

English Department Summer Reading 2010

Friends,

The books below are our favorites of 2010. Directions require you to choose a book below, pour some lemonade, find a hammock, and enjoy your reading. Your only homework here is to get lost in a few great books this summer.

Ms. Judy Christian

In Anna Quindlen's *Every Last One* (2010) the reader can see the influence of Quindlen's long experience as a newspaper journalist. At the heart of this beautifully written, rich novel is a mystery involving competitive twin brothers, their sister, Ruby, a young woman who is a high school senior headed to college, and her soon-to-be ex-boyfriend who, in many ways, is a member of the family. What happens when an act of extreme violence enters the lives of this very ordinary group of people? I am a long-time reader of mystery, detective and legal novels, but Quindlen got me: I didn't see it coming!

Scott Turow's *Innocent* (2010) is a sequel to his novel *Presumed Innocent* (1987). Rusty Sabich and Tommy Molto return as archrivals. Sabich is now a judge and Molto is the Prosecuting Attorney who believes that Sabich got away with murder in their previous encounter and now Molto thinks he's done it again. You'll enjoy *Innocent* if you are intrigued by police and legal procedural novels. Another hit for Turow.

Love words? Have a quirky sense of humor? Then you'll love Roy Blount, Jr.'s latest book, *Alphabet Juice* (2008). Subtitled: "The Energies, Gists and Spirits of Letters, Words." Blount is one of the regulars on *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*, NPR's News quiz show; a contributing editor to *Atlantic Monthly*; and a usage consultant to *the American Heritage Dictionary*. This is a very, very funny book that is also filled with everything you never knew you wanted to know about words. Set up like a dictionary, it's perfect for random browsing.

Lit (2009), by Mary Karr, is the third in her series of memoirs (*The Liar's Club* and *Cherry*). Karr, a professor of literature at Syracuse University, is a brilliant, incisive writer. Despite her incredibly difficult life, she maintains her balance and sense of humor. *Lit* revisits some of the earlier events in her life, but the perspective is now that of a woman who is in recovery and committed to her new-found Catholicism. Interestingly enough, she attributes much of her turnaround to participation in a Jesuit prayer group. Alternately heart-wrenching and hysterical, this is a beautifully written book.

Ms. Cook

Born to Run, Chris McDougall

Run with author and Prep grad Chris McDougall over the canyons and cliffs of Mexico as he discovers the secrets of the Taramuhara tribe. These natives of the dusty Mexican slopes are quite normal, normal except for the fact that they can run a hundred

miles at the drop of a dime (or peso). And in less than a day. And without getting so much as a blister on their pinky toe. While post-run tequila binges seem the salve for these swift-footed few, McDougall knows that there's something more than the fire water that keeps these men and women so healthy, so happy, so alive—and so injury-free. Indeed, reporter and runner McDougall becomes so fascinated with the Tarahumara spirit that he sets up the swiftest and strongest tribesman and Americans in a cross-country battle that challenges the will—and the lungs—of runners from the most disparate of cultures. Don't worry; I won't tell you who wins. I'll just tell you that you'll love McDougall's jocular and self-effacing and erudite way, and also the testament he twists about the human will to endure. Read Mr. O'Brien's review of *Born to Run* to find out even more.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard

If you liked hanging out with Thoreau at Walden Pond, then you'll love spending a year with Annie Dillard as she examines all the nature around her in Virginia's Blue Ridge valley. Dillard's is a risky enterprise: hear, see, feel and touch the blue sylvan spaces around you, then capture this natural mystery on the page in prose that flows as fast and fresh as Tinker Creek. She succeeds. Heading into the woods with Dillard, I doubted her ability to sustain my interest, as I suspected her observations about birds, spiders, and weeds would make me want to stop reading in order to sit on a log and sleep. Not so. A page into our journey, I found myself lost in her attention to detail, her wit, her crisp turns of phrases, her finding the magic in something so seemingly pedestrian as a pond. Indeed, Dillard's ability to "see God in all things" deepened my sense of how to see with Ignatian eyes our beautiful world. Nowadays, I often return to *Tinker Creek* to renew my spirit, and to remind myself of the spirituality so explosive and ubiquitous in God's great green world around me. I suggest that you, too, get lost and found with Dillard.

