

2011-2012

# Guide for the Casual Bookworm

from the faculty and staff of Falmouth Academy

*Reading is to the Mind, what Exercise is to the Body.* -- Sir Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, No. 17, 1710



## Alison Ament (science)

*Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers

A non-fiction account of a New Orleans resident who stayed in the city through Hurricane Katrina, living in the second story of his house. We share his first post-storm explorations by canoe. He is able to check on his properties, get food, and tend to dogs trapped in another flooded home. Things get tough when out-of-town volunteers come to bring order to the city and overstep their authority, arresting Zeitoun, who seems suspicious to them as Syrian-born. His wife, who left the city with the children before the storm, has her own difficulties, the most horrendous of which is losing contact with her husband after his arrest. This is a very well written book.

## *Just Kids*, Patti Smith

My other favorite book of the year, this is partly Smith's autobiography and partly her biography of Robert Mapplethorpe. It may be that the two lives just can't be separated. Smith left home on a bus for New York City with no money and no plan, and soon met Mapplethorpe, long before either of them became famous. Smith gives amazingly personal insights into her development as a poet and punk rock musician and Mapplethorpe's development as a photographer, the first to forge a bridge between art and pornography. Mapplethorpe's life style might make us squeamish, but seeing him through Patti's eyes, with

her total devotion and sympathy, helps us appreciate him as an artist and as a man. [*Interesting view into their lives.*—S. Moffat]

## Clare Beams (English)

*The Collected Stories of Deborah Eisenberg*

This volume, drawn from four previous story collections by Eisenberg, was probably my favorite book of this summer. It's so hefty that I was living with it for a long time, and I found that I missed it when I was done. The collection from which the earliest stories in this volume were drawn, *Transactions in a Foreign Currency*, was published in 1986, and the latest from *Twilight of the Superheroes*, which came out in 2007; making my way through the collection was like watching a writer develop before my eyes. The earliest stories are first-person tales, usually narrated by lost, young-ish women who long for people and things they can't have. The latest are mostly told in the third person and have a much greater range of protagonists (I loved the sense, late in the book, that I never knew quite whose life I would be reading about next). All of these accomplish what I think the best short stories do: they get at the large through the small. "The Custodian," for instance, tells the story of two girls' involvement with a charismatic young couple in their town, and of the end of childhood. "Some Other, Better Otto" is about one particular man and his con-

At Falmouth Academy, we emphasize reading and writing and have always had reading lists for our students. We encourage them to turn off their TVs and computer games and instead read or have conversations, as they and we do at FA.

Several years ago, we decided to condense some of our faculty-room conversations and compile this informal reading list for adults. We answered the question we ask prospective students: "What have you read or reread this year that you particularly liked?"

Here, then, are our answers to that question, along with comments by colleagues. We welcome your comments to: [thegam@falmouthacademy.org](mailto:thegam@falmouthacademy.org)

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nections to his siblings and his partner, but also about the way cruelty can flourish in the closest relationships. I thought this was a wonderful book.

### *Like You'd Understand, Anyway*, Jim Shepard

Another story collection. I loved this one, too. Shepard is a master of first-person voices, and there's an incredible, exuberant variety of those voices here. These stories are narrated by, among others, Aeschylus, a Russian female astronaut, a soldier on Hadrian's Wall, a modern high-school football player, and the chief executioner of Paris during the French Revolution. That last story, "Sans Farine," was perhaps my favorite, just for the way history and humanity collide in its narrator: "You want to know—all France wants to know—what takes place in the executioner's mind...Does he eat? Does he sleep? Do his smiles freeze the blood?...Becoming shrill, my wife calls it, whenever I get too agitated in my own defense." Highly recommended.

### Deborah T. Bradley (French)

#### *Island Beneath the Sea*, Isabel Allende

*Island Beneath the Sea* takes the reader from Haiti to Louisiana in the mid to late 18th century, portraying the decline and decadence of French colonial domination in both territories. The central character is a slave sold into a colonial domaine as a child, a richly created and deeply courageous woman of the sort that Allende has developed in each of her mature novels. Allende's women, typically set in horrifically abusive situations, restore one's faith in the human spirit despite all odds. On the historical level, I found the multinational exploration of the issue of slavery—in France leading up to the time of the Révolution, in the Louisiana Purchase (not yet purchased) and in the United States—particularly informative and thought provoking. Floating above it all shines a dream, a hope, a voyage of the spirit to that Island Beneath the Sea. [I read this book last year in Spanish and recommend that anyone who can read it in its original form do so. Allende's lyrical and beautiful prose lessens the horrifying impact of slavery, violence against women, and incest. Not my favorite book of hers, but a must read. -C. Pingal]

#### *The French Gardener*, Santa Montefiore

Did you love *The Secret Garden*? One might describe *The French Gardener* as an adult version of the children's book, filled with lovely descriptions of a neglected garden brought back to life by gentle, loving hands. This garden, like that of Frances Hodgson Burnett, also holds the living spirits of loved ones – and lovers. But most beautifully, the novel celebrates the transformative power of the

earth and the things that grow upon it in the stewardship of people who love nature and each other.

### *Caleb's Crossing*, Geraldine Brooks

I'm sure that many readers of the Bookworm have already read this eloquent and amazingly researched novel. Ms. Brooks' scholarship includes detailed history of the Wampanoag on Martha's Vineyard, a challenge to unearth from the silence of the lost tradition of oral history; it delves into aspects of the early years of Harvard College that their proud histories don't care to mention; and for the linguist, it offers the challenge of 17th century English. The story of "Caleb's crossing" from the culture of his people to that offered by the European missionaries gives the reader insight into a devastating spiritual clash. More than the story of the first Native American to graduate from Harvard, I found *Caleb's Crossing* to be the story of the narrator and protagonist, a young girl imprisoned by the restricted role of women and the deep-seated sense of fear, guilt, and sin inflicted by Puritan Christianity. Inspired by the spirituality of her friend whom she calls Caleb, her soul is set free even as his is destroyed. Having heard Geraldine Brooks interviewed on NPR by Diane Rehm, I look forward to her appearance in March at the FA Community Series.\*

[See also M. Burns, J. Zuzanski.]

\*Ms. Brooks will speak at Falmouth Academy on Wednesday, March 28, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. The public is welcome and admission is free.

### Marite Burns (ceramics)

#### *Caleb's Crossing*, Geraldine Brooks

This was the best reading I had this summer. As with her *People of the Book* which I also loved, Ms. Brooks has done her homework, even though it is historical fiction. The story starts on Martha's Vineyard in the early 1600s and follows two Wampanoags who become the first to graduate from Harvard Indian College. (At that time, Harvard was only a divinity school, teaching mainly Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and the Bible, fashioned after Cambridge College in England.) The two Wampanoags were given names from the Bible, Joel and Caleb. One of them didn't receive his diploma until Harvard's May 2011 graduation, posthumously, perhaps due to the publication of this book. Brooks' writing is superb and her characters show us what it was like to be alive in the 1600s in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Women were only so much chattel and Natives were only meant to be converted to Christianity, their land acquired by the colonists. I highly recommend both *Caleb's Crossing* and *People of the Book*. [See also D. Bradley, J. Zuzanski. - ed.]

