there are second chances in life and love—which students ought to know.



Character: A Novel Of Father And Son

F. Bordewijk (1938)

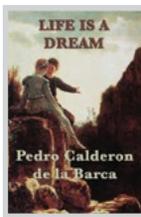
The bastard Jacob Katadreuffe's character is formed and malformed by the implacable austerities of his Calvinist mother and ogrimish father. By his own endeavors he repays all his debts, financial and spiritual. Students who complain of indebtedness from high tuition bills will benefit from reading about a young man who devotes his life to making good the debts he has assumed.



The Pilgrim's Progress

John Bunyan (1678)

Once the most widely read book in English besides the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an astonishingly successful allegory. We picked it because it is a key influence on English fiction, a tour-de-force of metaphor and analogy, and a vivid introduction to Christianity that secular students can grasp. Though accessible to children at one level, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has depths of psychological and moral insight that fully justify it as a reading for college students.



Life Is A Dream

Pedro Calderon De La Barca (1635)

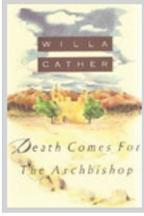
Segismundo, Prince of Poland, is raised as a savage in a prison, commits murder when he is brought at last to court—and is returned to his prison as he sleeps, to think that he only dreamed he left his jail. Segismundo resolves to act virtuously thenceforth, for we must be good even in our dreams. The greatest and most beautiful of the plays of Spain's Golden Age, Calderon's drama shows how the most profound of doubts can lead us to virtue and to grace.



The Plague

Albert Camus (1947)

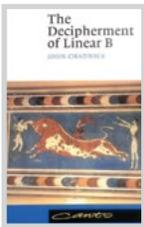
The novel depicts a city in French colonial Algeria that is quarantined during an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Camus describes the divergent ways those trapped in the city cope with the situation. We picked it because it is a compelling depiction of some of the great themes of 20th-century existential philosophy: the sense of a meaningless void against which humans struggle to achieve a sense of dignity; the feelings of alienation and exile poised against human solidarity and love; and the demand for something better than personal happiness.



Death Comes For The Archbishop

Willa Cather (1927)

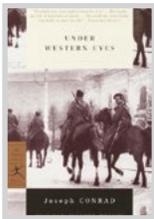
This episodic novel, based on the life of Jean-Baptiste Lamy, depicts the work of a devout French priest sent to reorganize the Catholic mission in New Mexico after the territory has been annexed by the United States. We picked it because Cather’s quietly expansive vision of the American landscape is an unsurpassed literary accomplishment, students can gain something vital from this account of steady purpose in the pursuit of an ideal, and the book offers a perspective on the mingling of cultures that strongly contrasts to the currently fashionable accounts of ethnic antagonism.



The Decipherment Of Linear B

John Chadwick (1958)

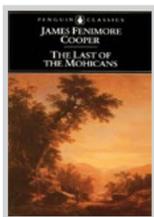
This is the story of how Michael Ventris solved a 50-year mystery by deciphering the language of an ancient Cretan script known as Linear B. Chadwick was Ventris’s friend and close collaborator and wrote that “even when [Ventris’s] success was assured, when others heaped lavish praise on him, he remained simple and unassuming, always ready to listen, to help and to understand.” We picked this book because it is a true story of the heroism of scholarship: tenacious curiosity and earnest study bring order out of confusion; because it provides students with an example of a moment when the facts proved academic consensus wrong; and because it unlocks a door to the Hellenic world at the time of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.



Under Western Eyes

Joseph Conrad (1911)

This novel, set in St. Petersburg and Geneva, is Conrad’s answer to Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. We chose it because the narrator observes a non-Western mindset through “Western eyes”—a skill Western students should learn; it depicts both the allure and the repugnance of terrorism (to which Conrad in his introduction to the book referred as “senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny”); and it shows the truth as being worth defending despite the cost.

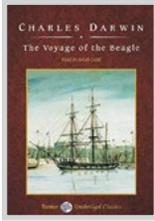


The Last Of The Mohicans

James Fenimore Cooper (1826)

By the time Cooper wrote this novel, the French and Indian War was as distant a memory as World War II is today. The story is a complicated account of the sharp-shooting white orphan Hawkeye, raised by Indians to protect the daughters of a British colonel from the perils of war and the unwanted attentions of a treacherous Huron warrior.

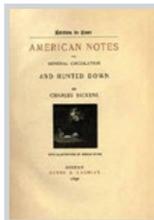
We picked it because, despite its wildly implausible plot, the book captures America’s exuberant vision of itself early in our history; Cooper’s romantic sense of place and sense of nostalgia for the lost grandeur of the Native American tribes of the east can also enrich contemporary students’ understanding of their national heritage; and the book is one kind of answer to the question, “Who are we?” And the answer involves a lot more cultural and racial “hybridity” than we typically recognize in the writings of America’s first professional writers.



The Voyage Of The Beagle

Charles Darwin (1839)

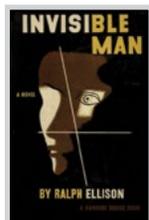
This is Darwin’s classic account of his expedition from 1831 to 1836 around coastal South America to the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti, Australia, across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius, and back to England, on which he made most of the observations that led eventually to his theory of evolution by natural selection. (*The Voyage* went through several editions and one of the augmented later ones might be a better choice.) We picked it because it is a dazzling display of young Darwin’s curiosity and his powers of observation of people and places as well as the natural world; because students can benefit from a robust example of careful observation and collection of facts as worthy pursuits in their own right; and because *The Voyage* offers a fresh point of entry into the intellectual adventure of scientific inquiry.



American Notes For General Circulation

Charles Dickens (1842)

Dickens published this account of his travels just after his six-month visit to the United States. It is an unflattering portrait of a country that effusively welcomed him—far too effusively in his judgment. We picked it because Dickens’ account of American character still resonates, the book lampoons qualities in which Americans continue to take pride, and it raises important questions about celebrity, status, travel, crime, law, and a host of other themes that still preoccupy us.

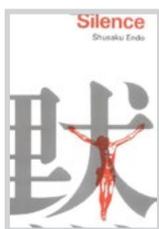


Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison (1952)

This novel presents the memory of an unnamed African American character who is currently living as a hermit in the basement of a New York City apartment building. In his youth in a small southern town he was school valedictorian and went on to college but was expelled. As he struggles to make a life for himself, he encounters a succession of people—most of whom see him not as the individual that he is but only in relation to their particular take on race—promoting various responses to white oppression: accommodation, Communism,

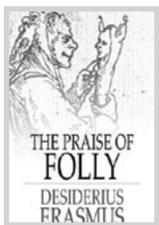
black nationalism, and cynicism. We picked it because it is a powerful evocation of the deadening quality of ideological responses to racism, and because it depicts the struggle for individuality in circumstances that strongly reinforce the claims of group identity. These are very much living questions on most college campuses.



Silence

Shusaku Endo (1966)

Endo's historical novel tells the story of a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Sebastião Rodrigues, sent to join the persecuted Christian community in seventeenth-century Japan. Rodrigues is threatened with torture, apostasizes, but inwardly keeps his faith. We picked this novel to illustrate the effects of demanding that people give up their faith—useful both for those students enduring such demands and those students imposing them.



The Praise Of Folly

Desiderius Erasmus (1509)

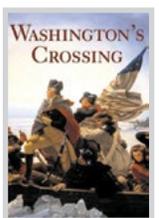
Erasmus' satirical praise of folly lambasts corrupt churchmen and foolish pedants in equal measure. Erasmus' *Praise* is witty, a good example of Renaissance erudition, and a reminder for students that folly, self-deception, and learning go hand in hand.



Everyman

(C. 1500)

Everyman must die. Friendship, Kindred, Goods, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and the Five Wits all abandon him on his journey, but Good Deeds and Confession at last bring him to heaven. The play introduces students to late medieval Christian thought, but more importantly gives them a standard by which to judge the vanities of the world. It also provides a hint that education is as much to prepare them to die as it is to live.

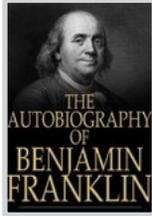


Washington's Crossing

David Hackett Fischer (2004)

We wanted to include a book about George Washington and had hundreds to pick from. We chose Fischer's account of a pivotal moment, when General Washington, faced with the imminent collapse of the whole Revolution, seized the initiative by crossing the Delaware River on Christmas night and mounting a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton. We picked it because Washington is a difficult figure for today's American students to comprehend, and Fischer succeeds admirably in showing him as a vivid human being;

because the book takes us out of “the American Revolution” as an abstraction and gives us a sense of the war as a matter of real choices made under life-and-death conditions; and because it is the kind of history writing that will whet students’ appetites for more.

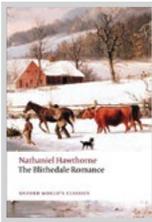


Autobiography

Benjamin Franklin (1791)

This unfinished autobiography, written as a letter to Franklin’s son, opens a window into the life and mind of one of our nation’s most beloved founding fathers.

We picked it because it captures Franklin’s unique genius as an equally accomplished scientist, inventor, entrepreneur, publisher, creative writer, aphorist, diplomat, and political thinker; because American college students should be familiar with the framers of the country, and Franklin stands out not only as the elder statesman of the Revolution but as one of the shapers of American character; and because in our new age of thrift, Franklin’s wisdom—he coined the phrase, “Time is money,” in his “Advice to a Young Tradesman,” 1748)—bears new attention.

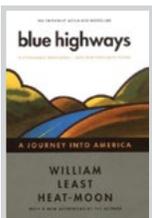


The Blithedale Romance

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1852)

This is Hawthorne’s fictionalized account of the utopian Brook Farm community in which he participated for eight months in 1841. The tale includes characters whose contemporary counterparts will soon be part of the lives of the students entering

college: a charismatic hater of the free market, an advocate of “freedom” intent on imposing her own tyranny, weak-willed followers eager to find someone to tell them what to think, aesthetes, and people eager to hide their ordinary appetites behind exotic poses. We picked *The Blithedale Romance* because it is an effective warning against the seductions of utopianism, and because it helps us see that the longing for social justice needs to be grounded in a real understanding of human nature.

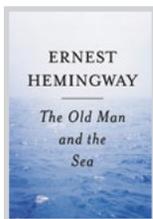


Blue Highways

William Least Heat-Moon (1982)

Heat-Moon heads out to see America from the vantage point of the back roads—the ones colored blue on highway maps. The book is largely built on the conversations he has with the people he meets: saloon keepers, fishermen, farmers, a prostitute, a

Christian hitchhiker, a Hopi medical student and more. We chose it because it is a quietly evocative picture of America—one that has stood the test of time—and because it is a model of first-person writing in which the speaker is unobtrusive and doesn’t get in the way of what he sees and hears.



The Old Man And The Sea

Ernest Hemingway (1952)

The old fisherman Santiago struggles to catch a giant marlin. Hemingway's fish story dramatizes man's lone struggle with nature, and gives it a spiritual dimension.

Hemingway's maturest rendition of his recurring preoccupation with masculinity is the most compelling modern meditation upon what comprise the manly virtues.

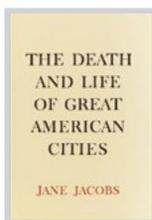


Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston (1937)

This novel by African American folklorist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston depicts the life of a thrice-married Florida woman who kills her last husband in self-defense. Much of the dialogue is in black dialect and the book has often been

criticized for trading in stereotypes. We chose it because it is an unromanticized picture of social oppression as well as of some fascinating and vanished American subcultures, and because it is a consummate work of artistry by a writer who defied the conventions of her time.

