

English Department
English 12
Summer Reading List¹

In the Peddie English Department, we hope that you encounter both “windows” and “mirrors” during your reading journey here. As Rudine Sims Bishop writes in her essay “Windows and Mirrors: Children’s Books and Parallel Cultures”:

A book can sometimes be a window. The view from the window can be imagined or real, familiar or new, panoramic or narrow. Usually the window is also a door, and a reader has only to walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or re-created in the book. When lighting conditions are just right, a window can also be a mirror, reflecting back for us the joys and sorrows, the loves and hates, the pain and pleasure of living. One of the reasons literature exists is to transform human experience, and reflect it back to us so that we can better understand it. Through the mirror of literature we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, of reaffirming our place in the world and our society.

In other words, books can serve as “mirrors” that reflect back to you your own experiences, while they can also function as “windows,” helping you to see the world through perspectives different than your own. While we design our academic-year curriculum with this framework in mind, we also recognize that Summer is an opportunity to continue reading literature that both reflects and broadens your perspectives.

Therefore, we ask that you select TWO books to read this Summer from your grade-level Summer Reading list:

- One book exploring topics that resonate with your own experience
- One book exploring topics that are distinct from your own experience

We recognize that *the entirety* of the book will not reflect/diverge from your own experience; rather, we ask that at least *one* aspect of it do so. (E.g. character, setting, plot, etc.) You also may not select the same book for both a ‘window’ and a ‘mirror’- you must read two *different* texts from your grade-level Summer reading list.

¹ All descriptions are from Amazon unless otherwise noted

1. [Apeirogon](#) by Colum McCann: Bassam Aramin is Palestinian. Rami Elhanan is Israeli. They inhabit a world of conflict that colors every aspect of their lives, from the roads they are allowed to drive on to the schools their children attend to the checkpoints, both physical and emotional, they must negotiate.

But their lives, however circumscribed, are upended one after the other: first, Rami's thirteen-year-old daughter, Smadar, becomes the victim of suicide bombers; a decade later, Bassam's ten-year-old daughter, Abir, is killed by a rubber bullet. Rami and Bassam had been raised to hate one another. And yet, when they learn of each other's stories, they recognize the loss that connects them. Together they attempt to use their grief as a weapon for peace—and with their one small act, start to permeate what has for generations seemed an impermeable conflict.

This extraordinary novel is the fruit of a seed planted when the novelist Colum McCann met the real Bassam and Rami on a trip with the non-profit organization Narrative 4. McCann was moved by their willingness to share their stories with the world, by their hope that if they could see themselves in one another, perhaps others could too.

With their blessing, and unprecedented access to their families, lives, and personal recollections, McCann began to craft *Apeirogon*, which uses their real-life stories to begin another—one that crosses centuries and continents, stitching together time, art, history, nature, and politics in a tale both heartbreaking and hopeful. The result is an ambitious novel, crafted out of a universe of fictional and nonfictional material, with these fathers' moving story at its heart.

2. [The Beautiful and Damned by F. Scott Fitzgerald](#): In this follow-up to his tremendously successful first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, F. Scott Fitzgerald again recaptures the Jazz Age's darker side as well as its excitement and *joie de vivre*. *The Beautiful and Damned* traces the meteoric path of two glittering young socialites. Building their marriage on the shaky foundation of an expected inheritance, they devote themselves to hedonistic pursuits that lead to moral and financial bankruptcy.

The characters' self-indulgence and mutual destruction anticipated the tragic lives of Scott and his flapper wife, Zelda. The Fitzgeralds regarded the world as a stage and their lives as performances, and their glamorous doings became as well-known as any of Scott's books. In an eerie foreshadowing of the real-life couple's rapid descent into ruin, this lyric, compulsively readable narrative examines the perishable nature of dreams in the face of reality—a theme scrutinized with profound effect in the book's esteemed successor, *The Great Gatsby*.

