



WHERE *Brilliance* BEGINS

Reading Assignment for College Composition Students

Over the summer, read three books of your choice from different genres:

Fiction: Romance, Fantasy, comedy, epistolary, etc.

Non-Fiction: Biography, historical non-fiction, short stories, etc.

Because you are preparing for a "writing" course, you should answer three "writerly" questions posed by Francine Prose in her book Reading Like a Writer:

1. Why did the author use the point of view s/he did? How would the story be different if it was told from, say, 1st person perspective and not 3rd?
2. As you read, write down three great sentences — known as "purple passages." Ernest Hemingway said that an author's ambition every day is to create "one true sentence." Consequently, he "discarded unnecessary words, stripped away narrative flourishes" to create his "sparse" novels. Please find a few great sentences in the works you are reading, and simply copy them down.
3. Evaluate the style. Write a complete, 150 word paragraph that *evaluates* the author's style. What specifically kept you interested in the story? If you were bored, why? Is there something special about the way the author writes — interesting words, wit, or wisdom? Please express your opinion and support it with insights from the book.

Below are some sites with good lists and discussion groups for those books. HAVE FUN!!

Reading Lists:

<http://www.bpl.org/kids/booksmags.htm#summer>

<http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/100-best-novels/>

<http://home.comcast.net/~netaylor1/modlibnonfiction.html>

http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/21925.The_Modern_Library_100_Best_Novels_Challenge

For specific suggestions, please consider these:

1. The Fortress of Solitude - Jonathan Lethem (2003)

The Fortress of Solitude is the story of the young white son of hippie parents living in Brooklyn New York. The boy, Dylan, has only one friend as one of the few white children in his neighborhood, Mingus. Mingus is a black boy who becomes Dylan's best friend. The story of these two friends spans over 30 years and recounts the race struggles of both boys throughout these years.

2. The Road - Cormac McCarthy (2006)

The Road is the tale of a father and his son as they attempt to escape a post apocalyptic winter by walking south. The boy and his father go unnamed throughout the book being narrated as “the boy” or “the man” or “the father.” The Road is an extremely bleak representation of what a post apocalyptic world would be like and with everything gone, those who have survived turn to cannibalism and other inhumane acts which the boy and father must escape from.

3. Kafka on the Shore - Haruki Murakami (2002)

Kafka is a 15 year-old boy who spends the story attempting to escape from an Oedipal curse. Kafka’s path, written about in the odd chapters of the book, frequently crosses with Nakata’s. Nakata is an old man who’s cat runs away and he is now forced to leave his home for the first time in ages to catch it. Nakata’s story takes place on the even chapters of the book.

4. House of Leaves - Mark Danielewski (2000)

House of Leaves was originally conceived as a work in progress horror story, being of very unpolished and unfinished pages combined to a story. The story has evolved into a novel which retains these aspects but combines them into a finished but unorthodox story of a family who faces a mystical force that steals their children from them and threatens their way of life. The writing style is extremely unique and contains footnotes and chapters which contain only a few words on a page.

5. Life of Pi - Yann Martel (2001)

Life of Pi is the story of a young boy who, after being lost at sea, is trapped on a lifeboat with a living tiger. The story is told as a narrative given by Pi at an older age, reminiscing about his youth in India. The novel explores spirituality and Pi’s belief in God through many different religion from an early age.

6. All the Light We Cannot See - Anthony Doerr (2014)

The novel is another crossing of paths story that takes place before and during World War II. A young girl who goes blind at an early age is forced to hide out from the Nazis in an abandoned citadel with her father who worked at the Museum of Natural History in France. A boy with a special talent for fixing broken devices is forced into a Hitler Youth camp where his talent is used to track down the French resistance. Knowing this he attempts to break free and ends up discovering the girl living in the citadel.

7. Lucky Alan - Jonathan Lethem (2015)

Lucky Alan : And Other Stories is a collection of individual stories about father’s nervous breakdown at SeaWorld, a foundling child rescued from the woods during a blizzard, a political prisoner in a hole in a Brooklyn street and a crumbling, haunted “blog” on a seaside cliff. Each story is unique in it’s own way and explores a different character in a different setting.

8. Where Did You Sleep Last Night - Lynn Crosbie (2015)

In Where Did You Sleep Last a girl who is terrorized by her classmates at school, spends most of her time in her room reading, writing letters to dead people, listening to old records and talking to the poster of Kurt Cobain above her bed. Her mother is an alcoholic grunge relic from Seattle, whose recollections, books and music help ignite Evelyn’s love for Cobain—a love so painfully strong that it summons the deceased singer to her side. When Evelyn is taken to the hospital after an overdose, she awakens to find Cobain who has little to no memory of his former life.

9. Satin Island - Tom McCarthy (2015)

When tasked to write up the entire history of the world, U, is faced with complications and and and overwhelming amount of data. He struggles to comprehend it all and begins hallucinating of a post apocalyptic vision of the world.

