

## 2014 Summer Reading List

Urban students! Here is your chance to get amazing recommendations for summer reading. Members of our faculty, along with the Library Leaders, have come up with a list of tantalizing choices in a variety of genres for your intellectual consumption this summer.

We expect you to read *at least* 2 of these books, in addition to reading the all-school read, [City of Thieves](#). Trust us, it's really good. While we think there is something for everyone on the list, check in with Sarah the Librarian for suggestions if you truly can't find anything that interests you or if you simply want a personalized recommendation.

All-School Read

## City of Thieves by David Benioff

City of Thieves is a story of adventure, friendship, and being so afraid for your life that you'll do anything to survive. Follow two young men who must find a carton of eggs (yes, eggs!) for a colonel during the German siege of Leningrad in order to earn their freedom from being executed. At turns this novel is sad, funny, and grisly. Most of all, though, City of Thieves is a compelling and well-researched tale written by a master storyteller. If the author's name is familiar, you may have seen it roll by in the opening credits as producer for HBO's Game of Thrones. Also recommended is the very entertaining audiobook version read by actor Ron Perlman.

## Fiction

The Miseducation of Cameron Post by Emily Danforth      recommended by Laura Hawkins, Math department chair  
*The story of a girl growing up while dealing with family tragedy and discovering her sexuality surrounded by people who don't approve or understand. I really loved the characters and appreciated how they were presented. Warning: while this is a book written for young adults, there are a couple racy love scenes!*

Run River by Joan Didion

recommended by Lauren Gersick, College Counselor

*The story of a tight-knit group of Old California families as they totally fall apart on personal and life-station levels. Early California class issues! Adultery! People watching steam rise off late summer fields! Prose from a 26 year-old Joan Didion! Faulkner meets Fitzgerald meets Steinbeck meets US Weekly. Slim volume for easy travel, as well.*

## Sea of Tranquility by Katja Millay

recommended by Jenn Epstein, Health

*This deliberate novel focuses on character development and grabbed me from the very beginning. It's about a fragile young woman who is dealing with a difficult past, healing, and difficult relationships. It's bittersweet: humorous moments are balanced with pretty sad parts. Read it and come tell me what you think!*

## My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante

recommended by Laurie Williams, Learning Services Coordinator

*First and foremost this is a meticulous and captivating story about best friends: two young Italian girls navigating the complexities of growing up in a poor patriarchal society, all the while depending on each other for sustenance.*

## King Dork by Frank Portman

recommended by Sophie Weir, Library Leader

King Dork Follows the High school experience of outcast Tom Henderson as he encounters a variety of quirky occurrences and mysteries in his life. I found the eccentric mannerisms of the characters both hysterical and endearing. This is a perfect read for anyone who enjoys humorous and incredibly original young adult novels.

The Tenth of December by George Saunders

recommended by Amelia Wohlers, Library Leader

*Tenth of December* is an awesome collection of short stories ranging from the slightly odd to extremely out there. The story lines are intriguing and have a deliberate pacing and familiar tone. I highly recommend this book to anyone that enjoyed "The Semplica Girl Diaries" in English 2A or just enjoys short, weird reads.

## Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

recommended by Jenn Starkweather, Visual Art

Americanah is a complicated story about love & race & hair and what it's like to straddle two different cultures, American and Nigerian; and to seek out a home in both while not entirely connecting with either. This is a mouthful of a sentence, very much like the book itself. I loved it and found it compelling, challenging and not without humor.

## Science Fiction

"At the Mountains of Madness" in Tales of H.P. Lovecraft

recommended by Riley Maddox, Math

*Ever wondered how awesome it would have been if Poe had been writing in the early 20th century? Do you ever feel there's nothing scarier than when a somewhat arcane vernacular meets The Unknown? Have you ever watched a sci-fi movie and said, "Hey, I wish this were more like Alien"? "At the Mountains of Madness" will not disappoint.*

Galapagos by Kurt Vonnegut

recommended by Xander Chan-Herur, Library Leader

*Galapagos* investigates the value of the human brain from an evolutionary standpoint using the setting of the fictional island of Santa Rosalia in the Galapagos Archipelago. Written in Vonnegut's simple and efficient style, a million year-old ghost narrates the book bringing an impersonal perspective to our species.

The Dog Stars by Peter Heller

recommended by Lucas Drummond, Library Leader

*The Dog Stars* uses beautiful and simple prose to tell the story of a man living on a dying planet earth. While there are moments of fast paced survival-at-all-costs, the book is not an apocalyptic tale, but rather a romantic and tragic story of a man who struggles to hold on to small moments of happiness as the world falls apart.