3. [Blood Meridian](#) by Cormac McCarthy: “Based on historical events that took place on the Texas-Mexico border in the 1850s, *Blood Meridian* traces the fortunes of the Kid, a fourteen-year-old Tennessean who stumbles into the nightmarish world where Indians are being murdered and the market for their scalps is thriving.”
4. [Cat’s Cradle](#) by Kurt Vonnegut: “*Cat’s Cradle* is Kurt Vonnegut’s satirical commentary on modern man and his madness. An apocalyptic tale of this planet’s ultimate fate, it features a midget as the protagonist, a complete, original theology created by a calypso singer, and a vision of the future that is at once blackly fatalistic and hilariously funny. A book that left an indelible mark on an entire generation of readers, *Cat’s Cradle* is one of the twentieth century’s most important works—and Vonnegut at his very best.”
5. [Chain-Gang All-Stars](#) by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah: “Loretta Thurwar and Hamara “Hurricane Staxxx” Stacker are the stars of *Chain-Gang All-Stars*, the cornerstone of CAPE, or Criminal Action Penal Entertainment, a highly-popular, highly-controversial, profit-raising program in America’s increasingly dominant private prison industry. It’s the return of the gladiators and prisoners are competing for the ultimate prize: their freedom.

In CAPE, prisoners travel as Links in Chain-Gangs, competing in death-matches for packed arenas with righteous protestors at the gates. Thurwar and Staxxx, both teammates and lovers, are the fan favorites. And if all goes well, Thurwar will be free in just a few matches, a fact she carries as heavily as her lethal hammer. As she prepares to leave her fellow Links, she considers how she might help preserve their humanity, in defiance of these so-called games, but CAPE’s corporate owners will stop at nothing to protect their status quo and the obstacles they lay in Thurwar’s path have devastating consequences.

Moving from the Links in the field to the protestors to the CAPE employees and beyond, *Chain-Gang All-Stars* is a kaleidoscopic, excoriating look at the American prison system’s unholy alliance of systemic racism, unchecked capitalism, and mass incarceration, and a clear-eyed reckoning with what freedom in this country really means from a “new and necessary American voice” (Tommy Orange, *The New York Times* Book Review).”

6. [Circe](#) by Madeline Miller: “In the house of Helios, god of the sun and mightiest of the Titans, a daughter is born. But Circe is a strange child -- not powerful, like her father, nor viciously alluring like her mother. Turning to the world of mortals for companionship, she discovers that she does possess power -- the power of witchcraft, which can transform rivals into monsters and menace the gods themselves.

Threatened, Zeus banishes her to a deserted island, where she hones her occult craft, tames wild beasts and crosses paths with many of the most famous figures in all of mythology, including the Minotaur, Daedalus and his doomed son Icarus, the murderous Medea, and, of course, wily Odysseus.

But there is danger, too, for a woman who stands alone, and Circe unwittingly draws the wrath of both men and gods, ultimately finding herself pitted against one of the most terrifying and vengeful of the Olympians. To protect what she loves most, Circe must summon all her strength and choose, once and for all, whether she belongs with the gods she is born from, or the mortals she has come to love.

With unforgettably vivid characters, mesmerizing language, and page-turning suspense, Circe is a triumph of storytelling, an intoxicating epic of family rivalry, palace intrigue, love and loss, as well as a celebration of indomitable female strength in a man's world.

7. [Citizen](#) by Claudia Rankine “Claudia Rankine's bold new book recounts mounting racial aggressions in ongoing encounters in twenty-first-century daily life and in the media. Some of these encounters are slights, seeming slips of the tongue, and some are intentional offensives in the classroom, at the supermarket, at home, on the tennis court with Serena Williams and the soccer field with Zinedine Zidane, online, on TV-everywhere, all the time. The accumulative stresses come to bear on a person's ability to speak, perform, and stay alive. Our addressability is tied to the state of our belonging, Rankine argues, as are our assumptions and expectations of citizenship. In essay, image, and poetry, Citizen is a powerful testament to the individual and collective effects of racism in our contemporary, often named "post-race" society.”
8. [The Color Purple](#) by Alice Walker: Celie has grown up poor in rural Georgia, despised by the society around her and abused by her own family. She strives to protect her sister, Nettie, from a similar fate, and while Nettie escapes to a new life as a missionary in Africa, Celie is left behind without her best friend and confidante, married off to an older suitor, and sentenced to a life alone with a harsh and brutal husband.