Mr. Coyle

The Global Game: Writers on Soccer edited by John Turnbull

This is the summer of the World Cup in South Africa so it seems only fitting that my first recommendation is a book about 'football'. This book is a collection of the best essays on soccer from around the globe in the last 50 years. Soccer is a "global game" so this book contains essays that originate from places like Scotland, United States, Holland, Germany, Peru, Brazil, Germany, South Africa, and many, many more. This book is a must read for any soccer fan and a good read in between games of this summer's competition.

Bear In Mind These Dead by Susan McKay

This is a book I found a few months ago and immediately knew that I wanted to use it as my 'textbook' for the Northern Ireland class I teach to the seniors. McKay creatively tells the story of The Troubles through simply allowing the people it touched to tell their stories. She does a nice job of staying in the middle of the sectarian divide and allowing

the reader to come to his or her own conclusions. The book as a whole has a great flow because, as they are told, each story flows into the next. It is an easy read, but extremely powerful. The book is able to serve the novice reader on the Northern Ireland issue equally as well as a person well versed in The Troubles. You may read it on the Jersey Shore but you will quickly be taken on an intense ride through the embattled streets of Belfast and Derry.

The Willow Tree by Hubert Selby Jr.

This novel comes from the author of such American classics as *Last Exit To Brooklyn* and *Requiem for a Dream*. *Requiem* is the novel that I use in my Censorship course. Usually people associate his novels with flawed characters, violent neighborhoods, drug use, etc. But those things are simply the subject matter, they are never the themes. His books are really about the flawed pursuit of the American Dream and they are always, always about love. In *The Willow Tree* we see a softer side of Selby. This book still has the typical Selby ability to take your breath away, but it is a book about the dangers of hate and the power of forgiveness. It is a classic and you will never forget it.

Mr. Griffin

Black Elk Speaks John G. Neihardt

His name was Black Elk, warrior and medicine man of the Oglala Sioux. From the Battle of the Little Big Horn, which he witnessed as a boy of 13, to the last terrible massacre of the Indians at Wounded Knee, Black Elk lived the life of the Plains Indian and saw the death of his people. In this book, he tells, as no man can ever tell again, his vision of the meaning of life on this planet as it was for the Indian of the western plains, and as it might be for all men. The great story of the Sioux is ended, and the sacred hoop of life is broken, but in this book the spirit of Black Elk's people lives on.

Bless Me, Ultima Rudolfo A. Anaya

This is a story of a boy, Antonio, and his dreams. It is also the story of La Grande, Ultima, the curandera. She is an old woman who has a special power derived from the herbs of the earth and a special knowledge of life. Ultima enters Antonio's life while the boy is quite young. It is she who realizes the value of his dreams, however beautiful or frightening. It is she who provides him with the strength to cope with the interminable conflict between the divisions within the human spirit. Through his relationship with Ultima, Antonio receives the power to grow, to dream, to survive in a world of good and evil, faith and superstition, life and death.

Mr. O'Brien

I'll take this opportunity to plug and recommend two books, the one a little known entry entitled the **The World** and the other a more famous, national best seller called **Born to Run**. Both were written by former Prep students, John Kearns '81 and Christopher McDougall '80 respectively. Interestingly, at least to me, they were in my English classes in the seventies, and for further information on those experiences I refer the reader to the section entitled "Help" in Kearns' novel and to an article in the winter, 2010 edition of *The Prep News* magazine (available on-line from the Prep home page) where McDougall and I give slightly different spins on events that happened over thirty years ago.