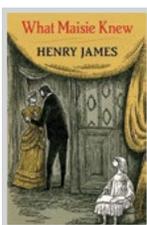


The Death And Life Of Great American Cities

Jane Jacobs (1961)

This book started the movement for preserving old neighborhoods in America. It was written as a critique of the kind of "urban renewal" that consisted of flattening whole sections of cities and replacing them with sterile modernist structures that

had no connection with actual human communities. She was especially opposed to urban expressways. But Jacobs' book somehow transcends the policy debates that gave birth to it. We chose it because it is a model of public policy advocacy, it remains a compelling vision of the best of urban life, and it can provoke students to think more deeply about how our prosperity and our sense of community depend on our use of space.

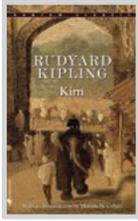


What Maisie Knew

Henry James (1897)

Maisie's irresponsible, divorced parents allow their daughter to be raised among a circle of decadent friends who assume that Maisie is already corrupt. Maisie struggles to keep her innocence intact by mouthing foul words while keeping herself

from knowing what they mean—and by finally arranging to remove herself from her parents so as to save herself from inevitable degradation. James' harrowing narrative makes a psychological thriller out of the struggle to maintain one's virtue in a world that assumes you are already depraved. We picked this book because it shows how and why innocence should be fought for, and why its casual destruction is unspeakably cruel.



Kim

Rudyard Kipling (1901)

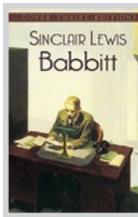
This is a book that vividly portrays British colonial India through a homeless white orphan's eyes. We picked it because it raises provocative questions about contemporary American views of personal identity, multiculturalism and colonialism, and because it is an extraordinarily artful tale of political intrigue. American higher education today spends considerable effort denouncing colonialism, post-colonialism, Orientalism, etc. Why not give students a chance to read a masterpiece from the writer who was one of colonialism's greatest and most sophisticated admirers?



Darkness At Noon

Arthur Koestler (1940)

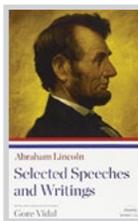
In this novel, Koestler, a former Communist, depicts the world of Stalin's show trials. The protagonist, Rubashov, is a true believer in the Communist system, but is arrested, interrogated, and struggles with the meaning of his life and loyalties as he awaits his certain execution. It is one of the classics of anti-totalitarian literature. We picked it because it powerfully portrays the awful system of oppression at the heart of the Soviet system, it is a testimony to the profound importance of individual rights and political freedom—so easily taken for granted by those who have always enjoyed them—and Koestler takes us inside the mind of someone trapped by ideology.



Babbitt

Sinclair Lewis (1922)

Babbitt is a partner in an upper Midwest real estate firm in this satiric novel. His life is devoted to social climbing until in a moment of crisis he realizes the vapidness of his materialism. At that point he plunges headlong into flouting social conventions, but eventually becomes disillusioned with the emptiness of rebellion as well. We picked this book because it is the classic indictment of American middle class complacency, and students deserve the chance to think this through. Is American life the sum of culturally-dead self-seeking Babbitts who conform even in their nonconformity? How true is this picture?

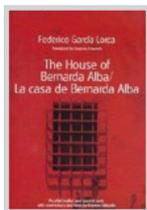


Selected Speeches And Writings

Abraham Lincoln (1832-1865, Published In This Volume In 2009) (Selections)

It was the Great Emancipator who held the United States together during the Civil War. His strength of character, sharp wit, and quest for peace made him one of our nation's greatest presidents. Of all Lincoln's speeches, our strongest recommendations for students are these three: the speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria (October 16, 1854); the

address to the Washington Temperance Society of Springfield, Illinois (February 22, 1842); and the second inaugural address (March 4, 1865). And one of the best ways to learn the power of persuasive argument is to read some of the Lincoln-Douglas debates on slavery.



The House Of Bernarda Alba

Federico Garcia Lorca (1936)

Bernarda Alba's five daughters are trapped in their house by their tyrannical mother. They desire to escape and to live; the daughter who almost does get away commits suicide when she fails. A stark, elemental tragedy of sexual desire, honor, and sterilizing power, Lorca's play will remind students that there are no easy solutions to the conflict of human passions.



On Liberty

John Stuart Mill (1869)

This is a short book on the limits of political power. Mill argues, most importantly, for freedom of thought and speech, and points out that partisans who suppress criticism ultimately weaken the views they are trying to protect. We picked *On Liberty* because the substance of the essay bears directly on contemporary higher education, where "political correctness" has limited the liberty to discuss important ideas, and because the book is a model of lucid philosophical exposition.



Tartuffe

Molière (1664)

Tartuffe pretends to be a holy man and imposes himself on the credulous Orgon; Orgon's folly almost results in the loss of all his wealth to the grasping Tartuffe. *Tartuffe* condemns religious hypocrisy in the first instance, but it is a useful warning in general both against frauds who clothe themselves in ideals and against credulous and excessive enthusiasm for ideals. There are Tartuffes enough on college nowadays, and students will benefit from reading about the archetype.

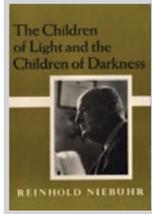


An Apology For Raymond Sebond

Michel De Montaigne (1580-1595)

Montaigne's essay is the greatest single statement of Renaissance skepticism—written by a believing Catholic, who took skepticism to justify his tolerant faith. Aside from illustrating a skepticism that was not dogmatic, Montaigne founded the

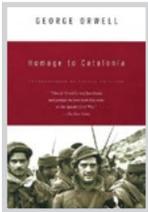
essay genre, and his enormous learning shows what Renaissance humanism was capable of producing. Montaigne is the heart of the Western tradition: students who start with his *Apology* will be better fitted to approach any part of it, from Homer and the Bible to the present moment.



The Children Of Light And The Children Of Darkness

Reinhold Niebuhr (1944)

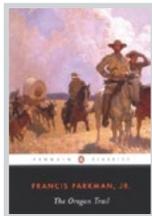
Niebuhr grounds democracy on both man's capacity to do good and on his ineradicable sinfulness. Modern political theory and modern college politics characteristically ground their activism on a facile belief in human goodness; Niebuhr encourages action in the world that squarely addresses human evil. Students will benefit from grounding their civic engagements on Niebuhr's sober estimate of the nature of the human soul.



Homage To Catalonia

George Orwell (1938)

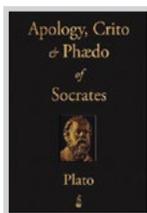
Orwell, a journalist, reflects on his experiences during the Spanish Civil War from December 1936 to June 1937, where he had the misfortune to enlist in a non-Stalinist Marxist militia that Soviet-controlled Communists had secretly determined to liquidate. Betrayed by people he mistook as allies, Orwell began a painful reconsideration of his views. He remained a socialist but had grown wise to the lawless nature of totalitarian regimes, and he came to loathe Stalinism. We picked this book because it represents a genuine act of personal courage, it vividly depicts the human reality of the great contest of political ideals that defined the twentieth century, and it exemplifies lucid political writing.



The Oregon Trail

Francis Parkman (1847)

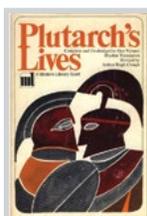
A classic of frontier literature, *The Oregon Trail* is American historian Francis Parkman's detailed and sometimes graphic account of life in the pre-Civil War West. He writes of buffalo hunting on the prairie, the hardships faced by westward-bound travelers, and the day-to-day lives of American Indians. Though Parkman's personal narrative is colored by the prejudices of his time, his book remains a fascinating window into an era of American history whose influence continues to this day. We picked it because it exemplifies history written on a grand scale, an attempt to encompass a large topic and a large idea; and because Parkman conveys an unapologetic sense of the energy, courage, and sheer enterprise of America's western pioneers.



Apology Of Socrates and Crito

Plato (C. 399-387 B.C.)

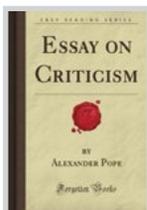
These are key works of philosophy that students who sign up for a philosophy course will probably read. But they are a common inheritance that everyone should know, and they can be read easily without a teacher's assistance. The *Apology* is Socrates' self-defense when he is charged with corrupting the youth of Athens. *Crito* is Socrates' explanation to a friend why he must obey the laws of Athens and accept the death penalty. We picked these two dialogues because together they present a profound debate about the place of the intellectual in society, the pursuit of truth, and the necessity of the law.



Parallel Lives

Plutarch (Second Century A.D.) (Selections)

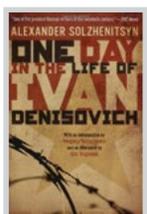
Plutarch pairs biographies of famous men, one Greek, one Roman, to illuminate their character. We picked it because it gives students a vibrant narrative view of ancient Greek and Roman culture, it examines what it means to be “good,” and as a commentary on leadership, it influenced the writers of *The Federalist Papers*.



Essay On Criticism

Alexander Pope (1711)

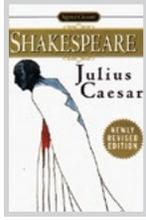
Pope's poem begins with a warning that incompetent criticism poses a greater danger than poor creative writing. The latter “tries our patience,” but poor judgment offered up authoritatively can “mis-lead our Sense.” The *Essay on Criticism* can be read hurriedly and with no profit, but for the reader who pays attention, it is a font of good insight. We picked it because it emphasizes the need for a moral seriousness in the critical inquiries that lie ahead for the college student, it is one of those rare works that fully embodies the strictures it lays down, and it just might help some students improve their writing.



One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1962)

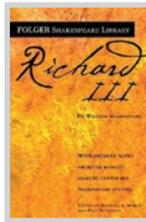
The great novel about the Soviet Gulag. Students should know what Communism inflicted upon the Russian people, and remember that the children of the Gulag guards still rule in Putin's Russia. The novel, beyond that, tells of the survival of some human decency and compassion within one of the most brutal prisons ever devised by man. We picked this book to allow students to consider that man's inhumanity to man is very great—but not the entire story.



Julius Caesar

William Shakespeare (C. 1599)

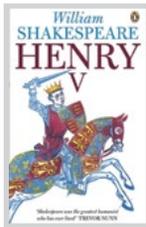
This play once was and should still be a standard part of the high school English curriculum, but it is not. We picked it to restore a vital literary reference point, to invite students to think about demagoguery and the willingness of people to sacrifice freedom to follow a charismatic leader, and to urge students to reflect on conflicts between personal loyalty and public duty.



Richard III

William Shakespeare (C. 1592)

This play offers one of Shakespeare's great villains, who despite his awful deeds somehow wins a share of our sympathy. We picked it because it is English literature's best portrayal of political manipulation and cunning self-advancement, which are qualities that students need to be on guard against in college no less than in the rest of life.



Henry V

William Shakespeare (C. 1598)

This play is about the maturation of a king and his extraordinary success on the battlefield. The St. Crispin's Day speech is one that every student should know. We picked *Henry V* because it is the richest of Shakespeare's history plays and it has profound things to say about the responsibilities of leadership.



Major Barbara

George Bernard Shaw (1905)

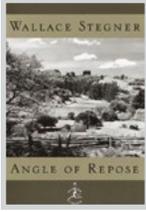
Major Barbara Undershaft of the Salvation Army wishes to do well in the world, with a pure heart—and finds that her good deeds end up financed by millionaires who make their profit from drink and guns. College students will benefit from reading Shaw's wicked commentary on the compromises young idealists must make with the world.



Sir Gawain And The Green Knight

(C. 1350-1400)

Sir Gawain goes on a heroic quest to the castle of the Green Knight—and discovers that he is not as heroic as he thought he was. Fourteenth-century men were quite aware that the self-confidently virtuous could be tempted from honor and virtue, and students can learn that their much-vilified medieval forefathers had wisdom still apposite today.