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**Barbara Campbell (development, alumni)**

***Admission*, Jean Hanff Korelitz**

This is one of the best books I have ever read. An intricate and intimate look at the admission process of Princeton University, the book draws you in emotionally. You feel for each candidate as the good ones are sadly denied and the great ones are ecstatically accepted. *Admission* focuses on Portia Nelson, an admission counselor for Princeton. (They don't call it admissions, just admission.) It begins with Nelson's journey through the process, first as she introduces Princeton to college-bound seniors at very privileged private academies and then to a motley crew at an experimental school. There, her heart is taken by a student who does not look promising on paper but has such a brilliant mind she can't forget him. We see the individual reading of files and finally the committee meetings where the Princeton admission officers hold in their hands the college futures of the good and the great. Even if this book were not about a school, I would have found fascinating the character development and the way Korelitz knows just when a certain piece of information should enter the picture. It is extremely well written and made me think about the situations and characters and storylines long after I finished. *[Needless to say, as FA's college counselor, I too loved this, especially the excerpts from student "essays" that start each chapter.—J. Taylor] [Lots of fun to read— and it could be helpful to high school juniors and seniors and their parents to see the college side of college admissions. The author is Barbara Campbell's cousin.—T. Clark]*

**Eleanor Clark (English)**

***Unbroken*, Laura Hillenbrand**

I'm not entirely sure if this is a compliment, but one aspect of *Unbroken* that I found particularly mesmerizing was that as I turned the page, I forgot the author was even there. Clearly she shaped the story as she offered us the experiences of World War II hero Louis Zamperini, but she did so in a lovely, unobtrusive way that let the glory be his. And what a story. Hillenbrand introduces us first to the 12-year-old Louie, a boy so full of energy, both physical and mental, that he terrorized his town with petty crimes, then to the young man who redirected his strengths to the track, a pursuit that took him to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and finally to the soldier, the man who despite being terrified of flying, was drafted by the air corps to become a bombardier. His experiences during the war (surviving bombing runs over the Pacific, getting shot down, living for 46 days on a barely-equipped life raft, and being held a prisoner of war) were horrifying and miraculous. "It reads like fiction," a friend

said; quite true. Deeply inspiring fiction.

Yet what I found equally fascinating were the people lurking in the background of Louis Zamperini's amazing story, and sometimes sadly in the foreground, the people who didn't remain "unbroken." Perhaps I was particularly drawn to them because I was reading and teaching *Macbeth* at the time, a work that also explores the cost of war. What happens to a person when "unseaming" someone, as Macbeth does, "from the nave to the chops" is met with the King's praise: "Great happiness!" What happens to a person asked to fly the bomber or to run the prison camp? What happens, in particular, to a person of imagination, so horrified by his own thoughts that, as for Macbeth, "function is smothered in surmise /And nothing is but what is not"? I found *Unbroken* moving and sad, and I highly recommend it.

**Tucker Clark (headmaster's assistant)**

***Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, Helen Simonson**

A love story for grown-ups. In an English village, a retired and recently widowed British officer develops a friendship with a local shop owner, also recently widowed, of Pakistani descent. Their relatives are less than enthusiastic for a variety of interesting (and, of course, selfish) reasons. Simonson creates a village with characters and personalities to love, to dislike, to admire and to pity and some to be glad you don't have to hang around with. A pleasure to read. *[I loved this. -- M. Hough] [See also S. Pring and N. Twichell -ed.]*

***The Whistling Season*, Ivan Doig**

This is a joy to read for the language, the pace, and the characters: a few bad apples, some fascinating eccentrics, and mostly decent folk. Doig places them in Montana's Big Sky country in 1909, a time when children attended one-room schoolhouses and had to take more responsibility for themselves and their families than many do now. A widower with three sons answers a housekeeper-looking-for-employment ad that reads: "Can't cook but doesn't bite," and a dynamo from Minneapolis arrives in the rural community dressed in blue satin. She also arrives with her brother, who becomes the schoolmaster. The novel is sweet and evocative. It is saved from sentimentality by terrific writing, a good twist, and beautifully considered interactions.

***The Anthologist*, Nicholas Baker**

You, and most of the people you know, might easily dismiss a book about poetry, but don't do that! This is a delightful, funny, interesting book with a rather

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sweet substory about an almost hapless poet who loses his girlfriend of eight years because he can't get around to writing the introduction to an anthology he's been commissioned to write. Meanwhile you get his gossipy, fascinating opinions of poets from Ezra Pound to Emily Dickinson to Billy Collins. Whether you agree or not, you can't help but tap out rhythms with your fingers and be so pleased to hear him dis the hype about iambic pentameter. All while he washes his dog, picks blueberries, sits in a plastic chair and watches the world go by. It is also a short book. Really, I think you will be surprised at how much fun it is to read. [*Don't usually appreciate poetry but loved the book.* -- J. Taylor] [*I loved this!* -- R. Slocum]

### **Peter Conzett (science)**

*The Most Human Human*, Brian Christian

This is, quite simply, the most interesting book I've read in the last decade. It is a combination of philosophy, psychology, and the computer science of artificial intelligence. Christian is involved in a Turing Test, where a judge tries to tell a person from a computer program based on their responses in five minutes of questioning. Since Christian is to be the human responder, he wants to know what he should do to be more human—i.e., to be the most human human. This sends him to all kinds of history and research about what it means to be human, and he produces a density of “aha's” that few books can match.

*Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*, Alexandra Fuller

Fuller's sequel to her *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*, the story of her own time growing up in southern Africa as colonialism collapsed. *Cocktail Hour* tells her mother's story, also the story of growing up in Africa as colonialism collapsed, but a different generation and a different collapse. Her mother, who was raised in the fashionable colonial life in Kenya, would have to somehow transform herself to a person who carried an Uzi as she took her two small children to a playdate in Rhodesia. Fuller writes transcendently and tosses in her wisdom by turns with lines like, “The pathos and the gift of life is that we cannot know which will be our defining heartbreak, or our most victorious joy. [*I loved Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight so am looking forward to this.* -- T. Clark]

*Einstein: His Life and Universe*, Walter Isaacson

Isaacson's long and beautifully written biography of Einstein is much better at giving us a sense of the man,

his vision, and his world, than it is on explaining his science, which he tries to do, but not very successfully. However, his deep humanity and genuine awe come through page after page. Published today, as I write this, is Isaacson's new biography of Steve Jobs. Of course I haven't read it, but wonder how he might compare how the two men—each an intellectual celebrity in his own era—stack up on “the vision thing.”

### **Mike Earley (admissions)**

*The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Diane Ravitch

Ravitch was an early fan of school choice and accountability (i.e. testing) as two key ways to improve American schools. But she later changed her mind, coming to believe that these trends actually harm public school systems. She now advocates for a greater commitment to quality in curriculum and instruction. The importance of those two enduring aspects of great schools will not be news to Falmouth Academy readers. Ravitch calls for a “strong, coherent, explicit curriculum that is grounded in the liberal arts and sciences.” She states that teachers must be well educated, not just well trained.

Advocates of charter schools won't like Ravitch's argument that they have departed from what they were created to do and are now hurting the public schools that they were supposed to help. Advocates of large public schools won't like her assertion that “for students who need close relationships with concerned adults (what student doesn't need them?) a small high school is surely superior to the anonymity of the comprehensive high school.” But, readers familiar with the power of great independent schools will know what Ravitch means when she calls for experienced teachers with the freedom to design their own curriculum, at least three years of study in all of the major subjects in high school, and the development of the skills that students will need to “understand political debates, scientific phenomena, and the world they live in.”

*Sippewissett: Or, Life on a Salt Marsh*, Tim Traver

If you like swimming, boating, wading, and exploring along the water's edge, and you haven't read this book about a jewel in our own backyard, this might be a good way to chase away the winter blues and start thinking about summer again. The author recounts riding the tide through the marsh with masks and snorkels, fly fishing at night for the stripers that come in with the flooding tide, and catching and cooking quahogs with his family's childhood recipe. In addition to the memoir bits, there is

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plenty of science here to help you know more about how these systems work. One chapter, in fact, could easily have been titled “Ginny Edgcomb” since it focuses on the work our own Life Science teacher has done studying microbes in the marsh. The book is reminiscent of *The House on Nauset Marsh* by Wyman Richardson, which is another good way to pass the time until you can actually go fishing again.

***Everyday Blessings*, Jon and Myra Kabat-Zinn**

I recommend this for parents. You’ll get the basic point after a few chapters, or with some judicious skimming! The main point is that parents will be better parents if, in the moment, they can set aside their own preoccupations and really focus on where their child is coming from. The interesting question for me is whether, with good modeling of this by adults, kids might learn to pay attention to adults (and everything else) longer and in a more focused way.

