



You've Got To Read This!

Books You Should Read in College: recommendations from SVC's faculty, staff, & administrators

Southern Vermont
College Library

December 2011

Did you ever see one of those lists, occasionally published in newspapers or magazines, that inventories all the books the experts think you should have read in high school? Did it make you feel like you'd missed out on something, and you could never catch up? Well we feel the same way, and we've decided to fix that. The SVC Library has collected favorite titles from our faculty, staff, and administrators: we've compiled our list not of what you've missed in the past, but that you can aspire to in your immediate future.

We've purchased any of these we didn't already own, and they are all here for the taking. Bring one home over winter break, settle in with a blanket and your favorite hot beverage, and find out what your favorite professor is raving about!

1984 by George Orwell

David Brown, Social Science Adjunct Faculty

I was fairly stunned when I recently asked my students in my 4th, 5th, and 6th Amendment class who among them had read *1984*, and it turned out none of them had. It's hard for me to imagine tackling 'the right to privacy' without it.

Allegory of the Cave by Plato

Joan Sakalas, Social Science Adjunct Faculty

Plato's work is provocative still and moves the reader to consider whether what we consider "real" is, in fact, real.

Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt

Kitty Farnham, Administrative Assistant, Success Center

The amazing thing about this memoir, to me, is the humor Frank McCourt is able to bring to a story which describes one of the bleakest childhoods imaginable. The fact that he rose above his very humble beginnings to become an accomplished teacher and writer is inspiring.

Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin

Michael Zauzig, Women's Soccer Coach

A significant book in our country's history that examines the life of one man and literally dives into the world of segregation. A white man uses a variety of means to change his skin color and live life as a black man in the south. The book is a narrative about his travels and all that he endures. I believe this book truly helps those who viewed the Civil Rights Movement from the outside and gives them a first-hand perspective. This book provided me with genuine perspective about the Civil Rights Movement, the treatment of humans, and the importance of equality in our world.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Sarah Knapp-Oliver, Social Science Faculty

This book is set in Nazi Germany during World War II. The main character is a young girl named Liesel, yet the novel is narrated by another interesting character; Death. Death is fascinated by humans, and particularly fond of Liesel, whose behavior he observes with great interest, including her tendency to steal books, which provide her with some comfort in an otherwise tumultuous life. Liesel also kept a dangerous secret; her foster family hid Max Vandenburg, a Jewish fist-fighter, in their basement for a period of time during the war. In the author's own words, this book aims to show "another side of Nazi Germany, where certain people did hide their Jewish friends to save their lives (at the risk of their own)". This novel shows the potential for human kindness and the significance of a young child's tolerance for the many differences among us to shine through, even in the darkest periods of history.

***Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser**

Sarah Koehl Sanfilippo, Director of Library Services

While you may have seen these food facts in other places (like Michael Pollan's books, or *Super Size Me* and other movies) Schlosser addresses this as a larger issue.

The bulk of the book does consist of the author's reporting on all levels of fast food business, from franchises to teen burger flippers to meatpacking plants. (The meatpacking chapter has kept me from eating fast food for over a decade now, not only because of the environment the meat is processed in, but also due to the horrid conditions for the workers.) In addition though, Schlosser goes further to discuss how the "McDonaldization" of our culture has affected not just restaurants and food, but how we shop for all consumer products, how we develop real estate, and how we're exporting these values and habits to the rest of the world. It really makes you think: Do we want our incredibly diverse nation (and the larger world) to lose individuality and regional "flavors" in favor of the ease of uniformity?

***The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls**

Susan Biggs, Director of Communications

Today Jeanette Walls is a broadcaster for MSNBC. This is her story of growing up in an extremely eccentric, dysfunctional family. It's written in a detached, unemotional way that helps the reader understand why the family stuck together through much of it. The poverty and neglect is so sad and maddening, yet Jeanette works her way out of the craziness to college and beyond.

***Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck**

Susan Sykas, Nursing Faculty

This is a story about family bonds, hardship and struggles, unemployment, incarceration, scarce hospitality, and survival in a time of economic hardship. The Joad family is forced to abandon their long-held family farm in Oklahoma to the powers of big business and to strike out for a new life across the country, in California. They gather as much of their possessions as will fit in a makeshift pickup truck and pile the extended family in on top of these belongings for the long, hot, sometimes dangerous, drive across country. Unfortunately they are not welcomed to new places, but are seen as itinerant, dirty, poor "Okies." Written in the time of the Great Depression in the United States, many of the issues still ring true today. This is a powerful read.

***Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift**

Stefano Donati, Learning Differences Assistant

Because it's funny and clever, and gives readers a glimpse of life and philosophy in the 18th century.

***Hamlet and others* by William Shakespeare**

Lynda Sinkiewich, Humanities Faculty

All students, regardless of Discipline, should experience Shakespeare. Preferably several of his works. To experience Shakespeare is to understand what it is to be human. The good, the bad, the innocent, the evil, the simple, the intelligent... it was not only Shakespeare's command of language, but his understanding of the truth of our humanity that made him a man who truly "was not of an age, but for all time."

While all of his plays and poetry have their merits, the plays I most highly recommend students read during their undergraduate career include (in order of preference):

Hamlet, Richard III, King Lear, The Tempest, The Merchant of Venice

***The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros**

Al DeCiccio, Provost

Poetic and poignant, this collection of memories compiled by a Latina who grew up in Chicago is a must read for students on a campus committed to literacy and to diversity and difference. The voice Cisneros gives to Esperanza in the vignettes she narrates is memorable.