Angle Of Repose

Wallace Stegner (1971)

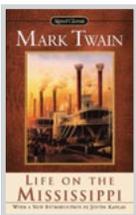
Stegner’s novel tells of the American frontier, Victorian culture in America, and the struggle to make both life and art from the harsh materials of the American West—and Stegner’s use of the actual letters of Mary Hallock Foote within his novel can introduce students to the idea that literary appropriation of documentary materials is often truer to the novelist’s vision than to history. This is also an environmentalist novel as it should be done—not mawkish hagiography of nature, but an exact study of how the characters’ actions and souls are shaped by the land of the West.



A Footnote To History: Eight Years Of Trouble In Samoa

Robert Louis Stevenson (1892)

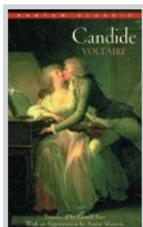
The author of *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and other popular works moved to Samoa in 1890 in search of a place to recover his health. This book is his account of the colonial struggle to possess the island, as the United States, Germany, and Britain squabbled with each other and a hopelessly outgunned Samoan king. Stevenson is on the side of the Samoans. *The New York Times* hailed the book on its first publication as “an entertaining and brilliant piece of narrative.” We picked it because it is a superbly written work that makes an otherwise forgotten episode in colonial history into a lens for the vanities of politics and power, and because it is a good benchmark for students to think about American military ventures in faraway places.



Life On The Mississippi

Mark Twain (1883)

Twain is remembering his life before the Civil War as an apprentice steamboat pilot. The book is as broad and digressive as the river itself, but we have a charming companion to keep it interesting. We picked it because Twain is one of the great native talents of American literature and *Life on the Mississippi* shows him in a genial mood, and because the book opens a window on a distinctly American combination of technical expertise, intellectual aspiration, and ironic observation.

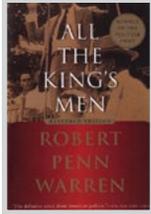


Candide

Voltaire (1759)

This eighteenth century satire of a young man under the spell of a philosophy that glibly treats the order of the world as “all for the best,” would seem to be superfluous counsel in an age where students are more likely to be surrounded by dire warnings

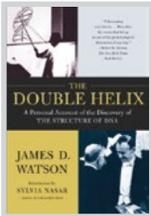
that things are bad and about to get much worse. But as a story of progressive (and sometime hilarious) disillusionment, *Candide* still has something to teach. We picked it because it is a timeless warning not to mistake beautiful theories for fact.



All The King's Men

Robert Penn Warren (1946)

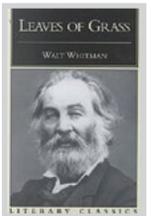
Warren's novel about the rise of a populist politician in the South presents the interplay of cynical calculation and idealistic yearning in American life. Based loosely on the life and death of Louisiana governor and senator Huey P. Long, the book is a classic portrayal of one of the weaknesses of our system of governance. We picked it because it presents political corruption but is ultimately a counsel against viewing politics as mere manipulation, it is a rich and vivid depiction of the insider's view of political life, and it provides students an occasion to come to terms with their own temptation to think of governance as a raw, anything-goes game.



The Double Helix

James D. Watson (1968)

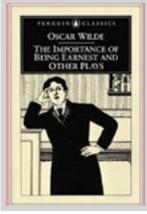
Watson's first-person account of the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA continues to provoke controversy, especially over Watson's cursory treatment of Rosalind Franklin, whose x-ray diffraction images of DNA were crucial to the hypothesis that he and his colleague Francis Crick developed. Nonetheless, the book is a classic insider account of one of the great scientific breakthroughs of the last century. We picked it because it is a vivid portrayal of how scientific reasoning, personal ambition, and individual character come together in actual research, and because students need to know about some of the foundational discoveries that underlie contemporary medicine and technology.



Leaves Of Grass

Walt Whitman (1855-1892)

Whitman's poem is self-indulgent, sprawling, bizarre, radical, indecently sensual, the inspiration for one hundred fifty years of bad poetry, and the greatest love letter ever written to America and her people. Every American should know this eccentric masterpiece, which identifies America with every softheaded, openhearted ideal in the world. There is no better prophylactic to the anti-American cynicism that too many students will encounter in college.



The Importance Of Being Earnest

Oscar Wilde (1895)

This is the funniest play ever written and about nothing at all. Students should know that we also read good books in order to laugh, and that a good education and sheer joy go hand in hand. They should also know that civic engagement isn't everything, that you should always eat your guests' cucumber sandwiches, and that it is important to spend some time not being earnest.



The Right Stuff

Tom Wolfe (1979)

This book examines the lives of test pilots and astronauts, and chronicles the early years of the U.S.-manned space program. We picked it because Wolfe's sympathetic engagement with the pilots brings to life the human side of this hugely complex scientific and technical accomplishment, the book exemplifies the rhetorical power of the "new journalism" when it was truly new, and it offers a compelling portrait of courage and self-reliance.



The Book Of Job

(C. 1000 B.C.)

Among the most profound and unsettling stories in the Bible, *The Book of Job* depicts a righteous man brought to the depths of suffering by the seeming capriciousness of God. Job rejects the counsel of his friends to curse God for his fate, but he does eventually complain. God's answer is awesome—and frightening. We picked this book because it is among the most accessible points of entry to the Bible for secular students, and because it is a terrific story that can lead to important questions about the nature of justice.

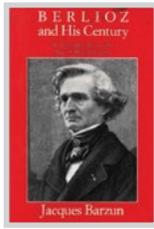


The Book Of Ecclesiastes

(C. 970-930 B.C.)

A king searches for meaning in life by successively seeking wisdom, pleasure, wealth, sex, and power. Having achieved them, he finds that they fail to fulfill his longings and are ultimately meaningless. We picked this book because it asks many of life's deepest questions: why work so hard if it doesn't bring real happiness and death is inevitable? What is there to live for, really? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are some people wealthy while others are poor? In this way it also speaks to the rising concern on college campuses for social justice.

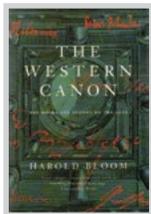
20 Recommended Books for More Ambitious College Common Reading Programs



Berlioz And His Century: An Introduction To The Age Of Romanticism

Jacques Barzun (1950)

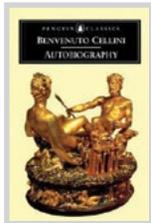
An exemplar of intellectual history, which brings alive the great romantic French composer Hector Berlioz. Barzun shows how to conduct a sympathetic evocation of the past, and lets us know both what was new and valuable about Romanticism and how Romantic we still are.



The Western Canon

Harold Bloom (1994)

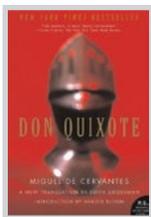
Bloom's enthusiasm for great books is infectious. Students won't have read many of the books he discusses but will want to.



The Autobiography Of Benvenuto Cellini

Benvenuto Cellini (1558-1563)

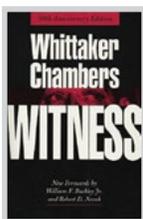
Goldsmith, soldier, sculptor, and musician, Cellini's life embodied the gusto and ambition of the Renaissance. Cellini's autobiography is the standard by which to measure milk-and-water memoirs—as his life is the standard by which to measure milk-and-water lives. Especially recommended for colleges with concentrations in the fine arts.



Don Quixote

Miguel De Cervantes (1605)

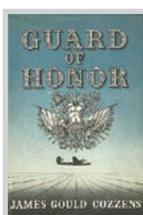
Is Don Quixote a hero, a fool, a madman—or all three? *Don Quixote* is a rich, gargantuan saga of the adventures of the iconic windmill-tilting knight-errant Don Quixote and his faithful squire Sancho Panza. The book has been called the “first modern novel,” and Harold Bloom writes that the tale of Don Quixote's impossible quest “contains within itself all the novels that have followed in its sublime wake.” The book might be the longest work a college student will ever read, but it will also be the most memorable.



Witness

Whittaker Chambers (1952)

A former Communist and Soviet spy, Chambers repented and exposed former State Department official Alger Hiss as a fellow Communist and spy. Hiss denied the allegation but evidence emerged that Chambers was right. Though the statute of limitations on espionage had run out, Hiss went to prison on a perjury conviction. In *Witness*, Chambers goes beyond the details of this case to offer a broad reflection on the course of twentieth-century history and the fate of Western civilization as it faced the challenge of totalitarian Communism.



Guard Of Honor

James Gould Cozzens (1948)

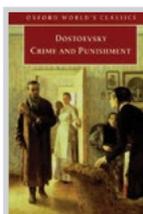
The heart of Cozzens' novel is the story of a racial conflict on an Army Air Force base in Florida in 1943; it expands to include the nature of modern warfare, the way military bureaucracy works, the tissue of American race relations built upon a thousand racial insults, the self-serving ruthlessness of the American left in its claim to care about American blacks, and the profound indifference by all other American whites to the sufferings of American blacks. Decidedly un-PC, triggering with a vengeance in its stenography of racial epithets, this is the great novel of America at war.



Democracy In America

Alexis De Tocqueville (1838)

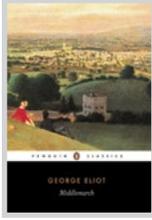
De Tocqueville remains the best observer of the American social and political experiment. A long read but not inherently difficult.



Crime And Punishment

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)

A psychological masterpiece. No one regrets reading it, though it is a long journey.



Middlemarch

George Eliot (1871-1872)

The greatest realistic novel in English. Why not have students read the best?



Journal, 1955-1962: Reflections On The French-Algerian War

Mouloud Feraoun (1962)

Feraoun was a Muslim Algerian in love with French civilization, sympathetic to the Algerian demand for independence, and a scrupulous observer of the horrors inflicted by both the Algerian nationalist rebels and the French Army during the savage terrorism and counter-terrorism of the Algerian independence struggle. Feraoun refused to simplify his account and he refused to simplify his own commitments; he was killed in the last year of the war precisely because he was a man who refused to embrace brutal simplicities. His journal is necessary reading during our long war against Islamist terror.



The Good Soldier Svejk And His Fortunes In The World War

Jaroslav Hasek (1923)

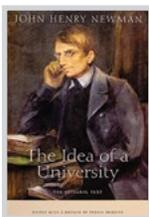
Svejk wants to be a good soldier; it's just that he's a bit slow, so it's not his fault that he happens to spend much of World War One drinking in a bar or wandering around Bohemia trying to find his regiment. Hasek's comic novel is an education for every student who wants to avoid the latest great cause without making a fuss.



The Confidence-Man

Herman Melville (1857)

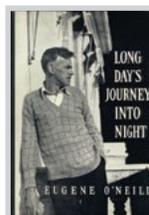
Easy to read but baffling to some readers, since Melville refuses to say exactly who among the large cast of characters aboard the Mississippi steam ship Fidèle is the confidence man. Is America a confidence game?



The Idea Of A University

John Henry Newman (1852)

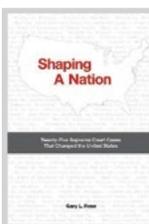
Newman’s articulation of the ideal of liberal education as an end in itself, embedded within a theological framework, is one of the most powerful and influential conceptions of the purpose of the university. This should be a starting point for any student’s understanding of what precisely they are supposed to be doing in college.



Long Day’s Journey Into Night

Eugene O’Neill (1941-1942)

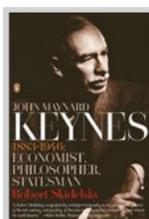
Edmund Tyrone spends a day with his family—some alcoholic, some drug-addicted, all self-deluded. At the end of the play, all self-delusions are stripped away—but the knowledge gained is of no use to save them from themselves. This harrowing American tragedy is the ultimate refutation of the psychiatric delusion that we may be redeemed by self-knowledge.