In an attempt to transcend a life that often seems too much to bear, Celie begins writing letters directly to God. The letters, spanning twenty years, record a journey of self-discovery and empowerment guided by the light of a few strong women. She meets Shug Avery, her husband's mistress and a jazz singer with a zest for life, and her stepson's wife, Sophia, who challenges her to fight for independence. And though the many letters from Celie's sister are hidden by her husband, Nettie's unwavering support will prove to be the most breathtaking of all.

The Color Purple has sold more than five million copies, inspired an Academy Award-nominated film starring Oprah Winfrey and directed by Steven Spielberg, and been adapted into a Tony-nominated Broadway musical. Lauded as a literary masterpiece, this is the groundbreaking novel that placed Walker “in the company of Faulkner” (The Nation), and remains a wrenching—yet intensely uplifting—experience for new generations of readers.

9. [A Constellation of Vital Phenomena](#) by Anthony Marra: “In a small rural village in Chechnya, eight-year-old Havaa watches from the woods as Russian soldiers abduct her father in the middle of the night and then set fire to her home. When their lifelong neighbor Akhmed finds Havaa hiding in the forest with a strange blue suitcase, he makes a decision that will forever change their lives. He will seek refuge at the abandoned hospital where the sole remaining doctor, Sonja Rabina, treats the wounded.

For Sonja, the arrival of Akhmed and Havaa is an unwelcome surprise. Weary and overburdened, she has no desire to take on additional risk and responsibility. But over the course of five extraordinary days, Sonja’s world will shift on its axis and reveal the intricate pattern of connections that weaves together the pasts of these three unlikely companions and unexpectedly decides their fate. A story of the transcendent power of love in wartime, *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena* is a work of sweeping breadth, profound compassion, and lasting significance.”

10. [Dispossessed](#) by Ursula K. Le Guin: “A bleak moon settled by utopian anarchists, Anarres has long been isolated from other worlds, including its mother planet, Urras—a civilization of warring nations, great poverty, and immense wealth. Now Shevek, a brilliant physicist, is determined to reunite the two planets, which have been divided by centuries of distrust. He will seek answers, question the unquestionable, and attempt to tear down the walls of hatred that have kept them apart.

To visit Urras—to learn, to teach, to share—will require great sacrifice and risks, which Shevek willingly accepts. But the ambitious scientist's gift is soon seen as a threat, and in the profound conflict that ensues, he must reexamine his beliefs even as he ignites the fires of change.”

11. [Dune](#) by Frank Herbert: “Set on the desert planet Arrakis, *Dune* is the story of the boy Paul Atreides, who would become the mysterious man known as Muad'dib. He would avenge the traitorous plot against his noble family—and would bring to fruition humankind's most ancient and unattainable dream.

A stunning blend of adventure and mysticism, environmentalism and politics, *Dune* won the first Nebula Award, shared the Hugo Award, and formed the basis of what is undoubtedly the grandest epic in science fiction. Frank Herbert's death in 1986 was a tragic loss, yet the astounding legacy of his visionary fiction will live forever.”

12. [End Zone](#) by Don DeLillo: “At Logos College in West Texas, huge young men, vacuum-packed into shoulder pads and shiny helmets, play football with intense passion. During an uncharacteristic winning season, the perplexed and distracted running back Gary Harkness has periodic fits of nuclear glee; he is fueled and shielded by his fear of and fascination with nuclear conflict. Among oddly afflicted and recognizable players, the terminologies of football and nuclear war--the language of end zones--become interchangeable, and their meaning deteriorates as the collegiate year runs its course. In

this triumphantly funny, deeply searching novel, Don DeLillo explores the metaphor of football as war with rich, original zeal.”

13. [For Whom The Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway](#): In 1937 Ernest Hemingway traveled to Spain to cover the civil war there for the North American Newspaper Alliance. Three years later he completed the greatest novel to emerge from “the good fight” and one of the foremost classics of war literature. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tells of loyalty and courage, love and defeat, and the tragic death of an ideal. Robert Jordan, a young American in the International Brigades, is attached to an antifascist guerilla unit in the mountains of Spain. In his portrayal of Jordan’s love for the beautiful Maria and his superb account of a guerilla leader’s last stand, Hemingway creates a work at once rare and beautiful, strong and brutal, compassionate, moving, and wise. Greater in power, broader in scope, and more intensely emotional than any of the author’s previous works, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* stands as one of the best war novels ever written.

