

Greetings LHS parents and American Literature students!

We are looking forward to meeting you in the fall. American Literature is a challenging course, one that differs in several respects from your 9th and 10th grade English courses. We believe that you will find the experience exciting and rewarding.

We are suggesting that you read at least one book over the summer, if not several, from the teacher recommendations below. We believe that summer reading should be enjoyable to you as an individual, but also that individual students vary in interest. Therefore we have provided for you a list of books that we have enjoyed over our years of reading, both contemporary and classic.

We recommend reading the descriptions of the books in this letter and suggest that perhaps you complete research on your own to make sure you choose something you will truly enjoy. We have tried to provide you with a variety of American texts, attempting to offer something for everyone. We hope you find something you can take pleasure in!

Have a wonderful break! We'll see you in a few months.

The American Literature Team (Mr. Hironimus, Mr. Twadell, Mr. Kolze, Ms. Tarczynski, Ms. Nasland and Ms. Schoenbeck)

Mr. Hironimus's Recommendations:

- *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole -- An American comic masterpiece. John Kennedy Toole's hero, one Ignatius J. Reilly, is "huge, obese, fractious, fastidious, a latter-day Gargantua, a Don Quixote of the French Quarter. His story bursts with wholly original characters, denizens of New Orleans' lower depths, incredibly true-to-life dialogue, and the zaniest series of high and low comic adventures" (Henry Kisor, *Chicago Sun-Times*).
- *In Our Time* by Ernest Hemingway -- When published in 1925, this short story collection was praised by F. Scott Fitzgerald and others for its simple and precise use of language to convey a wide range of complex emotions, and it earned Hemingway a place among the most promising American writers of that period. *In Our Time* contains several early Hemingway classics, including the famous Nick Adams stories, and introduces readers to the hallmarks of the Hemingway style: a lean, tough prose -- enlivened by an ear for the colloquial and an eye for the realistic that suggests, through the simplest of statements, a sense of moral value and a clarity of heart. Now recognized as one of the most original short story collections in twentieth-century literature, *In Our Time* provides a key to Hemingway's later works (Amazon.com).
- *The Long Walk* by Stephen King -- Long before Katniss Everdeen picked up her bow and boldly aimed at the bureaucratic villains of *The Hunger Games*, Stephen King provided the literary world with *The Long Walk*. Human sacrifice is a theme as old as the written word, so it makes perfect sense that King, being an

obsessive documentarian of the dark side of the human psyche, would plumb these depths for content. In 1985, King released this novel under the pen name Richard Bachman. It is set during the present day, and while the America of King's imagination is easily recognizable, there are several key elements that mark this world as a terrible, twisted version of our own (www.literarytraveler.com).

- *Shoeless Joe* by W.P. Kinsella -- "If you build it, he will come." These mysterious words, spoken by an Iowa baseball announcer, inspire Ray Kinsella to carve a baseball diamond in his cornfield in honor of his hero, the baseball legend Shoeless Joe Jackson. What follows is both a rich, nostalgic look at one of our most cherished national pastimes and a remarkable story about fathers and sons, love and family, and the inimitable joy of finding your way home (Amazon.com).

Ms. Naslund's Recommendations:

- *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving. "*I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice—not because of his voice, or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God; I am a Christian because of Owen Meany.*" In the summer of 1953, two eleven-year-old boys—best friends—are playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire. One of the boys hits a foul ball that kills the other boy's mother. The boy who hits the ball doesn't believe in accidents; Owen Meany believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul ball is extraordinary (Amazon.com).
- *Montana 1948* by Larry Watson. "From the summer of my twelfth year I carry a series of images more vivid and lasting than any others of my boyhood and indelible beyond all attempts the years make to erase or fade them..." So begins David Hayden's story of what happened in Montana in 1948. The events of that cataclysmic summer permanently alter twelve-year-old David's understanding of his family: his father, a small-town sheriff; his remarkably strong mother; David's uncle Frank, a war hero and respected doctor; and the Haydens' Sioux housekeeper, Marie Little Soldier, whose revelations turn the family's life upside down as she relates how Frank has been molesting his female Indian patients. As their story unravels around David, he learns that truth is not what one believes it to be, that power is abused, and that sometimes one has to choose between family loyalty and justice (Amazon.com).
- *Same Kind of Different As Me* by Lynn Vincent with Ron Hall and Denver Moore. A dangerous, homeless drifter who grew up picking cotton in virtual slavery. An upscale art dealer accustomed to the world of Armani and Chanel. A gutsy woman with a stubborn dream. A story so incredible no novelist would dare dream it. It begins outside a burning plantation hut in Louisiana . . . and an East Texas honky-tonk . . . and, without a doubt, in the heart of God. It unfolds in a Hollywood hacienda . . . an upscale New York gallery . . . a downtown dumpster .