10. The Kite Runner - Khaled Hosseini (2003)

The Kite Runner is the story of a young Afghan boy and his father living during the Soviet Military Intervention and the rise of the Taliban regime. The story also involves the friendship between this boy and another living in a wealthy family during the conflict.

"Popular Contemporary Books." *Popular Contemporary Books*. Goodreads Inc,

<http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/contemporary>

This website lists 100 pages of the most popular contemporary novels at this time. There is more than enough to find a few interesting reads. The list does lack descriptions of the books without selecting each individually. I ended up using only the first page as they were the "most" popular and most recognizable.

The New York Times. "Best Sellers." *COMBINED PRINT & E-BOOK FICTION*. The New York Times

Company, <http://www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books/2015-05-17/combined-print-and-e-book-fiction/list.html>

The list of the top 15 best sellers are organized and numbered well with brief, non-spoiling descriptions of each story and the names of the authors clearly displayed. The list continues to the top 20 however the last five books are without descriptions, focusing on the top 15.

"The New Canon: 15 Modern Classics You Should Read Right Now." *Qwiklit*. Qwiklit,

<http://qwiklit.com/2013/03/26/the-new-canon-15-modern-classics-you-should-read-right-now/>

The web page gives very enticing descriptions of the 15 books listed along with large images of their respective covers. The publishing years of each novel are listed as well. An introduction is given at the beginning of the list explaining how literature continues to grow and evolve in this age.

IPRESNEL. "Top 10 Best Novels of the Last 20 Years - Listverse." *Listverse*. Listverse,

<http://listverse.com/2010/10/10/top-10-best-novels-of-the-last-20-years/>

Each listing of the ten has an introducing section consisting of the first sentence of the book to give the reader a sense of the book's style. This is followed up by a synopsis of the author's style in past novels and then a brief description of the novel itself.

Other Potential Books

Alvarez, Julia – *In the Time of Butterflies*

Book Description

It is November 25, 1960, and three beautiful sisters have been found near their wrecked Jeep at the bottom of a 150-foot cliff on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. The official state newspaper reports their deaths as accidental. It does not mention that a fourth sister lives. Nor does it explain that the sisters were among the leading opponents of Gen. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo’s dictatorship. It doesn’t have to. Everybody knows of Las Mariposas—“The Butterflies.”

In this extraordinary novel, the voices of all four sisters—Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and the survivor, Dedé—speak across the decades to tell their own stories, from hair ribbons and secret crushes to gunrunning and prison torture, and to describe the everyday horrors of life under Trujillo’s rule. Through the art and magic of Julia Alvarez’s imagination, the martyred Butterflies live again in this novel of courage and love, and the human cost of political oppression.

Garcia, Cristina – *Dreaming in Cuban*

From Library Journal

Garcia's first novel is about Cuba, her native country, and three generations of del Pino women who are seeking spiritual homes for their passionate, often troubled souls. Celia del Pino and her descendants also share clairvoyant and visionary powers that somehow remain undiminished, despite the Cuban revolution and its profound effect upon their lives. This dichotomy suffuses their lives with a potent mixture of superstition, politics, and surrealistic charm that gives the novel an otherworldly atmosphere. Garcia juggles these opposing life forces like a skilled magician accustomed to tossing into the air fiery objects that would explode if they came into contact. Writing experimentally in a variety of forms, she combines narratives, love letters, and monologs to portray the del Pinos as they move back and forth through time. Garcia tells their story with an economy of words and a rich, tropical imagery, setting a brisk but comfortable pace. Highly recommended.
- Janet W. Reit, *Univ. of Vermont Lib., Burlington*
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Haddon, Mark—*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com Review

Mark Haddon's bitterly funny debut novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, is a murder mystery of sorts--one told by an autistic version of Adrian Mole. Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone is mathematically gifted and socially hopeless, raised in a working-class home by parents who can barely cope with their child's quirks. He takes everything that he sees (or is told) at face value, and is unable to sort out the strange behavior of his elders and peers.

Late one night, Christopher comes across his neighbor's poodle, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork. Wellington's owner finds him cradling her dead dog in his arms, and has him arrested. After spending a night in jail, Christopher resolves--against the objection of his father and neighbors--to discover just who has murdered Wellington. He is encouraged by Siobhan, a social worker at his school, to write a book about his investigations, and the result--quirkily illustrated, with each chapter given its own prime number--is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Haddon's novel is a startling performance. This is the sort of book that could turn condescending, or exploitative, or overly sentimental, or grossly tasteless very easily, but Haddon navigates those dangers with a sureness of touch that is extremely rare among first-time novelists. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is original, clever, and genuinely moving: this one is a must-read. --Jack Illingworth, Amazon.ca

Harbach, Chad—*The Art of Fielding*

Book Description

At Westish College, a small school on the shore of Lake Michigan, baseball star Henry Skrimshander seems destined for big league stardom. But when a routine throw goes disastrously off course, the fates of five people are upended.