Shaping A Nation: 25 Supreme Court Cases

Gary Rose, Ed. (2010)

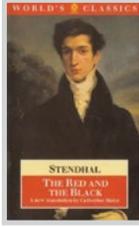
We are a nation of laws—and of Supreme Court opinions. It is a good idea for students to start college having read some of the most important ones.



John Maynard Keynes 1883-1946: Economist, Philosopher, Statesman

Robert Skidelsky (2005)

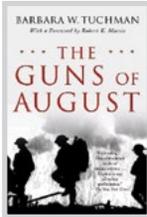
Skidelsky’s biography of Keynes (abridged, but still massive) tells us about the man whose theory still governs the global economy. His personal life ranged from gay affairs in Bloomsbury to marriage to a Russian ballerina; his instant analysis of the economic effects of the Treaty of Versailles predicted World War II twenty years in advance; his General Theory of Employment revolutionized economics and is still the basis of modern economic thought; his economic management carried England through World War II; and at Bretton Woods he helped lay the foundations for the postwar economic order. Skidelsky’s biography is indispensable for understanding the architect of the modern economic world.



The Red And The Black

Stendahl (1830)

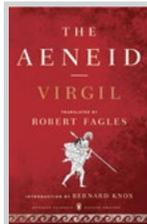
Julien Sorel is a young, poor man on the make, longing to conquer a world he considers inferior to him; he ends up dead for his pains. The best refutation to the thesis that French novels must be boring; a handy guide for ambitious students to the dos and don'ts of professional success.



The Guns Of August

Barbara Tuchman (1962)

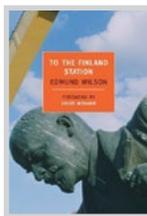
Winston Churchill called the first month of World War I a “drama never surpassed.” Renowned historian Barbara Tuchman’s classic chronicle of the first month of World War I and the events leading up to it is “more dramatic than fiction.” We chose this book because of its stellar writing, sweeping historical insight, and the story’s intimate bearing on the rest of the twentieth century: for, in many ways, the beginning of World War I was the beginning of the modern world.



The Aeneid

Virgil (19 B.C., Fagle’s Translation, 2006)

An epic in every sense, *The Aeneid* is one of the masterpieces of Western civilization.



To The Finland Station

Edmund Wilson (1940)

In *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson traces historical, political, and ideological threads from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The title refers to the St. Petersburg train from which Lenin emerged to take charge of the burgeoning Bolshevik revolt. Wilson’s narrative is an intellectual and cultural history that reveals the connections between the revolutionary era and the rise of socialism.

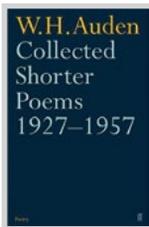
Shorter Suggestions

Defenders of the common reading status quo frequently declare that their students are not prepared for full-length, sophisticated works. A great many matriculating students apparently have read an adult book rarely if ever, and they cannot be expected to look at one without a certain amount of preparatory work. The compromises in the quality of common reading selections are meant to entice readers for whom reading a book at all is an adventure.

If there must be compromises, we would like to suggest compromises of quantity rather than of quality—the selection of fine, short works for common readings. Below we suggest 10 Short Fiction and Poetry possibilities, 10 Short Nonfiction possibilities, 5 Moderately Short Fiction possibilities, and 5 Moderately Short Nonfiction possibilities. The latter two categories overlap in length with some suggestions we make elsewhere—Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, Voltaire’s *Candide*—but those texts we endorse unreservedly, whereas these are choices we suggest in a compromise of quality with brevity.

These selections do not include excellent brief works such as Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* (1912), James Joyce’s *The Dead* (1914), and Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915), which might be too ambitious for “book virgins.” We have focused these selections on the Anglo-American tradition in the years from 1840 to 1970, as a proxy for a rough combination of lucid prose, cultural accessibility, and mental stretching by dint of historical distance from the present.

Short Fiction and Poetry Suggestions



Under Which Lyre

W. H. Auden (1946)

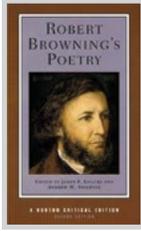
Auden’s poem on proper behavior in college: “Thou shalt not worship projects nor / Shalt thou or thine bow down before Administration.” A witty sketch by a master poet of the American college scene ca. 1946, it can introduce the student to the college milieu, prompt consideration of how it has changed in the last few generations, and warn him of enduring academic foibles.



This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen

Tadeusz Borowski (1946)

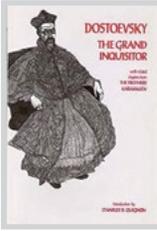
Borowski’s semi-autobiographical narrator is a Christian Pole incarcerated by the Germans in Auschwitz, but not condemned to die; a witness but not himself the central target. How do you live as an onlooker of such evil? Borowski, who committed suicide in 1951, did not find an enduring answer to the question.



Caliban Upon Setebos

Robert Browning (1864)

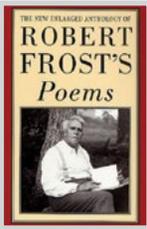
An ignorant, brutalized slave conceives of God in his own image. Browning's poem had the Darwinian conception of the cosmos in mind, but it applies to all students who worship ideals constructed from their own ignorance, deprivation, and savagery.



The Grand Inquisitor

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1879-1880)

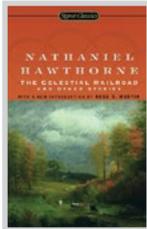
Dostoevsky's great fable inserted into *The Brothers Karamazov*; an eternal warning of how the functionaries who serve ideals eventually betray them.



The Death of the Hired Man

Robert Frost (1914)

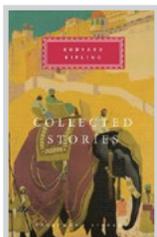
"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in." Frost's narrative poem tells us about the mutual need and responsibility that arises between human beings living and working together, and gives a moral claim even to the old, the annoying, and the useless.



The Celestial Railroad and Earth's Holocaust

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1843 and 1844)

Hawthorne's pendant fables on the dangerous follies of utopianism are as relevant now as ever.



Dayspring Mishandled

Rudyard Kipling (1928)

Jealousy leads to a foiled scheme for revenge, in an academic setting. A fine story of villainy, second thoughts, and Chaucerian scholarship, in which Kipling illustrates how human and academic passions intertwine.



Benito Cereno

Herman Melville (1855)

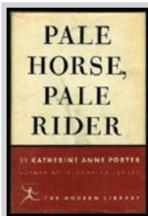
A well-meaning New England sea captain stumbles upon a Spanish ship manned by a captain and his faithful slaves—or is everything as he sees? Melville’s novella is a profound meditation on race and on the limited perceptions of well-meaning American liberals (*avant la lettre*).



Axis

Alice Munro (2011)

Sexual drama in the life of two college students, fifty years ago. The subject matter in Munro’s story remains relevant, but this selection is more to highlight the possibility of using fine, contemporary writing—and to prompt American selection committees to consider using Canadian literature.

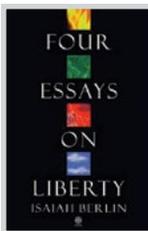


Pale Horse, Pale Rider

Katherine Anne Porter (1939)

Porter’s semi-autobiographical heroine’s life is shattered by the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. If you are going to read about disease, or disaster in America, start here.

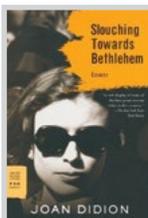
Short Nonfiction Suggestions



Two Concepts of Liberty

Isaiah Berlin (1958)

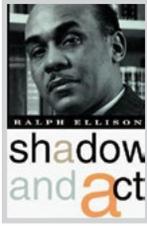
Berlin’s classic distinction between positive liberty and negative liberty—and warning of the particular susceptibility to abuse of the conception of positive liberty. A useful inoculation for students tempted to speak about freedom without scrutinizing its nature.



Slouching Towards Bethlehem

Joan Didion (1967)

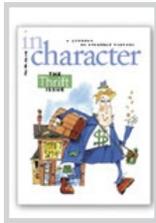
Didion’s tour-de-force on how the hippie dream crashes and burns into drug addiction, squalor, and killing irresponsibility. Still useful in case students remain tempted to conflate hedonism and idealism, and just beautiful prose.



The World and the Jug

Ralph Ellison (1964)

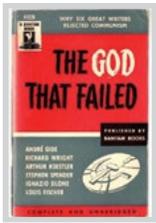
Irving Howe wanted black writers just to write about being black; Ellison ripped him apart in this essay. The definitive statement that race and racial subject matter do not and should not fully define or constrain a writer.



“You Kill It, You Eat It,” and Other Lessons From My Thrifty Childhood

Jean Bethke Elshtain (2004)

Elshtain’s reflection on the value of thrift—and note of how the value is disappearing in modern America. Worth reading in itself, but also included as an example of fine contemporary nonfiction.



Richard Wright

Richard Wright (1949)

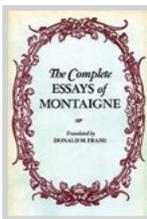
Wright’s autobiographical essay in *The God that Failed* details Wright’s disenchantment from Communism. It is a well-written account of the attraction Communism provided to a black intellectual in the time of Jim Crow—and about why Wright ultimately left the Communist movement.



A Successful Failure

Glenn Frank (1922)

Frank’s essay decries the inadequacy and superficiality of American colleges and calls for a proper liberal arts education “that will make for that spacious-minded type of citizen which alone can bring adequate leadership to a democracy.” Students will learn both the content of the liberal-arts critique of mediocre American education and the fact that such critiques are very long standing.

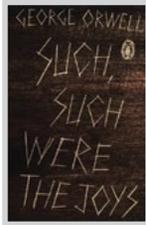


Of Cannibals

Michel de Montaigne (1580)

Montaigne describes the savage habits of the Indians of Brazil—and wonders if Europeans are any less savage in their own way, or if there is more to be said about the comparison between Brazil and France than “customs differ.” A classic work of Renaissance humanism and skepticism that is also the ancestor of both cultural relativism and

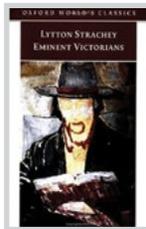
anthropology as a discipline, it will show students how much of our modern preconceptions descend from the thought of the European Renaissance.



Such, Such Were the Joys

George Orwell (1952)

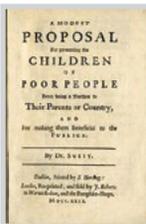
Orwell remembered his public school as a microcosm of the totalitarian state: he loved Big Teacher. Students can learn to be wary of the environment they are about to enter.



Florence Nightingale

Lytton Strachey (1918)

An extract from *Eminent Victorians*, the original exercise in snarky revisionism. Useful for acquainting students with the notion that noble humanitarians can also be unpleasant, self-important, controlling obsessives.

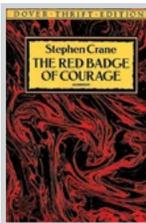


A Modest Proposal

Jonathan Swift (1729)

To eat babies. There is no material or practical argument against it, so why not? The original satire suggesting that improvement schemes for the general welfare quickly become horrific when shorn of moral grounding. Still worth considering.

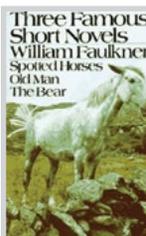
Moderately Short Fiction Suggestions



The Red Badge of Courage

Stephen Crane (1895)

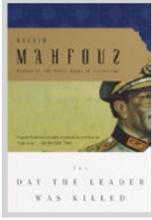
A realistic depiction of fighting in the Civil War—and a more broadly applicable analysis of how courage comes and goes.



The Bear

William Faulkner (1931)

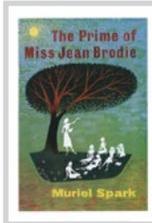
An exciting, mythologizing short novel about nature, hunting, masculinity, and race.