. . . a Texas ranch. Gritty with pain and betrayal and brutality, this true story also shines with an unexpected, life-changing love (Amazon.com).

- *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior* focuses on the stories of five women—Kingston's long-dead aunt, "No-Name Woman"; a mythical female warrior, Fa Mu Lan; Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid; Kingston's aunt, Moon Orchid; and finally Kingston herself—told in five chapters. The chapters integrate Kingston's lived experience with a series of talk-stories—spoken stories that combine rich Chinese history, myths, and beliefs— that her mother tells her (Goodreads.com).

Ms. Tarczynski's Favorites:

- *Devil in the White City* by Erik Larsen -- History/Mystery. In 1893, Chicago was gearing up for its shining moment on the international stage. A prominent local architect, Daniel Burnham, had taken the reins to organize and construct the massive project. Unfortunately for Burnham and his team, everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. And there was a monster on the loose. A man who used the chaos of Chicago at this time in history to conceal the murders of dozens of people - many of them young, single women. *The Devil in the White City* is nonfiction, but it reads like a novel. The real-life details of this story seem almost too bizarre to be true, yet this is one example of the old saying that "truth is stranger than fiction" (excerpted from K. Osborn Sullivan's review on BarnesandNoble.com).
- *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck -- Classic Literature. In his journal, Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck called *East of Eden* "the first book," and indeed it has the primordial power and simplicity of myth. Set in the rich farmland of California's Salinas Valley, this sprawling and often brutal novel follows the intertwined destinies of two families—the Trasks and the Hamiltons—whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel. *East of Eden* is a work in which Steinbeck created his most mesmerizing characters and explored his most enduring themes: the mystery of identity, the inexplicability of love, and the murderous consequences of love's absence. Read by thousands as the book that brought Oprah's Book Club back, *East of Eden* has remained vitally present in American culture for over half a century (BarnesandNoble.com).
- *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand -- Biography/History. On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a young lieutenant, the plane's bombardier, was struggling to a life raft. So began one of the most extraordinary odysseys of the Second World War. Louis Zamperini, in boyhood, had been a cunning and incorrigible delinquent. As a teenager, he had channeled his defiance into running, discovering a prodigious talent that had carried him to the Berlin Olympics. But when war had come, the athlete had become an airman,

embarking on a journey that led to his doomed flight, a tiny raft, and a drift into the unknown. Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, a foundering raft, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater (excerpted from BarnesandNoble.com).

- *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson -- Nature/Witty Humor. For reasons even he didn't understand, Bill Bryson decided in 1996 to walk the 2,100-mile Appalachian trail. Winding from Georgia to Maine, this uninterrupted 'hiker's highway' sweeps through the heart of some of America's most beautiful and treacherous terrain. Accompanied by his infamous crony, Stephen Katz, Bryson risks snake bite and hantavirus to trudge up unforgiving mountains, plod through swollen rivers, and yearn for cream sodas and hot showers. This amusingly ill-conceived adventure brings Bryson to the height of his comic powers, but his acute eye also observes an astonishing landscape of silent forests, sparkling lakes, and other national treasures that are often ignored or endangered. Fresh, illuminating, and uproariously funny (BarnesandNoble.com).