14. [House of Leaves](#) by Mark Danielewski: “Years ago, when House of Leaves was first being passed around, it was nothing more than a badly bundled heap of paper, parts of which would occasionally surface on the Internet. No one could have anticipated the small but devoted following this terrifying story would soon command. Starting with an odd assortment of marginalized youth—musicians, tattoo artists, programmers, strippers, environmentalists, and adrenaline junkies—the book eventually made its way into the hands of older generations, who not only found themselves in those strangely arranged pages but also discovered a way back into the lives of their estranged children.

Now made available in book form, complete with the original colored words, vertical footnotes, and second and third appendices, the story remains unchanged. Similarly, the cultural fascination with House of Leaves remains as fervent and as imaginative as ever. The novel has gone on to inspire doctorate-level courses and masters theses, cultural phenomena like the online urban legend of “the backrooms,” and incredible works of art in entirely unrealed mediums from music to video games.

Neither Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Will Navidson nor his companion Karen Green was prepared to face the consequences of the impossibility of their new home, until the day their two little children wandered off and their voices eerily began to return another story—of creature darkness, of an ever-growing abyss behind a closet door, and of that unholy growl which soon enough would tear through their walls and consume all their dreams.”

15. [Invisible Man](#) by Ralph Ellison: “Invisible Man is a milestone in American literature, a book that has continued to engage readers since its appearance in 1952. A first novel by an unknown writer, it remained on the bestseller list for sixteen weeks, won the National Book Award for fiction, and established Ralph Ellison as one of the key writers of the

century. The nameless narrator of the novel describes growing up in a black community in the South, attending a Negro college from which he is expelled, moving to New York and becoming the chief spokesman of the Harlem branch of "the Brotherhood," and retreating amid violence and confusion to the basement lair of the Invisible Man he imagines himself to be. The book is a passionate and witty tour de force of style, strongly influenced by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce, and Dostoevsky."

16. [Joe Turner's Come and Gone](#) by August Wilson: "When Harold Loomis arrives at a black Pittsburgh boardinghouse after seven years' impressed labor on Joe Turner's chain gang, he is a free man—in body. But the scars of his enslavement and a sense of inescapable alienation oppress his spirit still, and the seemingly hospitable rooming house seethes with tension and distrust in the presence of this tormented stranger. Loomis is looking for the wife he left behind, believing that she can help him reclaim his old identity. But through his encounters with the other residents he begins to realize that what he really seeks is his rightful place in a new world—and it will take more than the skill of the local "People Finder" to discover it."
17. [Kindred](#) by Octavia Butler: "Dana's torment begins when she suddenly vanishes on her 26th birthday from California, 1976, and is dragged through time to antebellum Maryland to rescue a boy named Rufus, heir to a slaveowner's plantation. She soon realizes the purpose of her summons to the past: protect Rufus to ensure his assault of her Black ancestor so that she may one day be born. As she endures the traumas of slavery and the soul-crushing normalization of savagery, Dana fights to keep her autonomy and return to the present.
Blazing the trail for neo-slavery narratives like Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *The Water Dancer*, Butler takes one of speculative fiction's oldest tropes and infuses it with lasting depth and power. Dana not only experiences the cruelties of slavery on her skin but also grimly learns to accept it as a condition of her own existence in the present. "Where stories about American slavery are often gratuitous, reducing its horror to explicit violence and brutality, *Kindred* is controlled and precise" (New York Times)."
18. [Love in the Time of Cholera](#) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "In their youth, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza fall passionately in love. When Fermina eventually chooses to marry a wealthy, well-born doctor, Florentino is devastated, but he is a romantic. As he rises in his business career he whiles away the years in 622 affairs--yet he reserves his heart for Fermina. Her husband dies at last, and Florentino purposefully attends the funeral. Fifty years, nine months, and four days after he first declared his love for Fermina, he will do so again."