The Day the Leader was Killed

Naguib Mahfouz (1983)

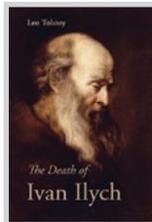
Mahfouz writes of everyday tensions in life in Sadat's Egypt, and how they explode when Sadat is murdered. A fine literary introduction to the culture and politics of the modern Middle East.



The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Muriel Spark (1961)

Miss Jean Brodie is a charismatic but destructive teacher, with a devastating effect upon her students. Students can take note.

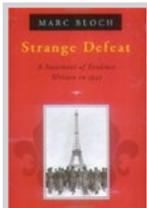


The Death of Ivan Ilych

Leo Tolstoy (1886)

Ivan Ilyich is dying of stomach cancer. As he does, he finds out what matters in life. Students who read Tolstoy's novella can get a head start on the learning curve.

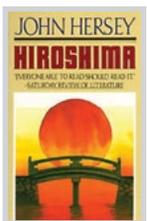
Moderately Short Nonfiction Suggestions



Strange Defeat

Marc Bloch (1940)

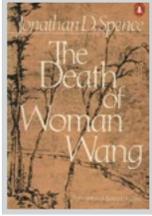
Sometimes everything goes wrong, your country is defeated, and your nation's frailties are to blame. Bloch's account of the Fall of France in 1940 is gripping, conducted with a historian's eye, and especially recommended for those students at elite schools who have never known the experience of failure.



Hiroshima

John Hersey (1946)

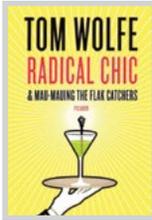
All the people who furrow their brows whenever America exercises military force love this book, but it's still good. Students ought to have some idea about what atom bombs do—to understand both what it means for America to have a nuclear arsenal and why it is not a casual matter to let our enemies acquire one.



The Death of Woman Wang

Jonathan Spence (1978)

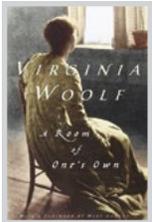
Spence tried to understand the life of a peasant woman in seventeenth-century China; he even wrote down her dreams and provided footnotes. An extraordinary work of historical imagination, *Woman Wang* exemplifies one of the things a liberal arts education can achieve—to bring us to understand people no matter how far they are from us in time and space.



Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers

Tom Wolfe (1970)

The classic account of white liberal self-abasement when confronted with Angry Young Radicals of Color. Devastatingly funny. This remains useful as a guide to some of the dynamics of college life.



A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf (1929)

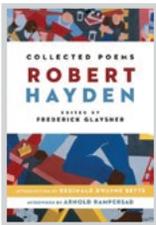
A classic feminist essay—whose argument that a minimum of wealth is necessary for true creative freedom is something students should consider, whether trustafarian or cash-strapped. Indeed, because students are divided ever more starkly between the haves and the have-nots, discussion of Woolf's argument is more necessary than ever.

Pushing-the-Envelope Suggestions

Here we recommend a selection of books that far more closely approach the common reading mold. We don't necessarily endorse these books in all their particulars, but they are interesting, and few if any of them seem ever to have been a common reading selection. We present them to committee members as suggestions that largely conform to the conventions of the common reading genre, but which expand its boundaries just a little.

Pushing-the Envelope Suggestions, Categorized by Theme

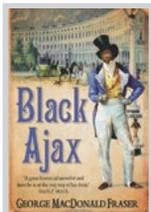
Racism/Slavery/African American



Collected Poems

Robert Hayden (1985)

Hayden's poems range from his complicated relationship with his adopted father ("Those Winter Sundays") to his Baha'i faith ("Full Moon") to African American history and experience ("Middle Passage," "Mourning Poem For The Queen Of Sunday," "Runagate Runagate," "Frederick Douglass"). A poet of formal excellence, neither ashamed to address nor confined by the subject matter of race, Hayden is certainly a fine American poet and arguably the best African American poet.

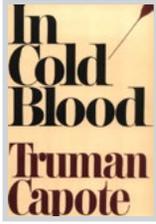


Black Ajax

George MacDonald Fraser (1997)

Fraser's historical novel about Tom Molineaux, the ex-slave who almost became the boxing champion of England, is an incisive meditation on conceptions of manhood and race, and tells why excellence in the noble art of boxing was so important for convincing Englishmen that blacks were not their natural inferiors. Raw, triggering, and excellent.

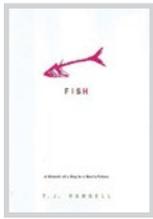
Crime and Punishment



In Cold Blood

Truman Capote (1965)

Capote's nonfiction account of a robbery murder by a pair of recidivist ex-cons is a chilling tale of murderers who well and truly deserved the death penalty—and were no less human for that.

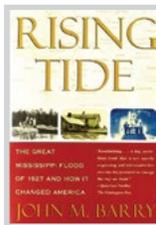


Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison

T. J. Parsell (2006)

Parsell was gang-raped in prison; his memoir is an unblinking account of the intersection of race and violence in prison, with an extended exploration of how his homosexuality contributed to his victimization. Parsell also tells of how the book inspired his activism with Stop Prison Rape, which works to bring an end to the true locus of rape culture in America, the rape of men within our prisons.

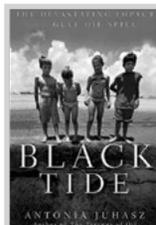
Disaster in America



Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America

John M. Barry (1997)

Barry's account of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 tells of the flood's disparate effect on African Americans, of its role in inspiring the American government to tame America's waterways by vast civil engineering projects, and of Herbert Hoover's stellar role in coordinating disaster relief. Barry's book was assigned at Tulane University in 2002, but apparently nowhere else.

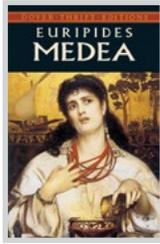


Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill

Antonia Juhasz (2011)

A history of the Deepwater Horizon (BP) Oil Spill of 2010, and its effects on the Gulf Coast. It is a standard tale of environmental disaster, save that it recounts a disaster overseen by a Democratic president.

Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women



Medea

Euripides (431 B.C.)

Jason decides to divorce Medea and remarry; she decides that her self-respect requires her to kill his new wife and her own children. Is she a monstrous woman, or simply claiming the dignity due any man? As timely now as when it was written.

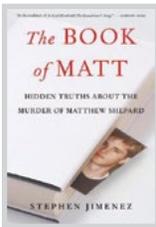


The Left Hand of Darkness

Ursula K. LeGuin (1969)

A man on a planet of hermaphrodites falls in love. A classic of science fiction and a classic of feminist thought; it will also introduce students to standard American conceptions of sex on the brink of the women's rights revolution of the 1970s.

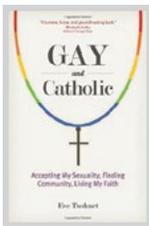
Homosexuality



The Book of Matt: Hidden Truths About the Murder of Matthew Shepard

Stephen Jimenez (2013)

Jimenez argues that Matthew Shepard was probably murdered in a drug deal gone wrong, by other gay drug dealers. The book opens up the possibility that an icon of gay martyrology was nothing of the sort—and allows students to consider how contemporary polemics can build upon dubious factual support.

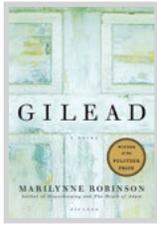


Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith

Eve Tushnet (2014)

Tushnet's memoir tells of her transformation from a liberal atheist to a believing Catholic, and of her decision to adhere to Church doctrine forbidding homosexual acts and be celibate. Tushnet also argues that gay Catholics generally should do the same. Especially recommended for sectarian Catholic colleges.

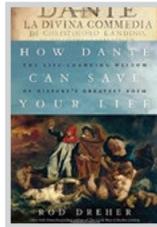
Religion



Gilead: A Novel

Marilynne Robinson (2004)

Robinson's novel of three generations of American ministers shows the transformation from John-Brown Calvinism to liberal Congregationalism. A beautiful novel, and suffused with liberal Protestant faith.

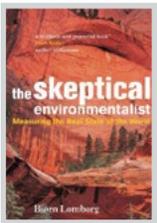


How Dante Can Save Your Life: The Life-Changing Wisdom of History's Greatest Poem

Rod Dreher (2015)

Dreher's book is an appreciation of Dante, an account of his own spiritual troubles, and an enraptured narrative of how reading Dante restored him from sickness of the soul.

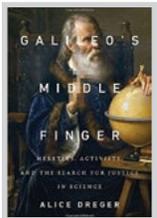
Science/Technology



The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World

Bjørn Lomborg (2001)

The classic case for skepticism of those arguing for the existence of catastrophic man-made climate change. Especially recommended for common readings dedicated to sustainability themes.

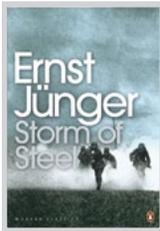


Galileo's Middle Finger: Heretics, Activists, and the Search for Justice in Science

Alice Dreger (2015)

A zippily readable account of how social justice activism has been damaging the conduct of science and leading to the outright persecution of scientists. Not yet available in paperback.

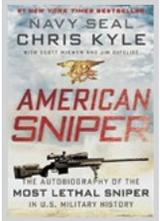
War



Storm of Steel

Ernst Jünger (1920)

Storm of Steel may be the best war memoir of the last hundred years. It tells of the horrors of trench warfare without descending into anti-war polemic.



American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History

Chris Kyle, Jim DeFelice, and Scott McEwen (2012)

Kyle's work tells what it's like to be a very good soldier in the modern American army.

Addendum on Science Books

If one existed, we would also like to recommend a popular-science book solely devoted to John Ioannidis' work on the replicability crisis in science and medicine, and his strong argument that a great many "scientific results" are an unholy combination of improper technique, statistical noise, and a credulous peer review and editorial procedure slanted to prefer both a positive result to a negative one and new research to the (dis)confirmation of old research. David H. Freedman's *Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us—And How to Know When Not to Trust Them* (2010) partly fits the bill, but unfortunately it has only a few chapters on Ioannidis' research.

As a substitute until such time as a full-length book devoted to Ioannidis' work is written, we would like to recommend instead that colleges assign a sampler of works by and about Ioannidis. These should include Ioannidis' groundbreaking article "Why Most Published Research Findings are False" (2005), Freedman's original article on Ioannidis in *The Atlantic*, "Lies, Damned Lies, and Medical Science" (2010), Monya Baker's brief summary in *Nature* (2015) of the substance of Ioannidis' new work on replicability in psychology—and Ioannidis' *Reproducibility Project: Psychology* webpages on Open Science Framework (which doubles as an example of how the internet makes possible crowd-sourced, open-access science), so that students may see the data for themselves and, as scientists should, subject it to their own critical examination.⁹³ This is not an ideal way to present the subject, but it should suffice to spark conversations on the nature of scientific method and the dubious quality of "scientific authority."

93 John P. A. Ioannidis, "Why Most Published Research Findings Are False," *PLOS Med.* 2005 Aug; 2(8): e124 [<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1182327/>]; David H. Freedman "Lies, Damned Lies, and Medical Science," *The Atlantic* (November 2010), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/lies-damned-lies-and-medical-science/308269/>; Monya Baker, "First results from psychology's largest reproducibility test," *Nature*, 30 April 2015, <http://www.nature.com/news/first-results-from-psychology-s-largest-reproducibility-test-1.17433>; *Reproducibility Project: Psychology*, <https://osf.io/ezcuj/>.