Personal interests aside, both books are good summer reading. Kearns' autobiographical novel is about growing up in the western suburbs in the seventies, studying and swimming at the Prep, writing for the Chronicle literary magazine, and falling in love. McDougall's more famous non-fiction account tells the story of some of the modern heroes of long-distance road racing (many of whom compete with no shoes) and a lost tribe of legendary runners still living in the wilds of the Sierra Madre mountains. It is an entertaining saga at many levels and ranges from speculating about our success on the evolutionary tree to strongly recommending that we should turn back the clock and return to running (and hunting?) barefooted as our distant ancestors did. McDougall's book is available in many book stores, and both are available on-line at Amazon.

Mr. Patragnoni

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly Jean-Dominique Bauby

This mesmerizing memoir comes from the highly successful editor-in-chief of Elle Magazine who suffered a major stroke in the late 90's. Unable to speak or move – a victim of "locked-in" syndrome – Bauby learns to communicate and, ultimately, write this recollection in the most extraordinary way. Quick, lyrical, and powerful – this memoir celebrates life and our longing to live.

Mr. Rupertus

Kindred by Octavia Butler

Dana, the narrator of *Kindred*, is an African American woman in the late 20th century who gets transported back in time by forces unknown to save a young white boy in the antebellum south from drowning. She soon surmises why she gets summoned – to protect her ancestors, which include the drowning boy, from untimely deaths so that her family line can continue and she, ultimately, can be born. But her journeys into the past come with a cost; she goes from being a free woman to a slave, and she must risk ending her life before it begins.

Fools Crow by James Welch

Take William Wallace out of medieval Scotland and drop him into the Blackfeet tribe of northwest Montana in the 1870's, and you've got *Fools Crow*. This young warrior and medicine man has his very existence threatened when the Napikwans, his tribe's term for the white men, arrive to exterminate him and his brethren in the name of "manifest destiny." To take a stand against the legions of the numerically superior United States Army, *Fools Crow* must summon up all of the physical skills and spiritual powers at his disposal, calling on both his fellow warriors and his long-deceased ancestors to prevent annihilation.

Mrs. Kathleen Sullivan

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Liesel Meminger is a foster child living just outside of Munich, Germany during World War II. Liesel falls in love with something she cannot resist – books, and she steals books to feed her passion. The story is told from the point of view of Death, who narrates the story, but it is certainly not death as we would envision it. Death is touched by the courage and humanity of this little girl. She steals Death's heart as well as books. The writing is elegant and the story is beautiful, something the young and old alike will love. *The Book Thief* is an unforgettable narrative about the ability of books to feed and heal the soul.

The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream by Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt with Lisa Frazier Page. This is a compelling true story of three African American young men, told in their own voices, of how they manage to rise above the ills of city life (poverty, drugs, and violence) in Newark, New Jersey and become doctors. While still in high school these three young men make a pact. They decide that they will become doctors and together they will help each other plod through the many, many pitfalls that they encounter along the way. Their story is a "must read" for all young men, as it addresses the universal teenage struggles of peer pressure, the academic and social struggles inherent in transitioning from high school to college, and highlights the power of friendship to overcome the odds and attain success.

Mr. Whelan

Short Cuts (selected short stories by Raymond Carver) - This collection of now-classic stories, when read together, form a searing and indelible portrait of American innocence and loss. With its deadpan humor and enormous tenderness, *Short Cuts* is the perfect companion for a thoughtful and curious reader.

After Image: The Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers (by Robert Blake) - Blake, a noted film critic, reveals a Catholic imagination at work in the films of Martin Scorsese, Alfred Hitchcock, Frank Capra, John Ford, Francis Ford Coppola, and Brian De Palma. The fascinating book encourages recognition of the ways religion influences the imagination and shapes American culture.

The Universal Baseball Association Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop. (by Robert Coover) - Robert Coover uses the great game of baseball and its almost perfect balance between offense and defense to explore the texture of American life and myth. In doing so, he has created a comic masterpiece. A must read for anyone even remotely interested in baseball, or for anyone who likes to laugh smartly.