**Gundhild Eder (German)**

***The Empress of Weehawken*, Irene Dische**

This memoir is written in the voice of Irene Dische’s grandmother Elisabeth Rother, who grew up in an aristocratic Catholic family in Germany in the early 1900s. She falls in love with a Jewish doctor, Carl Rother. In order to marry Elisabeth, Carl must convert to Catholicism. Soon both live as devout Christians, raising their daughter Renate. Life in 1930s Germany changes and soon after Hitler’s rise to power, the Rotheres realize that Carl’s Jewish heritage will have dangerous consequences for them. They decide to emigrate to America where they try to rebuild their life in Weehawken, New Jersey. (This book was also published German as *Großmama packt aus*.)

***In the Garden of Beasts*, Erik Larson**

Larson tells the story of the first American ambassador sent by Franklin D. Roosevelt to Berlin after Hitler became chancellor in 1933. Worried by the emerging news of state-condoned violence against communists, socialists and Jews and the possibility that Germany might fail to pay back \$1.2 billion it owed to American creditors, Roosevelt scrambled to fill the vacant post of the ambassador in Berlin. He appointed William E. Dodd, a professor from Chicago. At first Dodd and his family fall in love with Berlin, especially Mrs. Dodd who is fascinated by the pomp, parties and handsome SS officers of the Third Reich. Soon however, they recognize Hitler’s true intentions and watch with horror his ruthless march to the top.

**Petra Ehrenbrink (German)**

***Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age*, Susan Jacoby**

Read this book – it is fascinating! If you kept your eyes and ears open during the last two decades, you will have noticed the onslaught of ads that – and celebrities who – are trying to tell us that we all will end up as thriving, active, sexy seniors; that 60 is the new 40; and – soon – 90 will be the new 50... Susan Jacoby explains why we should feel uneasy about these tales and how a too optimistic view of old age prevents us as a society from planning adequately for the reality millions of us will be facing. Her plea is for us to work together to figure out how we are to take care of everyone in his or her last decades in order to make those years as rewarding and trouble-free as possible.

***Hypothermia*, Arnaldur Indridason**

If you follow the “Bookworm,” you know that I’m a fan of this Icelandic author and his atmospheric series around the criminal cases investigated by senior detective Erlendur. *Hypothermia* is the series’ latest volume translated into English. [*I, too, am a fan!—S. Wakefield*]

***White Heat*, M.J. McGrath**

If you want to travel even farther North, try out this debut novel from a non-fiction writer who has already written two books (*Hopping* and *The Long Exile*) about the Inuit. Part-time teacher/hunting guide “Kigga” turns detective when one of her clients suffers a peculiar accident. Chock-full of interesting facts about Inuit life, the crime story plays a secondary role to the unfolding clash of cultures and traditions.

***The Dry Grass of August*, Anna Jean Mayhew**

In the summer of 1954, 13-year-old Jubie goes on a road trip with her mother, siblings and her family’s black maid, Mary. On their way from North Carolina to Florida, Jubie notices the signs indicating racism and segregation between whites and blacks and finds out how cruel the world around her is. Compassion and humor keep this novel levitating above its serious theme.

***Sister*, Rosamund Lupton**

This debut novel was such a hit in the U.K. that it took less than a year for it to make its way to the U.S. New York-based designer, Beatrice, gets a call to say that her younger sister, Tess, has gone missing. She boards the first plane to London. Structured as a letter from Beatrice to Tess, the facts of Tess’s disappearance and the following investigation are slowly revealed to the reader

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until all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. This lyrical novel emphasizes the bond between the sisters, and Lupton's insights into grief and familial guilt. *[I enjoyed this.--J. Taylor]*

### **David Faus (headmaster)**

#### ***Final Voyage*, Peter Nichols**

I stumbled across *Final Voyage* at the public library knowing nothing about it, but the subtitle caught my eye: "A Story of Arctic Disaster and One Fateful Whaling Season." It became one of my summer favorites. The story of the whaling industry from New Bedford to Nantucket in the mid 1800s covers the rise and fall of the New England whale oil industry, delving into the politics, religion and finances of several key families in the business. From detailed descriptions of the whale hunt (sometimes lasting three years) to the discovery of shale oil in central Pennsylvania, the author offers a comprehensive view of the life and times of the industry's elite. I really enjoyed the local history and look forward to my next visit to New Bedford with a new appreciation for its seafaring past. (The arctic disaster was a whaling ship that in its quest for whales got iced in at the arctic.)

#### ***Atlantic: Great Sea Battles, Heroic Discoveries, Titanic Storms, and a Vast Ocean of a Million Stories*, Simon Winchester**

A must-read for anyone who lives near or spends time on the Atlantic. It is a serious history that examines this tremendous body of water. For example, Winchester has a fascinating chapter about how the transition from vessels powered by sail to those powered by steam affected the shipping industry. Drawing on stories of those who have spent their lives studying or living on the Atlantic, Winchester touches on ecology, geology, oceanography and geography. While the book can get dense, Winchester seems to know when to switch it up a bit and provide the reader with some light-hearted narrative.

#### ***The Best American Sports Writing of 2010*, Edited by Peter Gammons**

As I have written before, this collection of great sports short stories from the past year is an annual "must-have" on my Christmas list. Each year, a different editor puts his or her own mark on the series by compiling stories that speak to personal interests and passions. Gammons (a past Falmouth Academy Community Series speaker) goes after the human element in sports, both heroic and tragic. One compelling story in this edition focuses on several retired NFL players living with profound post-concussion syndrome – a timely and

tragic topic. The perfect gift for the sports fan of any age.

**FYI:** our own Clare Beams has been published in another of "The Best American" series. Her short story "We Show What We Have Learned" is in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Non-required Reading*.

### **Olivann Hobbie (history, arts)**

#### ***Brick Lane*, Monica Ali**

Ali tells the story of a young Bangladeshi woman who makes an arranged marriage with a Bangladeshi emigrant to London 20 years her senior. The reader comes to love the young, inexperienced Nazneen as she deals with the conflicts born from the transplantation to a foreign culture and from her sense of duty to her husband at odds with her emotional and erotic awakening.

#### ***Fishing in Utopia: Sweden and the Future that Disappeared*, Andrew Brown**

A fascinating read for me, as the Sweden I knew in the early 1960s and then again in 1988-89 has clearly disappeared. Brown, an avid fisherman, loves casting in the isolated lakes found in the wilderness still existing in Sweden — if you seek it out — but which has entirely vanished in his native England. The fishing chapters (I now understand why one could come to love fishing) alternate with anecdotal looks at changes since the 1970s that now make it hard to define "Swedishness." Sweden has taken in tens of thousands of refugees from the Balkans and the Middle East, but it is nevertheless hard to see Sweden as the egalitarian, caring (though not compassionate) society it was shaping itself as in the first three decades after World War II.

#### ***Night Music*, Kazuo Ishiguro**

This collection presents five stories of musicians, of has-been musicians, or would-be musicians. Yes, with this elegant writer, one doesn't get easy, happy endings. Each story is a little gem, a little reminder of how easily hope turns wispy, relationships lose their magic. Ishiguro's mastery of prose makes the settings, the dialogue, and, of course, the characters almost painfully real.

#### ***How to Live: A Life of Montaigne*, Sarah Bakewell**

What struck me most forcefully about Montaigne's voice was its honesty and its inquiring spirit. This willingness to question everything makes him seem modern. His motto, "What do I know?", fits in perfectly with his firm decision to take himself as a subject that, perhaps, he can come to know a little, but not in the reductionist sense of Descartes. In an age of kings and a dominant

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aristocracy, to which he belonged, he had an attitude of concern for those who served him and those far below him on the social scale (e.g., the peasants on his estate). [See also *W. Potter-ed.*]

### **Monica Hough (middle school coordinator)**

#### *The Imperfectionists*, Tom Rachman

I cannot say enough good things about the drop-in book club at Eight Cousins Bookstore in Falmouth. Thanks to them, I have revisited childhood favorites (L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*) and much-loved classics (Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*), but I especially enjoy discovering new books, such as *The Imperfectionists*. Set at a dying English-language newspaper in Rome, the novel follows the mostly misbegotten adventures of the staff. Each chapter begins with a headline and offers a short story about the private life of a reporter or editor. Slowly the pieces come together to form the whole, with much laughter and pathos along the way. [See *S. Pring-ed.*]

#### *A Song of Fire and Ice* series, George R.R. Martin

My son and his friends have long loved this series, but I thought myself immune to the fantasy genre. Boy, was I wrong. One taste of the political intrigue, romance, and adventure in the first book, *Game of Thrones*, and I was hooked. The series reads more like absorbing historical fiction - with a dragon or direwolf here and there.