Mr. Twadell's Recommendations:

- *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* by Jon Krakauer -- A bank of clouds was assembling on the not-so-distant horizon, but journalist-mountaineer Jon Krakauer, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, saw nothing that "suggested that a murderous storm was bearing down." He was wrong. The storm, which claimed five lives and left countless more--including Krakauer's--in guilt-ridden disarray, would also provide the impetus for *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer's epic account of the May 1996 disaster (Amazon.com).
- *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote -- On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence (Amazon.com).
- *The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus* by Richard Preston -- The bestselling landmark account of the first emergence of the Ebola virus. A highly infectious, deadly virus from the central African rain forest suddenly appears in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. There is no cure. In a few days 90 percent of its victims are dead. A secret military SWAT team of soldiers and scientists is mobilized to stop the outbreak of this exotic "hot" virus (Amazon.com).
- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe -- Selling more than 300,000 copies the first year it was published, Stowe's powerful abolitionist novel fueled the fire of the human rights debate in 1852. Denouncing the institution of slavery

in dramatic terms, the incendiary novel quickly draws the reader into the world of slaves and their masters. Stowe's characters are powerfully and humanly realized in Uncle Tom, a majestic and heroic slave whose faith and dignity are never corrupted; Eliza and her husband, George, who elude slave catchers and eventually flee a country that condones slavery; Simon Legree, a brutal plantation owner; Little Eva, who suffers emotionally and physically from the suffering of slaves; and fun-loving Topsy, Eva's slave playmate. Critics, scholars, and students are today revisiting this monumental work with a new objectivity, focusing on Stowe's compelling portrayal of women and the novel's theological underpinnings (Amazon.com).

Recommendations from other Teachers:

- *Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews -- It is a universally acknowledged truth that high school sucks. But on the first day of his senior year, Greg Gaines thinks he's figured it out. The answer to the basic existential question: How is it possible to exist in a place that sucks so bad? His strategy: remain at the periphery at all times. Keep an insanely low profile. Make mediocre films with the one person who is even sort of his friend, Earl. This plan works for exactly eight hours. Then Greg's mom forces him to become friends with a girl who has cancer. This brings about the destruction of Greg's entire life. Fiercely funny, honest, heart-breaking—this is an unforgettable novel from a bright talent, now also a film that critics are calling "a touchstone for its generation" and "an instant classic" (Amazon.com).
- *Eleanor and Park* by Rainbow Rowell -- *Eleanor*... Red hair, wrong clothes. Standing behind him until he turns his head. Lying beside him until he wakes up. Making everyone else seem drabber and flatter and never good enough... Eleanor.
Park... He knows she'll love a song before he plays it for her. He laughs at her jokes before she ever gets to the punch line. There's a place on his chest, just below his throat, that makes her want to keep promises... Park. Set over the course of one school year, this is the story of two star-crossed sixteen-year-olds—smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try (Goodreads.com).
- *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern -- The circus arrives without warning. No announcements precede it, no paper notices plastered on lampposts and billboards. It is simply there, when yesterday it was not. Within these nocturnal black-and-white striped tents awaits an utterly unique, a feast for the senses, where one can get lost in a maze of clouds, meander through a lush garden made of ice, stare in wonderment as the tattooed contortionist folds herself into a small glass box, and become deliciously tipsy from the scents of caramel and cinnamon that waft through the air. Welcome to Le Cirque des Rêves. Beyond the smoke and mirrors, however, a fierce competition is under way--a contest between two young illusionists, Celia and Marco, who have been trained since childhood to compete in a "game" to which they have been irrevocably bound by

their mercurial masters. Unbeknownst to the players, this is a game in which only one can be left standing, and the circus is but the stage for a remarkable battle of imagination and will (Goodreads.com).

- *I Am the Weapon* by Allen Zadoff -- Boy Nobody is the perennial new kid in school, the one few notice and nobody thinks much about. He shows up in a new high school in a new town under a new name, makes a few friends and doesn't stay long. Just long enough for someone to die -- of "natural causes." Mission accomplished, Boy Nobody disappears, moving on to the next target. But when The Program assigns him to the mayor of New York City, things change. Somewhere deep inside, Boy Nobody is somebody: the kid he once was; the teen who wants normal things, like a real home and a girlfriend; a young man who wants out. And who just might want those things badly enough to sabotage The Program's mission. In this action-packed series debut, author Allen Zadoff pens a page-turning thriller that is as thought-provoking as it is gripping, introducing an utterly original and unforgettable antihero (Amazon.com).
- *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers -- Through the story of one man's experience after Hurricane Katrina, Eggers draws an indelible picture of Bush-era crisis management. Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a successful Syrian-born painting contractor, decides to stay in New Orleans and protect his property while his family flees. After the levees break, he uses a small canoe to rescue people, before being arrested by an armed squad and swept powerlessly into a vortex of bureaucratic brutality. When a guard accuses him of being a member of Al Qaeda, he sees that race and culture may explain his predicament. Eggers, compiling his account from interviews, sensibly resists rhetorical grandstanding, letting injustices speak for themselves. His skill is most evident in how closely he involves the reader in Zeitoun's thoughts. Thrown into one of a series of wire cages, Zeitoun speculates, with a contractor's practicality, that construction of his prison must have begun within a day or so of the hurricane (Amazon.com).
- *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* by Julia Alvarez -- In this debut novel, the García sisters—Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía—and their family must flee their home in the Dominican Republic after their father's role in an attempt to overthrow a tyrannical dictator is discovered. They arrive in New York City in 1960 to a life far removed from their existence in the Caribbean. In the wild and wondrous and not always welcoming U.S.A., their parents try to hold on to their old ways, but the girls try to find new lives: by forgetting their Spanish, by straightening their hair and wearing fringed bell bottoms. For them, it is at once liberating and excruciating to be caught between the old world and the new. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* sets the sisters free to tell their most intimate stories about how they came to be at home—and not at home—in America (Amazon.com).
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain -- A classic for a reason. It is a fun adventure story! "You don't know about me without you have read a book