19. [Martyr](#) by Kaveh Akbar: Cyrus Shams is a young man grappling with an inheritance of violence and loss: his mother's plane was shot down over the skies of the Persian Gulf in a senseless accident; and his father's life in America was circumscribed by his work killing chickens at a factory farm in the Midwest. Cyrus is a drunk, an addict, and a poet, whose obsession with martyrs leads him to examine the mysteries of his past—toward an uncle who rode through Iranian battlefields dressed as the angel of death to inspire and comfort the dying, and toward his mother, through a painting discovered in a Brooklyn art gallery that suggests she may not have been who or what she seemed. Kaveh Akbar's *Martyr!* is a paean to how we spend our lives seeking meaning—in faith, art, ourselves, others.
20. [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) by William Shakespeare: In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare stages the workings of love. Theseus and Hippolyta, about to marry, are figures from mythology. In the woods outside Theseus's Athens, two young men and two young women sort themselves out into couples—but not before they form first one love triangle, and then another.
- Also in the woods, the king and queen of fairyland, Oberon and Titania, battle over custody of an orphan boy; Oberon uses magic to make Titania fall in love with a weaver named Bottom, whose head is temporarily transformed into that of a donkey by a hobgoblin or “puck,” Robin Goodfellow. Finally, Bottom and his companions ineptly stage the tragedy of “Pyramus and Thisbe.”
21. [The Namesake](#) by Jhumpa Lahiri: “Meet the Ganguli family, new arrivals from Calcutta, trying their best to become Americans even as they pine for home. The name they bestow on their firstborn, Gogol, betrays all the conflicts of honoring tradition in a new world—conflicts that will haunt Gogol on his own winding path through divided loyalties, comic detours, and wrenching love affairs. In *The Namesake*, the Pulitzer Prize winner Jhumpa Lahiri brilliantly illuminates the immigrant experience and the tangled ties between generations.”
22. [Never Let Me Go](#) by Kazuo Ishiguro: “As children, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy were students at Hailsham, an exclusive boarding school secluded in the English countryside. It was a place of mercurial cliques and mysterious rules where teachers were constantly reminding their charges of how special they were.
- Now, years later, Kathy is a young woman. Ruth and Tommy have reentered her life. And for the first time she is beginning to look back at their shared past and understand just what it is that makes them special—and how that gift will shape the rest of their time together.”

23. [No One Is Talking About This](#) by Patricia Lockwood: As this urgent, genre-defying book opens, a woman who has recently been elevated to prominence for her social media posts travels around the world to meet her adoring fans. She is overwhelmed by navigating the new language and etiquette of what she terms "the portal," where she grapples with an unshakable conviction that a vast chorus of voices is now dictating her thoughts. When existential threats--from climate change and economic precariousness to the rise of an unnamed dictator and an epidemic of loneliness--begin to loom, she posts her way deeper into the portal's void. An avalanche of images, details, and references accumulate to form a landscape that is post-sense, post-irony, post-everything. "Are we in hell?" the people of the portal ask themselves. "Are we all just going to keep doing this until we die?"

Suddenly, two texts from her mother pierce the fray: "Something has gone wrong," and "How soon can you get here?" As real life and its stakes collide with the increasingly absurd antics of the portal, the woman confronts a world that seems to contain both an abundance of proof that there is goodness, empathy, and justice in the universe, and a deluge of evidence to the contrary.

Fragmentary and omniscient, incisive and sincere, *No One Is Talking About This* is at once a love letter to the endless scroll and a profound, modern meditation on love, language, and human connection from a singular voice in American literature.

24. [Norwegian Wood](#) by Haruki Murakami: In a complete stylistic departure from his mysterious and surreal novels (*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*; *A Wild Sheep Chase*) that show the influences of Salinger, Fitzgerald and Tom Robbins, Murakami tells a bittersweet coming-of-age story, reminiscent of J.R. Salamanca's classic 1964 novel, *Lilith*. The tale of a young man's involvement with a schizophrenic girl. A successful, 37-year-old businessman, Toru Watanabe, hears a version of the Beatles' *Norwegian Wood*, and the music transports him back 18 years to his college days. His best friend, Kizuki, inexplicably commits suicide, after which Toru becomes first enamored, then involved with Kizuki's girlfriend, Naoko. But Naoko is a very troubled young woman; her brilliant older sister has also committed suicide, and though sweet and desperate for happiness, she often becomes untethered. She eventually enters a convalescent home for disturbed people, and when Toru visits her, he meets her roommate, an older musician named Reiko, who's had a long history of mental instability. The three become fast friends. Toru makes a commitment to Naoko, but back at college he encounters Midori, a vibrant, outgoing young woman. As he falls in love with her, Toru realizes he cannot continue his relationship with Naoko, whose sanity is fast deteriorating. Though the solution to his problem comes too easily, Murakami tells a subtle, charming, profound and very sexy story of young love bound for tragedy. Published in Japan in 1987, this novel proved a wild success there, selling four million copies.