### **Doug Jones (math)**

#### *The Rule of Four*, Ian Caldwell & Dustin Thomason

In the guise of a book review, I will expound on the merits of books, both electronic and paper. I have always loved books, the old fashioned kind. For eight years, I worked at the most fabulous bookstore, the Market Bookshop down the hill from FA on Depot Avenue. Last year, however, my wife gave me an e-reader and I reluctantly took up this medium. The e-reader has some wonderful features: reading with one hand, finishing one book and immediately obtaining another one, and having the latest edition of the Boston Globe (including late sports scores) delivered to your bedroom at 4:30 a.m. Last week I discovered that I could also borrow e-books from the Falmouth Public Library but when I tried, I discovered that my library card had expired so I had to go to the library to renew it.

Once there, I remembered what the e-reader could not offer and why I liked the library so much: I saw my babysitter (as in *my* babysitter), said hello to four other friends, renewed my card, and checked out the Friends of the Library collection of used books for sale. What a

delight it was to look at books again and consider buying one just because the title intrigued me. *The Rule of Four* suggested itself to me, probably because it sounded like one of my favorite Sherlock Holmes' stories, or perhaps because I had already read it. Anyway, I paid my two dollars and I have been thoroughly enjoying holding a book in my hands again and reading about how four Princetonians struggle to decipher the secrets hidden in a medieval Latin Text. Who wouldn't want to read this, right? [On a recent long flight, I watched people in the darkened plane glued to their e-readers, faces lit in a ghastly white glow and I wondered how their eyes could take that for so many hours. I prefer the hard copy even if it does take up room in my luggage.--E. Muñiz.]

### **Connie Joyner (business)**

#### *I Alex*, James Patterson

Detective Alex Cross is back to solve the most important, horrific and personal murder case of his life. In the death of his niece, he discovers similarities with other murdered women. The investigation takes many turns including implications involving the highest level of government. Detective Cross refuses to let it get swept under the rug and is determined to solve the gruesome murders. I think this is Patterson's best novel to date: I couldn't put it down!

#### *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Stieg Larsson

This book is actually two stories in one. Editor Mikael Blomkvist has been sentenced to 90 days in jail for aggravated libel of financier Hans-Erik Wennerstrom. Before he starts his sentence, he is hired to write a biography of a wealthy family and to investigate the disappearance of the patriarch's niece, missing for over 40 years. Realizing he needs help, he brings in the girl with the dragon tattoo, Lisbeth Salander. She has the appearance of a punk kid with piercings and tattoos. Having lived in "the system" and at times dodged authority, she has a rough edge about her. Salander is brilliant with computers as she hacks her way through cyberspace digging up information. Blomkvist is amazed by her knowledge and total recall. After a shocking and surprising resolution to the puzzle of the missing niece, he resumes his efforts to take down the corrupt tycoon, Wennerstrom. Again, he relies on Salander to help him reveal all the criminal activities of the business, the Wennerstrom Group! There is a lot of information to absorb and, to quote my sister, "It is slow to start but ends as a good read." [I enjoyed this one, too.--A. Ament.]

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## Alexandra Karolinski (French)

### *The Tao of Travel*, Paul Theroux

Recommended to all those who enjoy the transformation that travel brings and teeming with the wisdom of authors, poets and philosophers. We are invited in one chapter to discover the pleasures of railways; another is a doorway into the peculiar habits of travelers like Sir Richard Burton who went to great lengths to disguise himself as a pilgrim in order to enter Mecca. A shared respect for the earth by men like H.D. Thoreau, John Muir, and J.J. Rousseau is described beautifully in "It is solved by walking." Women's travel, too, is covered, from Ffiona Campbell, who walked around the world and the length of Britain at sixteen, to Jessica Watson, the youngest person to sail around the world non-stop, to a special chapter on the "Travel Wisdom of Freya Stark." I particularly enjoyed Robert Louis Stevenson's insights into a French region that is still beautiful and wild and which he describes in "Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes." So I will have to finish with this piece of advice from Stevenson: *For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go...to feel the needs and hitches of our life a little more nearly, to get down off this feather-bed of civilization, and to find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flint.*

## Janet Kearsley (English)

### *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison

Set in New England in the late 1600s, this novel is filled with characters who, while interdependent, are each attempting self-discovery in the harshness of striving and slavery. The passion of the story comes from narrator Florens whose mother gives her as servant to an earnest trader and landowner. Her identity develops privately, sadly, deeply and wildly, with little understanding of the motivations and intricacies of the world. "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love." I've reread this novel many times, immersed in Morrison's language as it captures an isolated and instinctive perception of the world that we can't easily fathom today.

### *The Red Garden*, Alice Hoffman

This is also New England – the town of Blackwell in Western Massachusetts – beginning in 1750 and moving to the present through discrete, whimsical short stories that overlap in imagery and characters. Underneath the generations run bears, bees, and eels that seem to have a stronger, more primitive hold on the earth than even the sturdy (and not so sturdy) people who keep hold of the history of their town. A bit of magical realism seems to

make this evolution all the more substantial.

## *Year of Wonders*, Geraldine Brooks

1660s-Eyam, Derbyshire shuts itself off from its neighbors to prevent the spread of the plague that has arrived on a bolt of cloth. The story is told through the eyes of Anna Frith, who, like Morrison's Florens, navigates sorrow while being surprised by her own internal dimensions. I am reminded of Hamlet: "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." But unlike Hamlet, Anna never imagined she bore such a kingdom. Brooks' transporting language is natural and elegant. *[Great book. I enjoyed it immensely.--S. Wakefield]*

## Elisabeth Ledwell (English, drama)

### *Where Men Win Glory: the Odyssey of Pat Tillman*, Jon Krakauer

Although I'm neither a huge football fan nor a fan of military adventure, I found Krakauer's book lucid, interesting, and real. It gave me a clear idea of what it was like to be a soldier in Afghanistan. I always like Krakauer's work – it's always well written and intriguing. This was no exception.

## *A Mortal Terror* and others in the Billy Boyle series, James R. Benn

Billy Boyle is a Boston Irish Catholic junior officer in the U.S. Army serving in World War II. At home, he's a police detective. On the front, he's General Eisenhower's nephew investigating crimes within the military. In the most recent novel, *A Mortal Terror*, he's in pursuit of a murderer who's targeting one officer after another, rising through the ranks. Here's historical mystery of the first water.

## *Theatre Geek*, Mickey Rapkin

Okay, I admit it. I'm a theatre geek. Name an obscure show, and I've probably not only heard of it, but also have read or seen it. Rapkin's book is about people just like me. A cross between a history of Stage Door Manor, a summer camp for aspiring musical theatre performers, and profiles of several campers, *Theatre Geek* is filled with stories that provide a glimpse into the passionate world of would-be actors, singers, and dancers as they participate in intense workshops while simultaneously auditioning for, rehearsing, and performing challenging productions. Some students even get professional training if they are cast in the cabaret groups that perform on stages in the Catskills. Stage Door Manor boasts alumni such as Robert Downey, Jr. and Mandy Moore, but it also

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hosts dozens of kids who simply live and breathe theatre. Particularly poignant are the stories of those children who are ridiculed and shunned for their interests while in junior high and high school and who find a safe haven at Stage Door Manor. There is a companion documentary, but the book is much more engaging. I recommend it to theatre geeks and non-theatre geeks alike.