Henry's fight against self-doubt threatens to ruin his future. College president Guert Affenlight, a longtime bachelor, has fallen unexpectedly and helplessly in love. Owen Dunne, Henry's gay roommate and teammate, becomes caught up in a dangerous affair. Mike Schwartz, the Harpooners' team captain and Henry's best friend, realizes he has guided Henry's career at the expense of his own. And Pella Affenlight, Guert's daughter, returns to Westish after escaping an ill-fated marriage, determined to start a new life.

As the season counts down to its climactic final game, these five are forced to confront their deepest hopes, anxieties, and secrets. In the process they forge new bonds, and help one another find their true paths. Written with boundless intelligence and filled with the tenderness of youth, *The Art of Fielding* is an expansive, warmhearted novel about ambition and its limits, about family and friendship and love, and about commitment--to oneself and to others.

Maclean, Norman – *A River Runs Through It*

Just as Norman Maclean writes at the end of "A River Runs through It" that he is "haunted by waters," so have readers been haunted by his novella. A retired English professor who began writing fiction at the age of 70, Maclean produced what is now recognized as one of the classic American stories of the twentieth century. Originally published in 1976, *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* now celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, marked by this new edition that includes a foreword by Annie Proulx.

Maclean grew up in the western Rocky Mountains in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a young man he worked many summers in logging camps and for the United States Forest Service. The two novellas and short story in this collection are based on his own experiences—the experiences of a young man who found that life was only a step from art in its structures and beauty. The beauty he found was in reality, and so he leaves a careful record of what it was like to work in the woods when it was still a world of horse and hand and foot, without power saws, "cats," or four-wheel drives. Populated with drunks, loggers, card sharks, and whores, and set in the small towns and surrounding trout streams and mountains of western Montana, the stories concern themselves with the complexities of fly fishing, logging, fighting forest fires, playing cribbage, and being a husband, a son, and a father.

By turns raunchy, poignant, caustic, and elegiac, these are superb tales which express, in Maclean's own words, "a little of the love I have for the earth as it goes by." A first offering from a 70-year-old writer, the basis of a top-grossing movie, and the first original fiction published by the University of Chicago Press, *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* has sold more than a million copies. As Proulx writes in her foreword to this new edition, "In 1990 Norman Maclean died in body, but for hundreds of thousands of readers he will live as long as fish swim and books are made."

"Altogether beautiful in the power of its feeling. . . . As beautiful as anything in Thoreau or Hemingway."—Alfred Kazin, *Chicago Tribune Book World*

"It is an enchanted tale. . . . I have read the story three times now, and each time it seems fuller."—Roger Sale, *New York Review of Books*

	<p>"Maclean's book—acerbic, laconic, deadpan—rings out of a rich American tradition that includes Mark Twain, Kin Hubbard, Richard Bissell, Jean Shepherd, and Nelson Algren. I love its sound."—James R. Frakes, <i>New York Times Book Review</i></p> <p>"The title novella is the prize. . . . Something unique and marvelous: a story that is at once an evocation of nature's miracles and realities and a probing of human mysteries. Wise, witty, wonderful, Maclean spins his tales, casts his flies, fishes the rivers and the woods for what he remembers from his youth in the Rockies."—<i>Publishers Weekly</i></p> <p>"Ostensibly a 'fishing story,' 'A River Runs through It' is really an autobiographical elegy that captivates readers who have never held a fly rod in their hand. In it the art of casting a fly becomes a ritual of grace, a metaphor for man's attempt to move into nature."—Andrew Rosenheim, <i>The Independent es</i></p>
<p>Shields, Carol—<i>The Stone Diaries</i></p>	<p>Book Description</p> <p>In celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of its original publication, Carol Shields's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is now available in a Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition</p> <p>ONE OF THE MOST successful and acclaimed novels of our time, this fictionalized autobiography of Daisy Goodwill Flett is a subtle but affecting portrait of an everywoman reflecting on an unconventional life. What transforms this seemingly ordinary tale is the richness of Daisy's vividly described inner life—from her earliest memories of her adoptive mother to her awareness of impending death.</p>

Smiley, Jane – *A Thousand Acres*

A successful Iowa farmer decides to divide his farm between his three daughters. When the youngest objects, she is cut out of his will. This sets off a chain of events that brings dark truths to light and explodes long-suppressed emotions. An ambitious reimagining of Shakespeare's **King Lear** cast upon a typical American community in the late twentieth century, **A Thousand Acres** takes on themes of truth, justice, love, and pride, and reveals the beautiful yet treacherous topography of humanity.

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com Review

Aging Larry Cook announces his intention to turn over his 1,000-acre farm--one of the largest in Zebulon County, Iowa--to his three daughters, Caroline, Ginny and Rose. A man of harsh sensibilities, he carves Caroline out of the deal because she has the nerve to be less than enthusiastic about her father's generosity. While Larry Cook deteriorates into a pathetic drunk, his daughters are left to cope with the often grim realities of life on a family farm--from battering husbands to cutthroat lenders. In this winner of the 1991 [National Book Critics Circle Award](#) for Fiction, Smiley captures the essence of such a life with stark, painful detail. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*