25. [On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous](#) by Ocean Vuong: “On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous is a letter from a son to a mother who cannot read. Written when the speaker, Little Dog, is in his late twenties, the letter unearths a family’s history that began before he was born — a history whose epicenter is rooted in Vietnam — and serves as a doorway into parts of his life his mother has never known, all of it leading to an unforgettable revelation. At once a witness to the fraught yet undeniable love between a single mother and her son, it is also a brutally honest exploration of race, class, and masculinity. Asking questions central to our American moment, immersed as we are in addiction, violence, and trauma, but undergirded by compassion and tenderness, On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous is as much about the power of telling one’s own story as it is about the obliterating silence of not being heard.

With stunning urgency and grace, Ocean Vuong writes of people caught between disparate worlds, and asks how we heal and rescue one another without forsaking who we are. The question of how to survive, and how to make of it a kind of joy, powers the most important debut novel of many years.”

26. [Picture of Dorian Gray](#) by Oscar Wilde: “Dorian Gray is the subject of a full-length portrait in oil by Basil Hallward, an artist impressed and infatuated by Dorian's beauty; he believes that Dorian's beauty is responsible for the new mood in his art as a painter. Through Basil, Dorian meets Lord Henry Wotton, and he soon is enthralled by the aristocrat's hedonistic worldview: that beauty and sensual fulfillment are the only things worth pursuing in life.

Newly understanding that his beauty will fade, Dorian expresses the desire to sell his soul, to ensure that the picture, rather than he, will age and fade. The wish is granted, and Dorian pursues a libertine life of varied amoral experiences while staying young and beautiful; all the while, his portrait ages and records every sin.”

27. [Pride and Prejudice](#) by Jane Austen: “Pride and Prejudice is an 1813 romantic novel by Jane Austen that follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness.

Mr. Bennet, owner of the Longbourn estate in Hertfordshire, has five daughters, but his property is entailed and can only be passed to a male heir. His wife also lacks an inheritance, so his family faces becoming very poor upon his death. Thus, it is imperative that at least one of the girls marry well to support the others, which is a motivation that drives the plot.

Pride and Prejudice has consistently appeared near the top of lists of "most-loved books" among literary scholars and the reading public. It has become one of the most popular novels in English literature, with over 20 million copies sold, and has inspired many derivatives in modern literature. For more than a century, dramatic adaptations,

reprints, unofficial sequels, films, and TV versions of *Pride and Prejudice* have portrayed the memorable characters and themes of the novel, reaching mass audiences.”

28. [Resurrection](#) by Leo Tolstoy: “Serving on the jury at a murder trial, Prince Dmitri Nekhlyudov is devastated when he sees the prisoner - Katyusha, a young maid he seduced and abandoned years before. As Dmitri faces the consequences of his actions, he decides to give up his life of wealth and luxury to devote himself to rescuing Katyusha, even if it means following her into exile in Siberia. But can a man truly find redemption by saving another person? Tolstoy's most controversial novel, *Resurrection* (1899) is a scathing indictment of injustice, corruption and hypocrisy at all levels of society. Creating a vast panorama of Russian life, from peasants to aristocrats, bureaucrats to convicts, it reveals Tolstoy's magnificent storytelling powers. Anthony Briggs' superb new translation preserves Tolstoy's gripping realism and satirical humour. In his introduction, Briggs discusses the true story behind *Resurrection*, Tolstoy's political and religious reasons for writing the novel, his gift for characterization and the compelling psychological portrait of Dmitri. This edition also includes a chronology, notes and a summary of chapters.”

29. [The Shadow King](#) by Maaza Mengiste: A gripping novel set during Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, *The Shadow King* takes us back to the first real conflict of World War II, casting light on the women soldiers who were left out of the historical record.