#### *Still Alice*, Lisa Genova

I avoided this novel for as long as I could. Told from the point of view of a relatively young Harvard professor who is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, *Still Alice* is a gut-wrenching read for anyone who has a family member with Alzheimer's as I do. Still, I found the novel somewhat comforting, for despite having lost so much of herself, Alice is still Alice, and relatively happy, even if she doesn't always understand why. [*Like Liz, I let this book sit on my table for months before I finally picked it up. Then I was almost halfway through it before I checked the time.*--T.Clark]

#### Ed Lott (math)

*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, Avi  
*Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir*, Doris Kearns Goodwin  
*Harry Potter series*, J.K. Rowling

For the last couple of years, my daughter, who reads much more than I, has been asking me to read some of the books that she reads. I finally consented and read what she told me to this summer. I must admit that my daughter's choices were wonderful and I truly enjoyed each one. She started me out with *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi. My daughter knows my love of the sea and this historical fiction based in the 19th-century was a great start to my summer. I thoroughly enjoyed how Avi used Charlotte's maturation as a person to peel away the intricacies and history between the crew and captain as the crossing of the Atlantic progressed.

The second book my daughter recommended appealed to my other love: baseball. Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Wait Till Next Year* is a fantastic look into the youth of one of the great historical biographers of our time. As much as Goodwin tried to keep her focus on her love of baseball and being a Brooklyn Dodger fan, she could not keep herself from describing her youth and how baseball and her neighborhood shaped her as an adult. Her love of her neighborhood and its characters comes through in each page. As I finished reading it, I was inspired to finally pick up one of her biographies and see how that childhood translated into her later writings.

The final group of books that my daughter had me read were the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. I had purposely not read them so that I might read them with Sarah, but she got there first. As many have said before, the books are entertaining and fun to read and any series of books that can pull kids away from video games can't be bad.

#### Stephanie Mastroianni (humanities, counseling) *Superparenting for ADD*, Edward Hallowell and Peter Jensen

I added this to my social work library as a valuable resource and to recommend highly for parents who have children with ADD or attention difficulties and for teachers and others who work with them. The book is a different approach to parenting/working with students who have ADD. It helps us to see the amazing ability and "gifts" that these children have as long as those of us who work and live with them unwrap them with love and support. I loved the analogy of children with ADD as people with "race car brains with faulty brakes." It gave me a peek into the mind of someone with ADD, helped me to appreciate them, and will allow me to look more closely at what they might be experiencing and the meaning behind their behavior.

#### *When Good Kids Act Cruel: The Hidden Truth about the Pre-Teen Years*, Carl Pickhardt, PhD

This is a great book for parents and teachers of adolescents because it helps us to understand why cruelty towards one another occurs during these difficult years and how we can help both the victims and the aggressors. We all know that adolescence is difficult. Insecurity and a lack of control over one's environment and even one's own body are the trademarks of this stage, and according to Pickhardt, this is the primary reason for social cruelty. He uses practical examples and clear advice to help parents help their children through this extremely difficult growing-up period. For instance, Pickhardt lists what he calls "the eight anchors for family influence," which include "completing homework, cleaning up one's room, doing household chores, joining family activities, contributing community service, saving money, developing proficiency, and relating to salient adults..."

#### *Teenproofing*, John Rosemond

I loved this book, not just because I am a parent, but because I find it fascinating to examine why teens behave the way that they do. Any fresh approach on how to deal with them is intriguing and welcoming to me. Rosemond, a renowned child psychologist, has written many

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amazing books on parenting and so far, this is my favorite. He takes his classic humorous approach with a common sense bent and lays out a very logical way to deal with the realities of teen-parent relationships, and how we can form a solid foundation with a “long rope principle” parenting approach. He talks about how to avoid being control freaks while not becoming too permissive or wimpy. He helps us to realize how we can effectively be controlled parents in a relaxed manner. I particularly like his methods of getting through to young adults with a sense of personal responsibility, then showing them the results of the good and bad choices that they make. His many examples help us to see that our struggles are normal and definitely manageable in spite of the temporary strain it might cause us.

### *The Glass Castle*, Jeanette Walls

I read one book this summer simply for pleasure and this is it. I highly recommend it. It's a remarkable memoir by a woman who overcame tremendous hardship with her alcoholic father and codependent mother, who dragged their children through their own abusive relationship and highly distorted values and child rearing practices as they moved from place to place evading the law and assimilation into society. Walls' dedication to her family, her ability to make her life hopeful, and her love and compassion for her parents no matter what is truly unbelievable. In fact, her resilience is something that should be analyzed and studied in social work and psychology classes. My only criticism is that I find it unbelievable that she turned out so “normal” and super successful with such an extremely dysfunctional background. And if she is not so “normal,” I definitely would have liked her to have said so. Instead, I felt like she glossed over a chunk of her life after the West Virginia stint and that she jumped into her now unbelievably positive life in New York City. That all seemed to happen way too fast and little detail was given about how she got there. I would have liked her to have continued with her genuine style as we enter her present life. I just wanted to know more about how, realistically, she was able to get to that place of “normal,” or to know more about what her “normal” means. *[This might be my favorite book.--S. Moffat] [I loved this book. I found Walls' resilience amazing and uplifting, a good example of locating the silver lining.--A. Ament] [see also J. Swanbeck-ed.]*

### Lalise Melillo (history, rhetoric)

#### *Shakespeare After All*, Marjorie Garber

This clear and thought-provoking guide to all of Shakespeare's plays was chosen by Newsweek as one of

the ten best nonfiction books of 2004, and it has won a number of other awards. Garber, a professor at Harvard, provides fresh insights for the scholar and engaging commentary for the general reader. The book is free of current academic jargon, but Garber's writing is rich with a subtle understanding of the ways in which the plays have “an uncanny timeliness.” She writes that, “like a portrait whose eyes seem to follow you around the room, engaging your glance from every angle, the plays and their characters seem always to be ‘modern,’ always to be us.”

Garber approaches the plays both as texts to be read and as dramas to be performed. She can analyze “the terrible language of equivocation” in *Macbeth* and the “various kinds of illusion” in *Hamlet*. She also can relate details of modern productions to the performance histories of the plays, noting that “every production is an interpretation and plays, like other works of art, are living things that grow and change over time...”

Garber leads us to understand the role of theater within the plays, as she discusses Shakespeare's use of the language of theater, of the characters' awareness of their own role-playing, and of the crossing of boundaries between the stage and audience. She has particularly interesting things to say about Iago, in *Othello*, and Shakespeare as “two competing dramatists.”

If Shakespeare is an acquaintance and you want to get to know him better or if he's already your good companion and you want to be further dazzled by what he does, then this is a book you should have at hand. You can read the chapters bit by bit and in any order, enjoying what Garber has to say about a play that you know or would like to know, or reviewing a play before you see it performed. Garber is an inspiring, but also a comfortable, guide, sharing her enthusiasm for Shakespeare and illuminating his plays. Read it and you'll see what I mean.

### Audrey Meyer (science)

#### *Moby-Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists, and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them*, Donovan Hohn

This book is pretty much as advertised by its lengthy title. The incident that sparked the story is well-known and has been written about in numerous journal articles and oceanographic textbooks: a shipping container lost at sea in the North Pacific in January 1992, filled with plastic toys that subsequently began washing up on beaches around the world. I knew the story, but even in the opening pages I learned something—the flotsam

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were not all yellow “duckies” but also toy frogs, beavers, and turtles. Overlooking for a moment the unfortunate plastic pollution aspects of this incident, it is a physical oceanographer’s dream—a multitude of brightly colored and distinctive ocean current drifters. Hohn, a former high school teacher turned journalist, gets fascinated by the story, and decides to pursue it. With a nose for a good yarn, his travels take him (and therefore his readers) to numerous beaches, onboard research vessels and container vessels, to the Chinese factory where the toys were made, and more. It’s a far ranging tale, not only about bath toys, but also about the people searching for them and what the plastic toy spill in the Pacific means in terms of our understanding of oceanographic circulation and human impact on the natural environment. Hohn tends to ramble on in places and the book would benefit from a firmer editorial hand, but I found it generally entertaining and informative.