***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot**

Karen Gross, President

A real story of a woman who changed our understanding of disease. It is about family and medicine; it is about social class and injustice and ethics—all topics that will appeal to students across our disciplines. It is about discovery and innovation but also about the price we pay for medical success. It is reflective of how we can and should think about people, and it showcases an America era in which discrimination was rampant. And, discrimination can take many forms—some overt and some subtle. And, this true story provides insight into activism and compassion.

It is a book that captives and moves the reader; for any student interested in healthcare and science and innovation, this book is a must-read. By reading it, I hope students learn about the power of change and the power of caring. I would welcome having a discussion of the book among students who read it over the break!

***Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn**

Sara Patch, Director of Residence Life

This book challenges the notion that human beings are the 'superior' beings on earth and purports that our culture is really just a story meant to reinforce our belief that, as the superior beings, we are entitled to take whatever we want from the planet. Although it is, at times, a little complicated, in an ever expanding global community and with the continued depletion of natural resources, this book offers an alternative way to see and live in the world. College is the perfect time to explore, question or strengthen your beliefs—this book gives you a chance to do all three.

***The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair**

Sue Metzner, Director of Human Resources

This book gives a gripping look inside the working and living conditions of immigrants in the meat packing business in early twentieth-century Chicago and the emergence of labor unions. It had a major influence on my ideas about our work and how it influences our lives.

***On The Beach* by Nevil Shute**

Sue Harris, Clerk

We read this in high school. Below is a review by a woman who also read it in high school; I like her comments. We were very aware of the chance for nuclear war during my high school days. It feels as if we've come full circle.

What I remember most about this book... is the intense discussion it sparked in my class about what you would do if you KNEW that nuclear fallout would shortly overtake your town and everyone would die, including your family.

Kill them prior to its appearance so they won't suffer? Kill yourself? What method would you use? What about pets? Morbid, but high school kids are like that. Now that I've read it again I just find it unbelievably scary and sad—imagine the most helpless feeling you could have and think about how easily this situation could play out today. Thanks, Mr. Veirs, wherever you are, for having us read this book.

***One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

Bryna Siegel Finer, Humanities Faculty

1. Garcia Marquez is basically the godfather of the magical realism genre, and I think it's important for students to see where some of contemporary fantasy comes from and what it looks like when it's done at a Nobel Prize winning level.

2. Every sentence is poetry—it's just beautiful.

3. It's a well-told, engaging story.

***Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson**

Nicole Myers, Humanities Adjunct Faculty

Often called quirky and eccentric, this book unfolds the tale of a young woman coming of age and coming to terms with her sexuality against the background of a very conservatively religious upbringing. At the very center, this book is about getting to know one's self and what can be more relevant to college students than that!

***The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster**

Catherine Burns, Learning Cooperative Coordinator

The Phantom Tollbooth teaches readers (ostensibly kids, but it is a great adult read as well) to avoid making assumptions, jumping to conclusions, saying what you don't really mean, etc. in a silly and entertaining way. The illustrations are amusing, it is very funny, and the concepts are important for anyone to remember.

***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce**

Daryl Kenny, Director of Alumni Relations & Annual Giving

This book gets my vote. It is a consummate "coming of age" story, lyrically written. It so beautifully deals with the psychological, spiritual turmoil of college-age students.

***A Soldier of the Great War* by Mark Helprin**

Kim Schultz, Administrative Assistant, Nursing & RT

"This celebration of life leaves the reader breathless but with a much stronger heart." - Bill Lewis (my favorite history buff and a very talented bookseller. It took him six years to get me to read this book and I am eternally grateful that he did!)

***The True Story of Hansel and Gretel: A Novel of War and Survival* by Louise Murphy**

Marion Whiteford, Assistant Director, Communications

SVC students (and anyone else who reads this novel) can get a historical perspective of how two children struggled to survive during World War II.

***Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* by Anna Deavere Smith**

Michelle Deal, Humanities Faculty

This book is a must read for anyone interested in documentary theatre and modern race/class relations in the United States. It's a collection of monologues taken from real interviews that the author conducted with a wide variety of people who experienced the 1992 L.A. Riots, the most violent up-rising in modern American history.

***Walden* by Henry David Thoreau**

Andrea Robare, Reference Librarian

Of all my college readings, this book impressed upon me the most: to live purposefully, meaningfully, and simply. And, in simplicity, we really do find all we need. I think everyone, especially college students, should read how Thoreau lived while on Walden Pond. No matter how technical and busy life becomes, living with purpose and simplifying our lives, as Thoreau did, brings us back to what in live truly has meaning.

***The World According to Garp* by John Irving**

Karoline Sears, Coordinator of Student Programs, Residence Director

I often give graduating seniors a copy of *The World According to Garp* by John Irving. I hand this out as an example of how, no matter how hard you try, life is not "scriptable" and things will often happen beyond your control. I have worked with a lot of seniors who think they have done everything they can to plan out their lives to the T and can get bent out of shape when something goes wrong.

***Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson**

Scott O'Callaghan, Humanities Faculty Chair

Written on the Body challenges our assumptions about narrative voice, sexuality, and health, using a speaker who experiences the joys of love but also the sorrow. Jeanette Winterson begins the novel, "Why is the nature of love loss?" Later on that first page, her speaker asks why the words we as people most want to hear-- "I love you"-- are also the most unoriginal. "I love you" is always a quotation," Winterson's narrator tells us. Great books make us question things we assume as basic truths, which is why I recommend *Written on the Body*.

Editor's note: I think Dr. O'Callaghan's last sentence sums up perfectly the reason that people are always saying "You've GOT to read this..." We hope our ideas inspire you to step out of your normal reading, try something new, and then tell others why they should read it too!