With the threat of Mussolini's army looming, recently orphaned Hirut struggles to adapt to her new life as a maid in Kidane and his wife Aster's household. Kidane, an officer in Emperor Haile Selassie's army, rushes to mobilize his strongest men before the Italians invade. Meanwhile, Mussolini's technologically advanced army prepares for an easy victory. Hundreds of thousands of Italians—Jewish photographer Ettore among them—march on Ethiopia seeking adventure.

As the war begins in earnest, Hirut, Aster, and the other women long to do more than care for the wounded and bury the dead. When Emperor Haile Selassie goes into exile and Ethiopia quickly loses hope, it is Hirut who offers a plan to maintain morale. She helps disguise a gentle peasant as the emperor and soon becomes his guard, inspiring other women to take up arms against the Italians.

What follows is a gorgeously crafted and unputdownable exploration of female power, with Hirut as the fierce, original, and brilliant voice at its heart. In incandescent, lyrical prose, Maaza Mengiste breathes life into complicated characters on both sides of the battle line, shaping a heartrending, indelible exploration of what it means to be a woman at war.

30. [The Secret History](#) by Donna Tartt: “Under the influence of a charismatic classics professor, a group of clever, eccentric misfits at a New England college discover a way of

thought and life a world away from their banal contemporaries. But their search for the transcendent leads them down a dangerous path, beyond human constructs of morality.”

31. [Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison](#): Milkman Dead was born shortly after a neighborhood eccentric hurled himself off a rooftop in a vain attempt at flight. For the rest of his life he, too, will be trying to fly. As Morrison follows Milkman from his rustbelt city to the place of his family’s origins, she introduces an entire cast of strivers and seeresses, liars and assassins, the inhabitants of a fully realized Black world.

“Morrison moves easily in and out of the lives and thoughts of her characters, luxuriating in the diversity of circumstances and personality, and revelling in the sound of their voices and of her own, which echoes and elaborates theirs.” —The New Yorker

32. [Station Eleven](#): “Kirsten Raymonde will never forget the night Arthur Leander, the famous Hollywood actor, had a heart attack on stage during a production of King Lear. That was the night when a devastating flu pandemic arrived in the city, and within weeks, civilization as we know it came to an end.

Twenty years later, Kirsten moves between the settlements of the altered world with a small troupe of actors and musicians. They call themselves The Traveling Symphony, and they have dedicated themselves to keeping the remnants of art and humanity alive. But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who will threaten the tiny band’s existence. And as the story takes off, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, the strange twist of fate that connects them all will be revealed.

33. [The Stranger](#) by Camus: With the intrigue of a psychological thriller, The Stranger—Camus's masterpiece—gives us the story of an ordinary man unwittingly drawn into a senseless murder on an Algerian beach.

Behind the subterfuge, Camus explores what he termed "the nakedness of man faced with the absurd" and describes the condition of reckless alienation and spiritual exhaustion that characterized so much of twentieth-century life.

34. [Such a Fun Age](#) by Kylie Reid: Alix Chamberlain is a woman who gets what she wants and has made a living, with her confidence-driven brand, showing other women how to do the same. So she is shocked when her babysitter, Emira Tucker, is confronted while watching the Chamberlains' toddler one night, walking the aisles of their local high-end supermarket. The store's security guard, seeing a young black woman out late with a white child, accuses Emira of kidnapping two-year-old Briar. A small crowd gathers, a bystander films everything, and Emira is furious and humiliated. Alix resolves to make things right.

But Emira herself is aimless, broke, and wary of Alix's desire to help. At twenty-five, she is about to lose her health insurance and has no idea what to do with her life. When the video of Emira unearths someone from Alix's past, both women find themselves on a crash course that will upend everything they think they know about themselves, and each other.

With empathy and piercing social commentary, *Such a Fun Age* explores the stickiness of transactional relationships, what it means to make someone "family," and the complicated reality of being a grown up. It is a searing debut for our times.

35. [The Sympathizer](#) by Viet Thanh Nguyen: "The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as seven other awards, *The Sympathizer* is the breakthrough novel of the year. With the pace and suspense of a thriller and prose that has been compared to Graham Greene and Saul Bellow, *The Sympathizer* is a sweeping epic of love and betrayal. The narrator, a communist double agent, is a "man of two minds," a half-French, half-Vietnamese army captain who arranges to come to America after the Fall of Saigon, and while building a new life with other Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles is secretly reporting back to his communist superiors in Vietnam.