by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter," declares Huck at the start of one of the greatest books in American literature. Filled with all the humor, suspense, and sheer excitement of its predecessor, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the more profound and accomplished creation. The tale of two outcasts' journey down the Mississippi River, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a nostalgic portrayal of a world Twain knew intimately, and the moving story of a boy who must make his own way in an often cruel society that counts it a sin to help a runaway slave (Amazon.com).

- *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* -- If poetry and short stories excite you, or you would prefer to read something other than a novel, this is a great option! Gathering a representative sampling of the New Negro Movement's most important figures, and providing substantial introductory essays, headnotes, and brief biographical notes, Lewis' volume—organized chronologically—includes the poetry and prose of Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen, W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and others (Amazon.com).
- *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller -- At the heart of *Catch-22* resides the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a hero endlessly inventive in his schemes to save his skin from the horrible chances of war. His problem is Colonel Cathcart, who keeps raising the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service. Yet if Yossarian makes any attempts to excuse himself from the perilous missions that he's committed to flying, he's trapped by the Great Loyalty Oath Crusade, the bureaucratic rule from which the book takes its title: a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes the necessary formal request to be relieved of such missions, the very act of making the request proves that he's sane and therefore, ineligible to be relieved (Goodreads.com).
- *Ragtime* by E.L Doctorow -- Published in 1975, *Ragtime* changed our very concept of what a novel could be. An extraordinary tapestry, *Ragtime* captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century & the First World War. The story opens in 1906 in New Rochelle, NY, at the home of an affluent American family. One lazy Sunday afternoon, the famous escape artist Harry Houdini swerves his car into a telephone pole outside their house. Almost magically, the line between fantasy & historical fact, between real & imaginary characters, disappears. Henry Ford, Emma Goldman, J.P. Morgan, Evelyn Nesbit, Sigmund Freud & Emiliano Zapata slip in & out of the tale, crossing paths with Doctorow's imagined family & other fictional characters, including an immigrant peddler & a ragtime musician from Harlem whose insistence on a point of justice drives him to revolutionary violence (Goodreads.com).
- *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Beals -- In 1957, well before Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, Melba Pattillo Beals and eight other teenagers became iconic symbols for the Civil Rights Movement and the dismantling of Jim Crow in the American South as they integrated Little Rock's Central High School in the

wake of the landmark 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Throughout her harrowing ordeal, Melba was taunted by her schoolmates and their parents, threatened by a lynch mob's rope, attacked with lighted sticks of dynamite, and injured by acid sprayed in her eyes. But through it all, she acted with dignity and courage, and refused to back down (Goodreads.com).

- *Rabbit Run* by John Updike -- *Rabbit, Run* is the book that established John Updike as one of the major American novelists of his—or any other—generation. Its hero is Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom, a one time high-school basketball star who on an impulse deserts his wife and son. He is twenty-six years old, a man-child caught in a struggle between instinct and thought, self and society, sexual gratification and family duty—even, in a sense, human hard-heartedness and divine Grace. Though his flight from home traces a zigzag of evasion, he holds to the faith that he is on the right path, an invisible line toward his own salvation as straight as a ruler’s edge (Goodreads.com).