APPENDIX V: YOU READ YOUR BOOK AND I'LL READ MINE

BY LINDA HALL

Linda Hall is Associate Professor of English at Skidmore College. Her research interests include *Literary nonfiction (especially cultural criticism and the personal essay), Alice Munro, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Thomas Hardy. She has had essays and reviews published in Guardian America, The American Prospect, The Hudson Review, New York, Salmagundi, Southwest Review, Vogue, and Under the Sun. Her honors include the McGinnis-Ritchie Award for Nonfiction (2006) and Notable Essays of the Year, The Best American Essays ('03, '06, '08, '11).*

What I would value from you is the “English professor’s perspective” on what you have found to be the best ways of leading students to love reading, and whether common reading programs as they are currently designed can lead them that way.

—Excerpt from an e-mail from
Ashley Thorne, Executive Director,
National Association of Scholars

Happy as I am to contribute to the latest NAS “Beach Books” report, I can’t be sure that I do lead students to love reading. I feel fairly confident, however, that I don’t drive them to despise it, for I am an English professor who does not teach literature. I teach writing.

“Surely you don’t *only* teach writing,” a British biographer once asked me. I’m afraid I do, but my classes are not the creative writing workshops she plainly disdained.

(I was a little surprised that she did not trot out a line from a novel by her countryman Kingsley Amis: “If there’s one word that sums up everything that’s gone wrong since the War, it’s Workshop.”) I teach the students what I think they need to learn; nowadays even some of the brightest English majors require instruction in the nuts and bolts of composition. My work does not leave me the least bit bored, and I often have the pleasure of watching students become not only competent but quite good essayists. Competence, however, is what we are aiming for, and I see it as anything but a modest goal.

Now, of course young people must read if they are to write, but because I don’t teach literature and rarely ask students to write about it (very little of the world’s writing, after all, is literary analysis), I am able to personalize almost all reading assignments.⁹⁴ “Tell her you like something

⁹⁴ Why don’t I teach literature? The short answer is that I am like a carpenter who has the highest regard for good furniture but doesn’t wish to talk about it, only to impart the fundamentals of woodworking. Literature has always been, for me, something private. In his latest book, Mario Vargas Llosa reminds me of why I resisted the teaching of novels even as a student: “[T]here is something deceitful and paradoxical happening when one tries to reduce imaginative writing to a pedagogical explanation.... when those works are drawn from profound and at times heartrending experiences, from real human catastrophes, which can be properly encountered, not in a lecture hall, but only in the concentrated intimacy of reading, and whose effects can be measured in the resonance that they have in the private life of the reader.” Mario Vargas Llosa, “Forbidden to Forbid,” *Notes on the Death of Culture: Essays on Spectacle and Society*, trans. John King (New York, 2015), p. 87.

and she'll hand you five essays about it," a student once said of me, exaggerating only a little. Tell me you hate something and you'll also leave my office with a sheaf of door prizes. Do I dispense contrary opinions? All the time—not just to encourage open-mindedness but to fuel polemical fires. Occasionally, though, I am content merely to provide the students with some like-minded company. I once had a student who loathed Hemingway. I pulled from my files a folder labeled "Ozick Hates Ernie" and handed it over. Cynthia Ozick made my student feel a little less alone, yes, but I suspect that in doing so, she elevated and complicated the student's dislike. Imagine an eighteen-year-old approaching the paragraph below not dutifully but with real curiosity:

In 1953, [Saul] Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* struck out on a course so independent from the tide of American fiction that no literary lessons could flow from it: it left no wake, and cut a channel so entirely idiosyncratic as to be uncopyable. Much earlier, Ernest Hemingway had engineered another radical divergence in the prose of the novel: having inherited the stylistic burden of the nineteenth century, with its elaborate 'painting' of interiors and landscapes, its obligatory omniscience, and its essaylike moralizing, he mopped up the excess moisture ('clotting the curds,' he called it) and lopped subordinate clauses and chopped dialogue and left little of the old forest of letters standing. An army of succinct-ness seekers followed in a movement that accommodated two or three generations of imitators, until finally the distinctive Hemingway dryness flaked off into lifeless desiccation. The Hemingway sentence became a kind of ancestral portrait on the wall, and died of too many descendants.⁹⁵

This door prize comes with a built-in bonus: recommended reading. I'm not as enthusiastic about Bellow's fiction as Ozick is, but so what? I'd rather my students learn to make their own way, following leads they encounter in print.

To ensure that they are exposed to the widest possible range of writers—and also because undergraduates tend not to undertake this activity on their own—I assign students to browse in both the college library and the downtown public library. Sometimes I ask them to look up a specific title that interests them and then borrow a book discovered in the vicinity of, or even nowhere close to, that which they were seeking; sometimes I set them loose in a particular section; sometimes I accompany them to an off-site storage facility full of bound periodicals (I think of it as the Louvre of little magazines). Back issues aren't books, but they contain splendidly written reviews of them.

Will browsers gravitate to books that have long intimidated them? Maybe not, and so I assign students to locate three classics of which they are afraid (I solicit titles during a class discussion) and photocopy a random page from each. In class, with the photocopies before them, I ask them to jot down their reactions. What is it about the writing that overwhelms or alienates or bores them? If you guessed that the students sometimes find the pages less overwhelming or alienating or boring

⁹⁵ Cynthia Ozick, "Saul Bellow's Broadway," *Fame and Folly* (New York, 1997), pp. 172-73.

than they'd expected, you're right. But I'm always prepared for this little ice-breaking exercise to fail, and I tell the students that there is really no shame, at eighteen, in feeling not quite ready for George Eliot or James Joyce or Stendhal. I also share with them a choice nugget from an interview Mr. Bellow conducted with himself: "The teaching of literature has been a disaster. Between the student and the book he reads lies a gloomy preparatory region, a perfect swamp. He must cross this cultural swamp before he is allowed to open his *Moby Dick* and read 'Call me Ishmael.' He is made to feel ignorant before masterpieces, unworthy; he is frightened and already repelled by the book he is meagerly qualified to begin."

Returning to the photocopies, I tell the students to hold on to them. "See how they strike you in a few years. Almost all of us keep records of how we once looked, and some of us keep records of how we once wrote. Let these pages tell you who you once were as a reader, for you will not always be as you are now."

Students lose their smartphones, you say. They won't hold on to those Xeroxes even if they want to! That's why I'm keeping my own copies of what my freshmen brought to class this semester. I haven't yet told them that I plan to return the pages to them via campus mail shortly before they graduate.

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As for Ms. Thorne's second question: I do not think common reading programs lead students to love reading, which is one reason I wrote "Reimagining College Summer Reading" for *Inside Higher Ed*.⁹⁶ I believe that the programs as they currently exist lead young people to love particular popular books, or—more often than we'd like to admit—to hate them (for the horrifying details, see my piece). I believe they teach young people that living authors are better than dead; that writers should be as pleasing in person as they are on the page; that celebrity is the ultimate value. Not exactly the lessons of the liberal arts, no?

Almost a quarter of a century ago, at the height of the canon wars, Katha Pollitt contributed to *The Nation* an essay in which she admitted that, to her surprise, she agreed with all sides in the debate. "Take the conservatives," she wrote.

They are arrogant, they are rude, they are gloomy, they do not suffer fools gladly,
and everywhere they look, fools are what they see.... But what is so terrible, really,

⁹⁶ Linda Hall, "Reimagining College Summer Reading," *Inside Higher Ed*, August 19, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/08/19/english-professor-reimagines-summer-reading-programs-new-students-essay>. A few sentences from that essay may serve to summarize it: "Left to my own devices, would I do away with summer reading? No, I'd try a variation on it. Instead of assigning one book that is expected to do several things (inspire engagement, spark debate, build community), I would present the students with several books—a menu of options—in hopes of promoting reading.... In the fall, on campus, students would have the opportunity to meet others who chose their book. The result might be a number of small, true communities.... Faculty, too, would choose what to read; they would not have to grin and bear books they disesteem.... 'You Read Your Book and I'll Read Mine' [the name I propose for my program] would cost less than common-reading programs, because the college would provide only titles and online samples. Students would obtain their own books, just as they do for classes."

about what they are saying? I, too, believe that some books are more profound, more complex, more essential to an understanding of our culture than others; I, too, am appalled to think of students graduating from college not having read Homer, Plato, Milton, Tolstoy—all writers, dead white Western men though they be, whose works have meant a great deal to me. As a teacher of literature and of writing, I too have seen at first hand how ill-educated many students are, and how little aware they are of this important fact about themselves. Last year I taught a graduate seminar in the writing of poetry. None of my students had read more than a smattering of poems by anyone, male or female, published more than ten years ago. Robert Lowell was as far outside their frame of reference as Alexander Pope.... That contemporary writing has a history which it profits us to know in some depth, that we ourselves were not born yesterday, seems too obvious even to argue.⁹⁷

Pollitt is a liberal feminist. So am I, and one of my friends—yet another strong liberal—does not much like the fact that I agreed to write for the NAS report. “The NAS is conservative,” he says. “What is so terrible, really, about what they are saying?” I reply. (I also remind him that some of our leftist colleagues won’t deign to speak to those with whom they disagree even slightly on diversity matters, while Ashley Thorne sought my participation in this report even after I told her precisely how far left I lean. Moreover, she’s not arrogant, rude, or gloomy; she even gave me an extension on my deadline.) What is so terrible, at the very least, about letting new books cool a bit—waiting to see if we still like them in ten or fifteen years? Look at the earlier NAS reports. What do you think now about the hot books of 2010? Better yet, remind yourself of the hot book of 1962: Katherine Anne Porter’s *Ship of Fools*. If you weren’t around then, Lynne Sharon Schwartz will fill you in: “Reviews proliferated like cells splitting in an embryo; literary pages were monopolized for weeks. (Pity any less celebrated author whose book appeared at the same time.)” Yet something, Schwartz confides, put her off. “Beyond the reported twenty-year gestation period and the arrogance of its metaphor (such relentless meaning), it was the awe that greeted it, an awe more fit for the hugeness of the Grand Canyon....” Schwartz didn’t read the book, and she still hasn’t. Her skepticism isn’t at all mysterious to me. It is the skepticism of the liberally educated person. Let us do better at developing it in our students, and let us begin with their summer reading.

⁹⁷ Katha Pollitt, “Why We Read: Canon to the Right of Me....,” *Reasonable Creatures: Essays on Women and Feminism* (New York, 1994), pp. 16-25, reposted at http://blog.bestamericanpoetry.com/the_best_american_poetry/2014/01/why-we-read-canon-to-the-right-of-me-by-katha-pollitt.html.

APPENDIX VI: ON BEACH BOOKS

BY BRUCE GANS

***Bruce Gans** served as a professor of English for many years at the City Colleges of Chicago where he founded the Great Books Curriculum. The Curriculum, which became the model for similar programs around the United States, was funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education, and publicized through front page coverage in the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. Symposium, the student-written intellectual journal he founded, received a commendation from the Wall Street Journal and won an award from Columbia University. Professor Gans has published widely in journals ranging from American Scholar to Playboy and has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant for his fiction and an Illinois Art Council prize for his literary criticism.*

The question of what books can best benefit incoming freshmen is part of the larger question of what books colleges should assign in general, and what is the goal of the education they provide. Without forgetting this larger question, we can focus on the narrower topic of what specially selected book colleges should recommend that students read over the summer in order to equip them with something they can talk about together when they arrive on campus.

Now, as an ice breaker, there is a limited amount that can be done by one-book programs that have no effect on a grade point average. Adolescents who have just left home for the first time are of necessity focusing every particle of their mental energy on such things as concealing their anxiety and homesickness, figuring out where their classes are located, and concealing the hormonal pandemonium unleashed by sudden immersion into the hordes of completely unfamiliar, painfully attractive members of the opposite sex, practically all of whom are unaware of their existence or uninterested in them. Remaining scraps of conversational mental energy are consumed by such topics as their favorite bands and the traumatic injuries they have suffered from their emotionally disturbed and incompetent parents. If reading a book will not count toward any grade, it will not, as a rule, top a student's list of must-do tasks. To have any hope of success, a one-book initiative must at least bear a firm relationship with reality.