### ***Paradise Walk*, Mary Malloy**

A sequel to *The Wandering Heart*, Malloy’s excellent first novel about Lizzie Manning, a Boston professor and historian. Since enjoying the first novel two years ago, I had looked forward to the second and was delighted when the author was able to share a pre-print copy with me this past summer. (It will be published in November, by the time this “Casual Bookworm” appears in print.) In this second mystery, Lizzie is hired by British scholar Alison Kent to walk the route of a medieval pilgrimage detailed in a journal by an ancestor who might be the model for Chaucer’s Wife of Bath. Lizzie discovers evidence of the ancestor’s visit at sites along her walk, as well as a plot to protect St. Thomas Becket’s remains. The book is well written and interesting reading. Mary Malloy promises another adventure for Lizzie Manning in a third novel, and I look forward to it with anticipation.

### **Susan Moffat (photography)**

#### ***Cutting for Stone*, Abraham Verghese**

Of the past year’s readings, the novel that most stands out in my mind is this one. I’m especially drawn to books about foreign lands and this book spans two continents with multiple cultures. It follows the lives of twin brothers, the result of a secret affair between a nun and surgeon in Ethiopia. The boys are born joined at the head and disconnected at birth, then quickly abandoned by their parents. Verghese beautifully describes the cultures of Ethiopia, Brooklyn, and Roxbury; the importance of family; betrayal and love. The characters are sensitively portrayed and really come to life. It’s a clever plot that is loaded with coincidence and surprise.

Verghese, the author, is also a physician and this is obvious in his sometimes-grueling descriptions of accidents and operations. The book might have been a bit heavy on the medical scenes. Given the fact that it was so strong in every other respect, I would highly recommend this book. I didn’t want it to end.

*[I very much enjoyed this book.--A. Ament] [Verghese’s non-fiction book about his life, My Own Country, deals with the early days of the AIDS epidemic and is even better than Cutting for Stone.--J. Taylor]*

### **Elenita Muñiz (publications)**

#### ***Jamrach’s Menagerie*, Carol Birch**

The tale of Jaffy Brown, whose life “truly begins” at age six, the day he meets a tiger walking down the middle of Ratcliffe Highway in the slums of Victorian London. “He drew me like honey draws a wasp. I had no fear. I came before the godly indifference of his face and looked into his clear yellow eyes.” This encounter connects Jaffy with the menagerie of the title where he is hired to muck out cages. Thrilling rumors about a south sea dragon years later result in Jaffy’s going to sea with an adventuring hunter charged with finding and bringing back the mysterious dragon. It is a whaling ship that carries them to the Pacific and they become part of its working crew. Find the dragon they do, capture it and load it on the vessel. Suffice it to say, this turns out to be a bad idea. Madness, obsession, catastrophic storms – and the crew finds itself struggling to stay alive on a careless sea. Despite some borrowings from the adventures of the *Essex* crew, Brown’s story is gripping and written in waterfalls of lyrical prose that put the reader inside the heart and mind of Jaffy Brown. Powerful stuff.

#### ***Mighty Be Our Powers*, Leymah Gbowee**

One of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize laureates has written a memoir of her work for peace and justice in Liberia. The subject of a recent documentary, “Pray the Devil Back to Hell,” Leymah Gbowee’s efforts to bring an end to Liberia’s endless civil war and the depredations of General Charles Taylor is engaging and fascinating. Like Rosa Parks, Gbowee is no accidental activist. Her lifetime of work on behalf of economic justice and an end to abuse of women and to the civil war led her finally to call together the women of Liberia. “Dress in white and come together to pray,” Leymah said. Her first success was in bridging the divide between Christian and Muslim women. Taking a leaf from *Lysistrata*, Gbowee and her peaceful pickets eventually brought the men to a peace table, where not much happened. Frustrated, the women barricaded the men into their elegant



hotel meeting room and wouldn't let them out until they had made progress. Gbowee's life has not been easy (indeed, her activist life has cost her both partner and her children) yet she continues on her path in the belief that it is up to the people, especially the women, to end wars and bring a just peace to their homelands. This is an interesting and inspiring read.

#### ***The Postmistress*, Sarah Blake**

I wanted to like this book, and some aspects of it, I did. It describes the impact of early World War II on people in Europe and in Provincetown (annoyingly called Franklin in this book) through the eyes of a news correspondent working for Edward R. Murrow and through lives of some residents of P-town, particularly the postmistress. The portentous early question, "What would you think of a postmistress who didn't deliver the mail?" turns out to be less cataclysmic than one might have been led to expect. The parts set in London and elsewhere in Europe, as the young reporter sees them, are excruciating and moving. The book would have made a better tale if it had focused on her adventures and left behind the folks in "Franklin." [See also *N. Twichell*.-ed.]

#### **Rachel Neurath (science)**

##### ***The Samurai's Garden*, Gail Tsukiyama**

Written with a simple beauty that mirrors a walk through a Japanese garden, *The Samurai's Garden* follows Stephen through his recovery from tuberculosis in a small Japanese village in the 1930s. Stephen is not a strong personality, but rather assumes the role of a guide, leading the reader through the lives of the villagers. It is a community bound by tradition, with characters full of a quiet intensity, such as Matsu, the housekeeper and gardener who takes care of Stephen, and Sachi, the love of Matsu's life now hidden away because she has leprosy. Ultimately what makes the book stand out is Gail Tsukiyama's ability to write in a style that flows with intentionality.

#### **Ben Parsons (French)**

##### ***Not for Profit*, Martha Nussbaum**

Distinguished professor of law and political philosophy at the University of Chicago, Nussbaum presents in her latest book a compelling argument for the liberal arts in education. Confronted with a market-driven society that has seeped into the realm of schools in the form of standardized testing, "jobs training," and the rhetoric of the marketplace, Nussbaum pleads for a curriculum that incorporates the arts. She calls on past educational theorists and practitioners like Dewey, Horace Mann and

Rabindranath Tagore to support a system that teaches empathy as the essential democratic ideal. In many respects, Falmouth Academy could serve as the supreme example of her vision, with our heterogeneously grouped classes, Arts-in-Humanities curriculum, and small size that demands involvement from all constituents. I highly recommend this book for anyone concerned with current trends in education or anyone looking for an articulation of our mission here at FA.

#### ***Outposts*, Simon Winchester**

Not too long ago, "the sun never set on the British Empire." In fact, it still doesn't. Winchester sets out to visit the last few bits of empire clung to by this erstwhile colonial behemoth. He visits the Pitcairn Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Gibraltar, the Falklands, Ascension, and others in his quest to chronicle the modern empire. His travel journal is at times hilarious, at other times quite depressing. The legacy of colonialism and the absurdity of empire are poignantly noted in his vignettes of foreign governors, strange traditions, and rocky outcroppings in all four corners of the globe. As a British subject myself, this book conjured feelings of affection, sadness, guilt and solidarity, but certainly not pride.

#### **Crissy Pingal (development)**

I love books. I love how they smell and the feel of turning a page. Last spring I gave all that up, succumbed to temptation and bought an electronic reader. With thousands of books only a click away, I feel like a kid in a candy store. I turned off my television and spent my evenings and free time reading. Here are some of my favorites from the dozens of books I have read to date.

#### ***Island of the Swans*, Ciji Ware**

A poignant story of a lifetime of heartbreak and lost love set in Scotland in the 18th century, this novel belongs in my favorite genre, historical fiction. Ware romanticizes the life of Jane Maxwell. I loved this book, but it made me a bit sentimental and sad.