The Sympathizer is a blistering exploration of identity and America, a gripping espionage novel, and a powerful story of love and friendship."

36. [A Tale for the Time Being](#) by Ruth Ozeki: "In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided there's only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates' bullying. But before she ends it all, Nao first plans to document the life of her great grandmother, a Buddhist nun who's lived more than a century. A diary is Nao's only solace—and will touch lives in ways she can scarcely imagine. Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchbox—possibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Nao's drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future.

Full of Ozeki's signature humor and deeply engaged with the relationship between writer and reader, past and present, fact and fiction, quantum physics, history, and myth, *A Tale for the Time Being* is a brilliantly inventive, beguiling story of our shared humanity and the search for home."

37. [There, There](#) by Tommy Orange: "A wondrous and shattering award-winning novel that follows twelve characters from Native communities: all traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow, all connected to one another in ways they may not yet realize. Among them is Jacquie Red Feather, newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind. Dene Oxendene, pulling his life together after his uncle's death and working at the powwow to honor his memory. Fourteen-year-old Orvil, coming to perform traditional

dance for the very first time. They converge and collide on one fateful day at the Big Oakland Powwow and together this chorus of voices tells of the plight of the urban Native American—grappling with a complex and painful history, with an inheritance of beauty and spirituality, with communion and sacrifice and heroism.

A book with “so much jangling energy and brings so much news from a distinct corner of American life that it’s a revelation” (The New York Times). It is fierce, funny, suspenseful, and impossible to put down—full of poetry and rage, exploding onto the page with urgency and force. There is at once poignant and unflinching, utterly contemporary and truly unforgettable.” -Amazon Description

38. [Tom Lake](#) by Anne Patchett: “In the spring of 2020, Lara’s three daughters return to the family’s orchard in Northern Michigan. While picking cherries, they beg their mother to tell them the story of Peter Duke, a famous actor with whom she shared both a stage and a romance years before at a theater company called Tom Lake. As Lara recalls the past, her daughters examine their own lives and relationship with their mother, and are forced to reconsider the world and everything they thought they knew.

Tom Lake is a meditation on youthful love, married love, and the lives parents have led before their children were born. Both hopeful and elegiac, it explores what it means to be happy even when the world is falling apart. As in all of her novels, Ann Patchett combines compelling narrative artistry with piercing insights into family dynamics. The result is a rich and luminous story, told with profound intelligence and emotional subtlety, that demonstrates once again why she is one of the most revered and acclaimed literary talents working today.

39. [Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow](#) by Gabrielle Zevin: On a bitter-cold day, in the December of his junior year at Harvard, Sam Masur exits a subway car and sees, amid the hordes of people waiting on the platform, Sadie Green. He calls her name. For a moment, she pretends she hasn’t heard him, but then, she turns, and a game begins: a legendary collaboration that will launch them to stardom.

These friends, intimates since childhood, borrow money, beg favors, and, before even graduating college, they have created their first blockbuster, Ichigo. Overnight, the world is theirs. Not even twenty-five years old, Sam and Sadie are brilliant, successful, and rich, but these qualities won’t protect them from their own creative ambitions or the betrayals of their hearts.

Spanning thirty years, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Venice Beach, California, and lands in between and far beyond, Gabrielle Zevin’s *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* examines the multifarious nature of identity, disability, failure, the redemptive possibilities in play, and above all, our need to connect: to be loved and to love.

40. [Wuthering Heights](#) by Emily Bronte: Considered lurid and shocking by mid-19th-century standards, Wuthering Heights was initially thought to be such a publishing risk that its author, Emily Brontë, was asked to pay some of the publication costs.

Wuthering Heights is a wild, passionate story of the intense and almost demonic love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, a foundling adopted by Catherine's father. After Mr Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff is bullied and humiliated by Catherine's brother Hindley and wrongly believing that his love for Catherine is not reciprocated, leaves Wuthering Heights, only to return years later as a wealthy and polished man. He proceeds to exact a terrible revenge for his former miseries. The action of the story is chaotic and unrelentingly violent, but the accomplished handling of a complex structure, the evocative descriptions of the lonely moorland setting and the poetic grandeur of vision combine to make this unique novel a masterpiece of English literature.