This, unfortunately, most such programs do not have. In the first place, colleges use these one-book assignments as a tool to form student friendships and discover the essential commonalities that make up a community—and in doing so ignore the rule of human nature that this is something people do only voluntarily, in their own way, and from within. It is impossible to create friendship and community by a top-down administrative directive. You cannot use a book to manufacture friends.

This misguided attempt, however, is not the only misalignment from reality underlying one-book college reading programs. Another is colleges' practice of basing their selections on superficial, philistine, false assumptions and working definitions. One false assumption is that it is entirely the institution's responsibility for students to read a recommended book, and therefore that the college

must market it like a perfume or a light beer. This assumption, which shortchanges students by not making them responsible for their own education, in turn means advertising such books as politically correct, relevant, possessing the cachet of fleeting popularity—and, above all, certified to be free of thematic and linguistic complexity. The decision to treat students as irresponsible consumers ensures that the one book they will read together will lack intellectual challenge, advanced vocabulary, and a range of reference that can introduce students to sophisticated cultural literacy.

A further misalignment proceeds from colleges' misguided definition of relevance—that a work must be set in the present and contain a multiplicity of details students can “relate to,” because these same details exist in their own lives. In other words, relevance is not defined as being able to initiate student readers into the profoundest depths of the human condition and thereby into understanding their own deepest fears and longings. The great and enduring works of literature can initiate students so, and set them on the path to an examined life that is the goal of a liberal education; books whose “relevance” is defined by their ability to mirror what the daily particulars of students' lives cannot. The goal of most one-book initiatives is divorced from what it should be—providing incoming freshman a thin edge of the wedge into the enlightenment that a liberal education offers, and thereby educating and preparing them for college-level reading while at the same time challenging them by presenting them with academic standards worthy of their respect.

By not being assigned great and enduring books, students are also cheated of the additional benefit of the opportunity to enlarge their vocabulary, and hence of their ability to read ever more complex thought. Words, after all, are each the incarnation of an idea. The more simplified the language and ideas, the more the intellectual impoverishment. George Orwell in 1984 presents this problem with overwhelming force and unsurpassed insight in his fictional language of Newspeak, where Oceania's masters are deliberately creating a stunted language so as to make their subjects incapable of independent thought. Tragically, the struggle against our own Newspeak now falls upon the few thousands of American teachers, who challenge their pupils to increase their vocabulary, and thus fight to increase their students' ability to think. It is a struggle made harder because these teachers must also fight the resistance and resentment of the majority of their colleagues, who have long since chosen to ease their own professional lives by following the easy path of acquiescence in dumbed down pedagogy and curriculum.

Similarly, by not assigning great literature set in an unfamiliar era, students are robbed of the cultural and historical initiation into the knowledge of the magnificently strange past that so often leads to new and expanded realms of imaginative curiosity. They are likewise bereft of the basic cultural literacy such knowledge provides, and which is essential for informed participation in humanistic inquiry.

Worse, to the degree the selected books covertly bear the imprimatur of political correctness, these books double as a guidebook to the speech taboos students must obey in polite collegiate society. These noxious and intimidating college taboos are already pernicious, both because acceptance is paramount to any adolescent and because in college they operate before students graduate, get

jobs, start a family, and have to choose which neighborhood to live in and where to send their kids to school—in other words, before they have come to live in reality and so inevitably discovered that political correctness is so much hypocritical, morally smug, socially destructive, condescending cant. In the meantime, it is a disservice to them to provide institutional sanction to classic adolescent close-mindedness. Yet it need hardly be added that such books are selected to reinforce the stridently espoused views of the faculty and administrators—views which upon any close examination normally bear no relationship to how students (or even the faculty or administrators themselves) ultimately will live their lives or further their careers. The priority given to pseudo-pieties over preparation for actual life can hardly be said to conduce to student welfare.

By avoiding the assignment of the greatest enduring literature, colleges also do students a very serious disservice by not giving them these books when they are ripest to read them. Freshmen are to a far greater degree than adults full of intense emotional vulnerabilities, volatile insecurities, and painful sensitivities—and therefore are the perfect readers for great books. Such books in any era present those elements of the human condition that exist everywhere and always—deep and corrosive loneliness, rejection in love, a mind alienated, injustice, evil, powerlessness, and manipulation. Books become great and enduring because they are the ones that always have most deeply moved, inspired, and comforted their readers. No literature matters until the heart is touched—and there is no reader with a heart so ready to be touched as a freshman. When their hearts are ready, a college should also be ready to provide them the mental tools with which to grasp such literature, so that they may embrace it. This is a main mission of an undergraduate liberal education; it is profoundly, criminally negligent to make anything short of a rigorous effort to provide that opportunity to students. It is educational malfeasance to permit a student to spend four years in college and come out of it equipped with nothing more than a set of superficial, contemporary platitudes.

It is essential, therefore, that no area involving deep emotional truth or the most fundamental and universal human instincts be off limits when a college recommends a book to incoming freshmen. The more profound the book's matter, the more students will be liberated from the superficial and usually false definitions of relevance fed to them at present by their colleges. Instead they will be able to enter into the transcendent knowledge that they are all fellow members in the human condition, and learn to recognize as brothers and sisters all the generations who have come before them.

A last word must be said about an objection colleges often cite to avoid the assignment of great literature—that the students will not be able to read it. Now, I would be the last to denigrate the field of literature by suggesting that it requires anything less than a serious and professional level of study in order to read, analyze and appreciate it fully, or to say that freshman are already capable of approaching a literary text at the level. But to claim that incoming freshman are incapable of a lively and intelligent appreciation of any great literature is not only grossly dismissive of students' capacities but also preposterously untrue. The claim suggests that those college personnel who make it have never read enduring literature, are unfamiliar with or afraid of it, have a political agenda to inculcate, or haven't the aptitude to grasp its beauties and rewards.

My teaching career was devoted to assigning Great Books to community college composition and literature classes, to constructing campus-wide Great Books Curricula on several community college campuses, and to founding Symposium, an award winning, scholarly Great Books journal entirely written by students. I know that some of the classics are not immediately accessible, and I have learned from experience that there is an art to bringing students to grasp authors such as Thucydides, Plutarch, Shakespeare, and Swift. But having said this, it is also true that students can enjoy and understand other classics with scarcely any effort at explication of the ideas by the teacher. It is not the students' capabilities that limit instruction in the great books, but the willingness and readiness of professors to teach them. Where professors are ready and willing to teach such texts, the benefits are immeasurably greater than in teaching dumbed-down college curricula.

A particularly egregious example of such dumbing down is the assignment of comic books (euphemistically, graphic novels) to incoming freshman and undergraduates. We all have every right to read comics and graphic novels at our leisure, and perhaps such works may even be profitably studied in college courses on Graphic Arts or Popular Culture. There is obviously a market for such works and no doubt some students can be trained in college to make a living producing them. But the goals of reading serious literature are far too fundamental and crucial to be satisfied by such productions. Serious literature possesses the unique and indispensable capacity to articulate the most complex human experience and thought, with the highest level of eloquence, precision, and beauty. To suggest a graphic novel can be mentioned in the same breath as Proust and Austen is to expose such an advocate as a fool and philistine of obscene proportions. Actually to teach a graphic novel as an example of great literature is to illustrate how criminally colleges have dumbed down their curricula.

And so lastly, in the hopes if not the confidence that future college one-book summer reading programs may be better served, below is a list of books that colleges can use to spare a generation from cluttering their minds with the currently offered politically correct ephemera. They include classics of Greece and Rome, examples of the great writings of France, Russia, England and America, and—for great works are still being written, and the most discerning critical spirit can recognize such greatness in the here and now—modern novels published in the last generation. These recommendations may also be used to encourage private reading—that solitary communion with an author where reading is most intimate and most moving. I have taught practically all to undergraduates. They teach well. It is not impossible to spark a love of great literature in the young; these books have done so, and can do so again.

Satire and Comedy

Lysistrata by Aristophanes

Candide by Voltaire

Magic Christian by Terry Southern

The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Ivan Chonkin by Vladimir Voinovich

Sneaky People by Thomas Berger

Wisdom

Art of Living by Epictetus (Sharon Lebell, translator)
Far From the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy
The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Integrity

Apology of Socrates by Plato
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

Solitude

The Death of Ivan Ilyich by Leo Tolstoy
Notes from Underground by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Winesburg Ohio by Sherwood Anderson
Quartet in Autumn by Barbara Pym

Injustice

Washington Square by Henry James
Bel Ami by Guy Maupassant
The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe

Crimes of Human Evil

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs
Night by Eli Wiesel
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Poverty

New Grubb Street by George Gissing
The Hamlet by William Faulkner
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith

No Category

“Indian Jugglers” and “The Fight” by William Hazlitt
One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Three Years by Anton Chekhov

APPENDIX VII: YES, YOU CAN—PICK BETTER BOOKS

BY ASHLEY THORNE

Ashley Thorne is Executive Director of the National Association of Scholars. She is the lead author of the previous Beach Books reports.

During the years that the National Association of Scholars has published our annual study, *Beach Books: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?*, we have received a lot of pushback from administrators and faculty members against our recommendations for more rigorous and classically-oriented common reading programs. By way of continuing the conversation, we want to answer their critiques and explain our rationales more fully. We've summarized the most frequent arguments we hear—25 so far—and we answer them below.

1. Objection: Students already read the classics in high school.

We say: Some students read some classics in high school. There are plenty more good books out there. Reading the books that have enduring value is the task of a lifetime, not a few years.

2. Objection: Students will read the classics in their regular college courses.

We say: Only some students read classics in college, probably the students majoring in English or philosophy. Due to the loss of core curricula, students can satisfy humanities requirements with topical courses rather than courses that compel them to engage with the great books. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni surveyed nearly 1,100 colleges and universities around the country and found that 682 did not require students to take a survey in literature or offer a high proportion of literature surveys and courses with a literary focus.⁹⁸

3. Objection: Students will only read the book and enjoy the program if the author comes to campus.

We say: Done well, a common reading program can be fun and interesting for students with or without the author speaking on campus. Colleges have been highly creative in planning campus-wide conversations on a book in common – they have held scavenger hunts, staged readings by well-loved professors, set up open mic nights, art contests, community service, debates, Shakespeare festivals, science experiments, military demonstrations, and more.

4. Objection: We can't bring a dead author to campus.

*We say: Well, true... Having an author who can speak in person is great, but it isn't the only way to engage students. Colleges can bring an expert who can speak authoritatively about the book. If you're reading *The Decipherment of Linear B*, bring in an expert cryptologist. If you're reading *The Voyage of the Beagle*, bring in an expert marine naturalist. You can also have students hear from a Dickens or Melville scholar. Or follow the University of*

⁹⁸ "What Will They Learn? A Guide to What College Rankings Don't Tell You," <http://whatwilltheylearn.com/disciplines/literature>.

Wisconsin-Parkside's lead and bring in an Edgar Allen Poe impersonator. There are also skilled impersonators of Lincoln, Twain, Teddy Roosevelt, and others. Some of these speakers are also more affordable than contemporary authors.

5. Objection: Testing students on the book takes the joy out of reading.

We say: When students come to college, they submit themselves to the discipline of doing intellectual work under deadline and with periodic assessment. Testing is a normal part of college. College ought to cultivate a love of learning in students such that they can take joy even in required reading. Students who dislike reading will balk at most required reading assignments, and those students won't read the book on their own without a test anyway. As adults know, doing something you don't immediately enjoy can often reap rewards down the road that you didn't expect at the time.