#### ***Cleopatra's Daughter*, Michelle Moran**

In this interesting but predictable novel set in ancient Egypt and Rome, Moran follows the lives of Cleopatra's and Mark Anthony's twins, Alexander and Selene, after their parents' defeat and death in 31 BC. Having read *Caesar's Women* by Colleen McCullough (one of the best historical novels set in ancient Rome), I was familiar with the characters and the setting once the action moved to Rome. A must-read for lovers of ancient Rome.

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Ladies, get your beach chairs ready....through my e-reader explorations, I have discovered a new genre to recommend – Regency romance novels. They are quick, easy reads that entertain me and indulge my romantic side. A warning: if you believe these authors, all the titled men in Regency England were tall, muscular, handsome, and in possession of piercing green eyes! Even though story lines are different, the basic premise is the same: a virtuous and beautiful young maiden in distress is helped by a rakish, handsome lord, and after many trials and tribulations, they find their happily-ever-after. (Gentlemen: please, no guffawing.)

I recommend the following novels (some R-rated; others are PG-13): *A Garden Folly*, *My Lord Wicked*, *A Fallen Woman*, and *The Earl's Bargain*, Cheryl Bolen; *Sweet Companion*, *An Intimate Arrangement*, Nancy Lawrence; *The Bargain*, Mary J. Putney; *The Best Intentions*, *An Affair of Honor*, *A Change of Heart*, Candice Hern; *Saved by a Scoundrel*, Stephanie Ellis.

### **Will Potter (business)**

*How to Live: A Life of Montaigne*, Sarah Bakewell

Had it not been a Falmouth Academy faculty-staff reading assignment, I am not sure if, on my own accord, I would have chosen *How to Live*. But, after taking the time to read this book and digest it, I am very glad to have been introduced to Montaigne's literary work. It is amazing that essays written back in the 16th century resonate 500 years later. I especially appreciated his honesty, integrity, and self-reflection, all evident in his writing. Today's lifestyles are certainly different than in the 1500s, but at its core, "life" is still about striving to be our best selves. As Montaigne seeks to answer the query about "how to live," I think he successfully captures the essence: "Life should be an aim unto itself, a purpose unto itself." To that end, I believe, by living life through its hopes, dreams, challenges, and reality, we each will find our own answers. [See also *O. Hobbie-ed.*]

### **Sarah Pring (development)**

*Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, by Helen Simonson

I especially enjoyed the patiently crafted first half, but felt the first-time author, so relieved to have succeeded in creating such wonderful, sharply observed and very British characters and setting, rather galloped towards the finish line. Nevertheless, still a charming and rewarding read. [See also *T. Clark and N. Twichell.*]

*The Sense of an Ending*, Julian Barnes

*The Sense of an Ending*, which recently won the UK's most prestigious book award, reflects on the plastic-

ity of time and how events from childhood can seem, even in old age, fresh, vivid, and painful. Barnes, one of the high priests of contemporary UK fiction, follows a group of clever schoolboy friends in suburban London as they spread their wings into their post-school life. Barnes makes a seemingly thin story as tense and taut as a thriller. Finding, in late middle age, the solution to a puzzle that had haunted him all his life, Barnes' main character is turned inside out and upside down, as he realizes that not only did others behave badly, but he did, too. For lovers of thought-provoking, sophisticated writing, so self assured that it almost seems at times slight, it will prove an engrossing and stimulating read.

### **The Imperfectionists, Tom Rachman**

This is a debut novel by Tom Rachman, a Canadian of UK background (and brother of Gideon, for the Financial Times readers amongst you). Set in Rome in the office of a newspaper broadly based on the International Herald Tribune, the book follows a large cast of characters who either work for the paper or who are connected to it. Various stories overlap and interweave and one character's searing pain is another's minor irritation. Rachman has a lovely light style, full of humor and pathos, and a sharp eye for characterization and detail. Rome presents a captivating backdrop on which the multiple dramas are played out. Rachman is a name to watch and his second novel, coming soon, will definitely be worth keeping an eye out for. [See *M. Hough-ed.*]

### **Jill Reves (science)**

*Notes to Myself - My Struggle to Become a Person*, Hugh Prather

One of my favorite quotes from *Notes to Myself: I have the choice of being right, or being human*. Disappointed with the unfinished book choices scattered on my end tables at the end of the summer, I found myself going back to some old, tattered, yellow-paged books from my past. Prather's book, published in 1970, reminded me a bit of our faculty summer reading, *How to Live*. It contains insightful, candid, humorous, contradictory, and sometimes embarrassing revelations and simple musings. It was an enjoyable return, for me, to a time when figuring out "the direction of my life" was my major preoccupation.

### **Ruth Slocum (English)**

*Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy

*Freedom*, Jonathan Franzen

*Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens

There are reasons the classics are classics. I am

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reading *Anna Karenina* and feeling quite happy that it is about 900 pages long. I started listening to it as a book on tape and am now working my way through part five. I love a lot about it: I love that there is one of everybody—the spoiled, careless but not entirely without conscience Vronsky; the conflicted, loving, and all-too-human Anna; the rational, precise, and flawed Karenin, and Levin and Kitty, all those lusty peasants and on and on. The love affair keeps one going at times, but I am finding that I like Tolstoy’s asides (mostly through the character of Levin) on agriculture, peasant life, democracy, and communism. Published in 1875, it is, of course, a piece of amber through which to view Russia before the revolution. It is shocking how prescient Tolstoy was—he saw it all coming and warned of what might be and yet it all came nonetheless. Given our current woes and how little practical attention we pay to the big thinkers and writers of our time, this book seems, like all classics, to be again a book for today. *[Oh, yes, who could forget Anna?—P. Ehbrenbrink]*

I have also recently read *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen and perhaps someone will be writing about this as a classic in about a hundred years, but I doubt it. I know that Franzen has been compared to Dickens and Tolstoy, and he is a remarkably skilled writer. He does hold a mirror up to our culture and, at times, the reflection is dazzlingly real. It is just that the subject matter—American culture today—seems so shallow and depressing, as are many (but not all) of his characters, that I cannot care about them as much as I care about Levin or Anna or even Vronsky. I know that is to some extent the point, and Franzen gives us all the tensions of our open society at this crossroads. He describes the collision of the biggest forces in American society today: individual freedom, democracy, more and more limited resources, and class. It is a good cultural literacy read, but I admit that I didn’t really enjoy it.

Finally, I also recently read two Dickens novels, *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. I recommend both because Dickens is, in the words of my 83-year-old Uncle Jack, “good for what ails you.” He, like Tolstoy, gives us one of each type from his society. He shows us the best and the worst and makes us want to be like the best. He is no realist; there is no objective mirror, but in these times I want to be reminded of the challenges that have always faced us in complicated societies, and I want to be reminded how to do the best that I can. *[I have always loved these two Dickens novels especially. They are the last he completed and the culmination of many ideas and*

*character types he worked with in his earlier novels. Plus Bleak House turns into such a good detective story. And I recently saw, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a silver epergne featuring camels and palm trees, precisely like the one that marched down the center of the Podsnaps’ dining room table—a remarkable construction entirely!—E. Muñoz]*

### Julie Swanbeck (history, math)

#### *The Glass Castle, Jeanette Walls*

This memoir contains both heart-warming and heart-wrenching recollections of Walls’ youth. Wonderfully eccentric in some ways but woefully irresponsible, her parents fight their own demons and leave their four children to fend for themselves. Walls’ father, Rex, works here and there as a mining engineer and electrician, but his alcoholism makes it difficult for him to hold down a job and leads him to gamble, con the banks and steal from his children, and when necessary, to “skedaddle” to avoid bill collectors. Fascinated with astronomy and math, Rex teaches Jeanette to complete her second grade homework in base two to make it more challenging and, lacking other presents, he gives each of his children their own star for Christmas one year. Walls’ mother Rose Mary, a self-described “excitement addict” who loves painting and writing, instills in her children a love of reading, but believes people worry too much about children and routinely espouses the school of hard knocks. From her child’s-eye vantage, Jeanette sees many of the family’s scrapes with disaster as wild and exciting adventures, but as she grows older, Jeanette and her siblings have to fight to survive, snatching bites of food thrown out by schoolmates, banding together against neighborhood bullies, and working and saving so that one by one they might escape their miserable home life. I was fascinated by Walls’ collection of painful, yet often endearing, memories of her childhood and truly amazed by her spirit and resilience. *[See also S. Mastroianni-ed.]*

#### *Mountains Beyond Mountains, Tracy Kidder*

I was also enthralled by Paul Farmer’s story, as told by Tracy Kidder. Farmer, an anthropologist and Harvard-trained doctor, began working with the poorest of the poor in Haiti while he was still in college. His unrelenting dedication led him to found and staff the Sanmi Lasante medical clinic in Haiti where he worked while completing his medical degree. With Boston-area associates, he also created a private charity, Partners in Health, which has funded and vastly expanded the scope of his influence.