## Classic Fiction

Siddartha by Herman Hesse

recommended by Ben Slater, English

*Spirituality, enlightenment, social class, sensual pleasures, river-crossing. Inspired by the life of Buddha, this short novel captures spiritual currents that drive a young man's quest for enlightenment. Best read near water: I re-read this one sunny day next to a lake. Best read when quests for spiritual and sensual satisfaction are unsatisfying.*

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

recommended by LeRoy Votto, History

*What happens when you mix an orphan, a convict, a mean-spirited sister, her good-hearted husband, a spurned bride, a spoiled young woman, social climbers, unrequited love, crazy love, a wedding cake, spiders, friendship, fidelity, quirky people, chase scenes, the Australian penal colony, London, prisons, courtrooms, murder, and a cast of unforgettable characters? Find out by reading the masterful Charles Dickens' wonder of a novel.*

## Drama

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

recommended by Andrew Packard, Theater

*The first play written by a black woman to run on Broadway introduced details of black life to a largely ignorant white public. Follow the Younger family who live in Chicago's south side as they determine what to do with a life-changing \$10,000 insurance check. This will also be the first production for CalShakes this summer.*

## Graphic Novel

Relish by Lucy Knisley

recommended by Erika Gomi, Library Leader

*For those of you who want a quick read and love food, Relish is a fun pick. It's about a girl and her relationship to food and family and it's full of great art and delicious looking food. Bonus: at the end of each chapter there are fun recipes to try out.*

## Science & Ecology

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert

recommended by Geoff Ruth, Assistant Head for Academics

*This winter in Science 1B we got into a discussion about the average length of time that a species exists on earth (it's between 1 and 5 million years). This book follows up on that discussion, describing natural rates of extinction, past mass extinctions, and how humans are currently creating a new mass extinction by our actions. I was able to read this book on the bus ride to Joshua Tree and in my sleeping bag at night, which suggests it's pretty engaging.*

Stiff by Mary Roach

recommended by Sarah Levin, Librarian

*I listened to Stiff as an audiobook and was unexpectedly enthralled and fascinated with what happens to the human body after we die. Local nonfiction virtuoso Mary Roach brings her trademark conversational tone and humorous writing style to an otherwise macabre (and at times pretty gross) topic. Not for squeamish readers.*

## The Psychopath Test by Jon Ronson

*I'm generally not that into non-fiction but this book really drew me in from the start. If you are interested in the human mind and the idea of sanity you'll love it. This book goes over functioning psychopaths in our society, the history of the mental condition and treatment, and serial killers! Bonus: you'll learn to spot traits of a psychopath!*

recommended by Gwen McLaughlin, Library Leader

## Sports

### Boys of Summer by Roger Kahn

recommended by Greg Monfils, English & History

*This book is about what it means to be human. Even a Giants fan can appreciate the challenges and glories of a team that featured Jackie Robinson, Duke Snyder, and Pee Wee Reese--men I got to know well beyond the stats. If you love baseball...what a book! If you don't care about baseball...it's not about baseball and what a book!*

### Among the Thugs by Bill Buford

recommended by Cathleen Sheehan, English

*Buford explores the phenomenon of Football Hooliganism by getting up-close and personal with a bunch of Man U fans (natch). Fascinating and horrifying at times, Buford touches on intersections of psychology, class, nationalism, violence, alcoholism, and gender-identity--but not with a heavy-hand. A very engaging read.*

## History

### Empire of the Summer Moon by S. C. Gwynne

recommended by Sarah Clowes, Science

*Gwynne's book is an unflinching and informative history of the battle between Comanche Indians and white settlers for control of the American West. This is a vivid, gripping, and fascinating read.*

## Memoir

### Redefining Realness by Janet Mock

recommended by Amy Argenal, Service Learning

*Slate.com calls trans advocate Janet Mock's bestselling book "a memoir that takes the coming-of-age narrative to both a higher and deeper level.... Mock juxtaposes the personal and the political with a dose of academic theory and pop culture, honestly detailing both the joys and difficulties of her journey."*

### The Water is Wide by Pat Conroy

recommended by Joe Skiffer, Director of Athletics

*This book will make you laugh, cry, and jump for joy. Pat Conroy spent a year as the only teacher in a two-room schoolhouse on an island off South Carolina working with a community the world had forgotten. It was a year that changed his life, and one that introduced a group of poor black children to a world they did not know existed.*

### Warriors Don't Cry by Melba Beals

recommended by Charlotte Worsey, Assistant Head for Student Life

*Read about Beals' first-hand experience with the struggles of being an African American child in the south before the Civil Rights movement, as well as her experience of being a student as schools integrated. Also, she was on the Board at Urban at one time and came to Urban to speak at an All School Meeting. It is a great read!*

### Fairyland : A Memoir of My Father by Alyria Abbott

recommended by Amanda Moore, English

*Fairyland is about a daughter growing up with her gay father in this very neighborhood (Haight Ashbury--you've walked by her building a hundred times!) in the 1980s through the AIDS pandemic. It is a compelling account of a non-traditional parent-child relationship, growing up, and a San Francisco we might not recognize today.*

## Books into Movies

*In addition to the regular summer reading list, the Library Leaders recommend reading these titles before their film adaptations reach theaters later this year!*

- Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn
- The Fault In Our Stars by John Green
- This Is Where I Leave You by Jonathan Tropper
- The Giver by Lois Lowry
- The Maze Runner by James Dashner
- Wild by Cheryl Strayed