6. Objection: Testing is logistically impossible for a large university.

We say: Although at most colleges, common reading falls outside regular courses, passing a test on the book can be made a requirement for registering for classes or for graduation. Colleges can impose administrative penalties on students who fail to meet non-academic requirements, as when Oklahoma State University puts a hold on course registration for any student who fails successfully to complete its sexual assault prevention course.⁹⁹ Some colleges test students in other areas, such as language proficiency. And some still have swim tests as graduation requirements.¹⁰⁰ A test on the reading can be online and multiple choice, so that the grading is automated. Universities can either require students to continue taking the test until they pass, or they can impose a penalty (an assigned paper, a fee, a mandatory course that teaches the book, etc.) on students who fail it. Testing solves a host of problems that have faced common reading – starting with the problem of persuading all students to read the book.

7. Objection: Students wouldn't feel comfortable questioning a classic book.

We say: In his criteria for the reading selection, Princeton president Christopher Eisgruber told his faculty that “the book should be something that students can argue with and about; for this reason, I'm inclined to avoid ‘classics’ that students might feel obliged to venerate.” Actually, books become classics because people have argued about them for a long time. Also, most undergraduate students have few qualms about voicing their true opinions.

8. Objection: Older books are irrelevant to the world today.

We say: Classic books are classics because they contain timeless truths about human nature. Reading classic books will give students a starting point from which to talk to others about

99 Monica Vendituoli, “A Scripted Response to Sexual Assault,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 25, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Scripted-Response-to-Sexual/148465/>.

100 Melissa Korn, “Could You Pass These College Swim Tests,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2012, <http://blogs.wsj.com/dailyfix/2012/11/28/could-you-pass-these-college-swim-tests/>.

contemporary issues their whole lives long, not just right now. Having everyone read only “in-the-moment” books, which fall in and out of popularity, divides generations from one another rather than uniting them in a way that will enable them to connect with people both older and younger.

Colleges can assign an older book and have students use it as an exercise in finding the connections to contemporary issues. It is good for students to learn how to make these connections rather than have them always ready-made for them.

9. Objection: Students only want to read authors to whom they can relate – it’s better if the authors and the students are close to the same age.

We say: Evidence for this seems thin. But even if students are more interested in authors who are more like them, college is supposed to both broaden their horizons (showing them people who are not like them) and offer them substance they would not have chosen on their own.

10. Objection: For the program to be successful, we need campus-wide buy-in. Having a large committee with members from diverse areas that votes on the book is the only way to help each department feel represented.

We say: Broad representation is not the best recipe for success in choosing a book-in-common. Everyone who’s been on a large committee knows the larger the committee, the more political and unwieldy selection becomes. It also leads to important but less popular books getting outvoted.

Instead of trying to get someone from every possible department and demographic, colleges would do well to have a small number of thoughtful and well-read people who confer, read the book(s) being considered, and come to a decision. That helps keeps selection from turning into a book popularity contest. “Buy-in” can be achieved in other ways, such as offering awards for departments that host the best events based on the book.

11. Objection: Many of the new students at my college come from conservative backgrounds – we want to broaden their perspectives.

We say: Nationwide, in only one year (1981) of the last 43 were there more conservatives than liberals as college freshmen, according to data from the Higher Education Research Institute.¹⁰¹ Individual colleges will have differing proportions of student political leanings, but while broadening perspectives is a worthy goal, a book with a blatantly liberal theme is not a good choice for common reading.

One certain way that students need to broaden their perspectives is in thinking beyond the biases of their own era. Over time society’s reigning concepts of right and wrong can change significantly – such changeable perceptions shouldn’t always be trusted. Reading an

¹⁰¹ “Backgrounds and Beliefs of College Freshmen,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 5, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/interactives/freshmensurvey15?cid=inline-promo>.

older book gives students insight into what people before them thought. Some older ways of thinking have been proven incorrect; others may be worth considering.

12. Objection: Often we assign books that inspire students to be agents of change in the world. It's important that they meet someone today who is setting an example for them.

We say: Giving students modern-day role models is a good idea, but that can be achieved through regular lectures by visiting speakers. Students also need role models from history and literature. Additionally, colleges should consider that molding students as “change agents” should take second place to educating them. They need to learn about the world before trying to transform it.

13. Objection: The classics were written by white people, and our non-white students can't relate to them.

*We say: Many, though not all, classics were written by white people. Are students really so defined by their races that they have nothing to gain from an author with skin color or heritage that differs from their own? In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that he was able to converse with Shakespeare, Aristotle, and Aurelius, and thereby “dwell above the veil” of racial division. He desired such transcendence for all Americans.*

*If colleges seek to use common reading to emphasize how people of different backgrounds treat one another, there are numerous classic books that powerfully portray a clash of cultures or races, including *Othello* (Shakespeare), *The Heart of Darkness* (Conrad), *Kim* (Kipling), *Typee* (Melville), *A Passage to India* (Forster), *Hadji Murad* (Tolstoy), and *Daniel Deronda* (Eliot).*

14. Objection: The classics are elitist – only the privileged read them.

We say: It is a privilege to read the classics – and the more people we can give that privilege, the more equity there will be. If we avoid taking students “higher” and leading them to a vantage point from which they can glimpse the ideas that have shaped society and brought us to where we are now, we put a cap on their potential. People always talk about the importance of giving students “access” to college as the entry point to the best opportunities in life. What access have students really been given if they are taught to immerse themselves in the passing scene rather than grapple with what is enduring and “higher”?

15. Objection: We have a lot of “book virgins” and our students come from a range of reading levels and academic backgrounds.

We say: For every college or university, it is inherently difficult to set a standard that will be appropriate for everyone because of the disparity in academic ability of students being admitted. Even students who have never read a whole book before—“book virgins”—are now being admitted to college in increasing numbers.

Colleges should take the range in students' reading levels into consideration but should be careful not to tailor assignments to the students that have the lowest abilities. If they are do

*have high proportions of “book virgins,” they would do well to choose simpler but thoughtful books that have timeless themes and that will whet students’ appetites for more. Some possibilities are *The Old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway (which is only about a hundred pages long and is written mainly in monosyllables), *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, and *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne.*

16. Objection: We need to find out what books students want to read and assign those.

We say: There is a temptation to choose a book that seems like it would be those students’ own choice. But suiting a book to students’ nascent (and changing) tastes is both condescending and unhelpful. The “student-centered” pedagogy is in this case actually not in students’ best interests for their future development. The reason young people go to college—rather than stay home and read books they want to read—is to have their minds formed by others who know more than they do.

17. Objection: We have to be realistic about what students are going to read. Classic books are too hard.

*We say: Realism does have a place here; there’s a good chance students would revolt if assigned *War and Peace*. But as all teachers know, when you expect more of students, they expect more of themselves. No one rises to a challenge that isn’t there. The assignment of a challenging book, however, is not enough by itself.*

Colleges must believe in students and draw out their potential. They must also foster intellectual curiosity, a sense of honor in taking on difficulty, and the camaraderie and adventure that comes from facing something unfamiliar together. Without that spirit, it is easy to give up prematurely at the prospect that students will simply not read the book.

18. Objection: They are already overwhelmed as they start college, and they would feel afraid of sounding stupid in a discussion about a classic book.

We say: Students should feel free to share their thoughts about the book. But college isn’t primarily supposed to make students feel comfortable and free them from the fear of sounding stupid. A realization of what you don’t yet know can be a valuable thing in the right environment. Such a realization can cause a student either to shut down and not try – or to gain humility and a desire to learn more in order to have something to contribute to the conversation. It’s up to colleges to nurture the latter, though it’s not easy.

19. Objection: Faculty members don’t feel equipped to teach the book.

We say: If using the book in classes, train faculty members to teach the book. Find some who are qualified by their experience and expertise, and have them do the training. If necessary, bring in people from outside the college.

20. Objection: Publishers provide resources, such as weekly discussion guides, for recent books, which makes it easier to choose those books.

*We say: Publishers have strong financial incentives to make it very easy for colleges to use the new books they are selling. Similar resources are needed for older and classic books. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) offers readers guides, discussion activities, writing exercises, capstone projects, suggested essay topics, historical background, interviews, timelines, and audio and video guides for 37 good books such as *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather, *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. These can be used to help students understand the book. Colleges can also develop their own materials, such as a bookmark with themes to look for (as Texas State University and others have done). Student- or faculty-led book clubs or study groups are helpful as well, and those can be organized by the department sponsoring the common reading.*

21. Objection: Graphic novels and graphic memoirs help students visualize ideas.

We say: Art and other visual materials can be helpful tools in teaching abstract ideas, but graphic books (books written in the form of comics) don't serve one of the main purposes colleges say they have for common readings: setting the academic expectations of the college. Instead, colleges should treat students as adults capable of using their own imaginations to picture the scenes described. It's the same reason it's better to read the book before seeing the movie version – when he isn't offered visual cues, the reader engages his mind more fully.

*A picture may be worth a thousand words, but reading a thousand-word description of a scene causes the reader to take the time to put it all together in his mind. Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows*, wrote, quoting developmental psychologist Patricia Greenfield:*

But our “new strengths in visual-spatial intelligence” go hand in hand with a weakening of our capacities for the kind of “deep processing” that underpins “mindful knowledge acquisition, inductive analysis, critical thinking, imagination, and reflection.”¹⁰²

While there may be a place in some college courses for graphic fiction and non-fiction, it is good to start students out with a book that requires them to use their capacity for “deep processing” to help them sharpen those skills in preparation for college-level work.

22. Objection: The books we assign are instant classics.

*We say: Perhaps some of the books frequently assigned as common reading have staying power. *This I Believe* anthologies by NPR persist in popularity as common reading assignments. But they are a rare exception in a sector with a very high turnover rate. In 2013, 82 percent of the selected titles were different from those chosen the previous year. Some books that were*

102 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York, 2010), p. 141.

popular a few years ago, such as Barbara Ehrenreich’s Nickel and Dimed, have disappeared. Even The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, which has been the most frequently selected book for three years in a row, is now waning in popularity. Only time will tell whether contemporary books can actually stand the test of time.

23. Objection: Choosing a book to read “in common” doesn’t mean that we endorse everything in the book.

We say: No, but choosing one book rather than another one does mean something. When the College of Charleston chose Fun Home, the graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel about becoming a lesbian and discovering her father was gay, its programming included a lecture on “Same Sex Marriage and the Courts” given by a pro-gay-marriage Harvard historian who testified in the Proposition 8 case in California. There were no readings or speakers opposed to same-sex marriage.

The College also provided a reading guide that encouraged students to “identify” with Fun Home and to think about “gender roles and sexual identity” within the context of “shifting cultural norms.” Study questions include, “What does Bechdel suggest we risk by denying our erotic truth?” In choosing a book centered on sexuality, the College asked students to question their own sexuality and to see it as flexible. That means the College was, by implication, taking a position on a matter which can legitimately be debated. Other colleges, in choosing obviously ideological books (in 2013, 6 colleges chose books on climate change; 6 chose books on illegal immigration; and 19 chose books on public policies such as wealth redistribution, affirmative action, minimum wage, and universal health care) do the same. It is better to choose books that do not obviously fit into a political or ideological narrative.

24. Objection: It doesn’t matter what book colleges choose as long as students are having a conversation about something.

We say: Conversation is good, but it is not the goal in itself. Ideas matter. Ask yourself, “Are students talking about things that will fade in a few years’ time? Or are they finding ways to connect concepts in older books with current matters? Are students talking about ideas that lead them to higher aspirations, make them curious to know more, take them outside themselves, and give them a sense of intellectual adventure?”

25. Objection: The classics aren’t everything.

We say: No, and students should read contemporary books as well. But look at the data on what colleges are assigning, and older books are clearly a tiny minority. They are underrepresented. College is the best setting to introduce students to important books they won’t otherwise encounter—so why not try a classic?

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