14 Margaret Mead’s famous remark—*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the*

*world* – could easily refer to Farmer and his associates at Partners in Health. Their desire to provide medical help to the world’s destitute led them to rural Haiti, to prisons in Cuba and Russia, and to slums in Peru. Though their projects, as the title metaphor suggests, are numerous and challenging, Farmer and his partners in health are influencing international health policy and making significant inroads in bringing modern medicine to the world’s poor. Kidder’s rendition of his story is thought-provoking and inspiring.

**Julia C. Taylor (college counselor)**

*The Big Short*, Michael Lewis

*Boomerang*, Michael Lewis

If you are still worried about what happened to the economy in 2008 but don’t feel you fully understand the causes of the collapse, or if you wonder what Occupy Wall Street means, Michael Lewis can help you out. *The Big Short* explains what happened in the United States, and *Boomerang* adds to the picture by describing the situation now in Iceland, Greece, Ireland, and Germany. Lewis is an excellent writer who makes the economic, legal, and moral issues clear. All voters need to understand what happened and what is needed to prevent it happening again.

**Nancy P. Twichell (admissions)**

*The Postmistress*, Sarah Blake

This is one of those books that “sticks with you.” Taking place at the brink of the US’s entry into World War II, it poignantly shows how war touches lives in so many ways. Iris James is the no-nonsense postmistress in a small town down-Cape. Letters cross her counter carrying news from far away, including letters from newlywed Emma Trask’s husband, who has entered the war haunted by past events. Meanwhile, over in England, Frankie Bard tries to tell the real story of what is happening in the war while the US seemingly ignores the signs of the devastation. Her path crosses with Emma’s husband in a bunker on the night of an intense Nazi blitz. I don’t want to give too much away but images from this story keep creeping into my head. [See also *E. Muñiz-ed.*]

**Major Pettigrew’s Last Stand**, Helen Simonson

Major Pettigrew is one of the last of the British gentry who tries to uphold all the ideals he treasures in the world. Recently widowed and then stunned anew by the unexpected death of his brother, Ernest Pettigrew fights for the simple traditions that define his world. His son is insensitive, busy trying to climb the social ladder. Ernest

finds an unexpected friendship with Mrs. Ali who runs a shop he frequents in the village. This new bond enriches his life. This book is delightful and at times made me laugh out loud. My daughter Sarah ’99 told me it was a “must read” and she was right!! [See also *T. Clark, S. Pring-ed.*]

**Sirkka Wakefield (German)**

*The Mayflower*, Nathaniel Philbrick

A must-read for anyone who lives in Massachusetts! Great book, well-written, made history come alive... now I understand the reasoning behind all the names of streets, towns, forests, parks, and beaches around here!

**Rob Wells (history)**

*Going Home to Glory: A Memoir of Life with Dwight D. Eisenhower*, David Eisenhower

As Bookworm readers may know, I have a long-standing interest in all things Eisenhower; I believe I have reviewed biographies of Ike in the Bookworm on two past occasions. So imagine my delight when I heard David and Julie Eisenhower talking about this book on NPR on my ride into FA one day. At heart, this is a grandson’s loving memoir of the opportunities he had to get to know his famous grandfather during Ike’s retirement years on the farm in Gettysburg. At the same time, however, David serves as an historian with a ring-side seat to Eisenhower’s interactions with the events and politics of his post-presidency years in the 1960s. David Eisenhower uses archive materials and official letters to augment his own recollections of his grandfather’s thoughts and opinions. While it is interesting to hear Eisenhower’s private thoughts on Vietnam, JFK, and other world and national events, what I found most intriguing was the personal nature of the book. For the author, Ike was first and foremost his “granddad,” and apparently it was not always easy being the teenage grandson of a small Pennsylvania town’s most famous resident. I loved learning, for example, that Ike would find excuses to let the newly licensed David take the car for errands in town, and that Ike liked to go along. David would emerge from the drugstore to find his grandfather slumping down in the passenger seat as passersby stared at the famous head they had recognized. There are also fine insights into the generational tensions of the time period as President Eisenhower grasped little of rock & roll and the emerging 1960s protest culture. He did, however, love his grandson, and tried to guide him and to watch over him; the letters Ike wrote to David while the latter was away at boarding school and then college show a wonderfully human side to the man who

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even five years out of the White House and seventy-five years old, topped the list of “Most Admired” Americans. In a way, this is a coming of age memoir of a young man in a unique family position. The book is both fine history and a heartwarming story of love between a grandfather and a grandson.

***Persian Fire*, Tom Holland**

My colleague Don Swanbeck lent me this book over the summer as he and I were both preparing to teach Ancient History at Falmouth Academy this year. The book tells the story of the rise of the Persian Empire and the subsequent Persian Wars between that empire and the Greek city-states. Holland is a terrific writer who makes this work read like a fast-paced action novel that keeps the reader on the edge of his seat. This is an especially impressive feat, as most readers will know the outcome of the wars before opening the book. I was especially taken with how cleverly Holland links this famous long-ago historical episode with our own time and with our own Western policies in the Middle East. Part of his intriguing thesis is that from the Persian perspective, Athens and Sparta were terrorist states on the outer fringes, at best, of civilization, and that it was necessary for Persia to pursue something akin to regime change in parts of Greece. A great read and a great book! *[I agree!—P. Ehrenbrink]*

**Jacek Zuzanski (drama)**

***Caleb's Crossing*, Geraldine Brooks**

I learned about this book at one of FA's spring faculty meetings. Published this year, the book has already earned much praise among reviewers. This was my most joyful reading this summer.

*[See also M. Burns - ed.]*

***When Asia was the World*, Steward Gordon**

This was my next summer favorite. Gordon presents

a fascinating look at Asia from A.D. 700 to 1500 by describing the personal journeys of Asia's travelers: the merchants who traded spices along the Silk Road, the apothecaries who exchanged medicine and knowledge from China to the Middle East, and the philosophers and holy men who crossed continents to explore and exchange ideas, books, science, and culture. A well researched and beautifully written book.

***Fixing Elections: The Failure of America's Winner-Take-All Politics*, Steven Hill**

This was my third favorite. I haven't had enough time to finish this one, but I will be returning to this analysis of weaknesses of American democracy. Hill writes about faults, but he also provides suggestions for a better future, and it is fascinating to follow his highly erudite and insightful thoughts.

***Land of Ashes and Diamonds: My Apprenticeship in Poland*, Eugenio Barba**

Last summer I was visiting my native Poland and on the bookshelf in my studio in Wroclaw, I found a book I had purchased 10 years ago. This was a nice surprise and wonderful summer reading. *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* is a personal account of creating the most innovative and influential theatre of the 20th century: the Laboratory Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski. Barba joined Grotowski's theatre in 1962 thanks to a scholarship from the Italian government. He quickly become Grotowski's closest collaborator, involved in creative work, research, experiments, development of revolutionary methods and inventing and implementing managerial strategies. The book gives a very personal account of how a provincial little theatre grew into the world's most significant group of theatre artists in the middle of Communist-era Poland. The story includes 26 letters from Grotowski to Barba. It is a feast for all interested in contemporary theatre and how it was shaped in the second half of the 20th century.

