



**READING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2011
ST. JOSEPH'S PREP ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

In addition to their required reading this summer, *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*, students are encouraged to read one or a few of our department's favorite books below.

MS. JUDY CHRISTIAN

The Help

Kathryn Stockett

Stockett's first novel became a best-seller and will soon be a major motion picture (release date is August 12). Set in Jackson, Mississippi in 1962, the novel explores the issues of family relationships, friendship, class and the early Civil Rights Movement. The main character, Skeeter Phelan, chooses a very volatile subject for her first venture into the world of journalism: the lives of the black maids in her deeply southern town. Her good friends (her sorority sisters) and some of her own family stop speaking to her. Stockett uses multiple narrators, some of them the black maids themselves, to reveal the very segregated world of the south in the early '60s.

The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth

Alexandra Robbins

The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth: is the title of Alexandra Robbins' new investigative exploration of American high schools. Robbins may be familiar to some parents: she spoke about her book, *The Overachievers* at The Prep in 2007. In *Geeks*, already a *NY Times* best seller, Robbins follows seven high school students as they try to navigate the social strata of high school. In the end, her message is that the very qualities that make them different, "quirky," in high school will be the qualities that help them to think outside the box, to become very successful. She offers advice to the kids, their parents, teachers and administrators.

MS. SUSIE COOK

The Road

Cormac McCarthy

An Austen and Bronte fan, I can't spend enough time with the likes of Elizabeth Bennett and Jane Eyre. So I surprised even myself in traversing McCarthy's gray and shattered post-apocalyptic world in *The Road*. The 2007 Pulitzer Prize winner, this novel involves a father and son's peregrination through a landscape ravaged by an unexplained cataclysm. It's gray. It's cold. It's stormy. Scary too is that these last of the "good guys" have only a shopping cart, a revolver and each other as they face cannibals and nomads bent on flesh and riot. Needless to say, this book transported me from the lush English countryside into a land without proprieties and teacups. The trip was worth it. I loved McCarthy's lyricism and sparseness of prose, and his odd employment of the third-person point of view in referring to the father as "the man" and the son as "the boy," which resulted in characters who have universal appeal in the triumphant comment they make about loyalty, family, death and hope. Since there's just something about McCarthy's clean sentences that I love, I plan on reading his Border Trilogy this summer, which contains *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, and *Cities of the Plain*. Maybe I will read *Blood Meridian*, too before I return to *Pride and Prejudice*. Wish me luck.

When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi

David Maraniss

I loved *Blindside* by Michael Lewis (the book is yards better than the film), was intrigued by *Boys Will Be Boys* (Jeff Pearlman), and was happy with *How Football Explains America* (Sal Paolantonio). Yet none of these can rival Maraniss' tome on Green Bay's Pope. From the Brooklyn streets of his childhood to the icy grit of the Midwest, Maraniss offers a rich glimpse into the life of a complicated man revered and loathed for being a great leader and difficult father. I especially enjoyed reading about Lombardi's college years at Fordham and how formative the Jesuits proved to be for him throughout his life (sideline note: for another great book that intertwines spirituality and coaching/playing, check out *Sacred Hoops: Spiritual Lessons of a Hardwood Warrior*, Phil Jackson's memoir). Maraniss also scores a touchdown in assessing how Lombardi's past, as in his high-school teaching and coaching and his tenure as assistant at West Point, molded his ever-unfolding future. This biography successfully circumvents the onrush of platitudes that usually mark Lombardi and, in making an easy estimation of Lombardi impossible, is a winner much like the Pack of the early sixties. Oh, and you learn a lot about the history of the game and our country in the process...a worthwhile read for any American.

MR. JOSEPH COYLE

Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair
by Padraig O'Malley

30 years ago this summer, in Belfast, Northern Ireland 10 men starved themselves to death for their beliefs and an unyielding desire for a free and unified Ireland. There have been many books written about this event that unfolded as the world watched. The preeminent work has always been considered to be David Beresford's *Ten Men Dead*; a book that I have used in my Northern Ireland course at The Prep. But this book is even better. In the last 10 years I have probably read between 50-60 books on the topic of Northern Ireland and I can say with all sincerity that I count this in my top 10. It is a sobering book for sure, but one that should be required reading for anyone who considers themselves knowledgeable on the subject of The Troubles.

Pistol: The Life of Pete Maravich
by Mark Kriegel

I am a father, a teacher, and a coach. My father recommended this book to me immediately after he finished it...I read the 323 pages in three days. It tells an amazing story about a revolutionary basketball player. A player who was called Showtime a generation before Michael Jordan and long before anyone ever heard of Magic Johnson. But this book also provides insight on a complex father-son relationship. It serves as a cautionary tale for fathers that push their sons...maybe a bit too far. It shows us how a man who seemingly has everything can suffer from a debilitating depression that haunted his college and pro playing days. Finally, at the end of the book and at the end of Pete's life, it shows us a grown man who loved and missed his father. If you are a student of the game or a student of human nature, you will enjoy this book.

MR. JOSEPH GRIFFIN

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 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 realize that he 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. Griffin, cont'd)

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 it 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.

MR. KEVIN KEARNEY

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

Jonathan Safran Foer

Oskar Schell, a 9 year old living with his grandparents in Manhattan, wanders around the city trying to undercover more details about a key his father, who died on 9/11, left behind in their home. Fans of JD Salinger should take note.

East/West

Salman Rushdie

When Salman Rushdie published his novel The Satanic Verses in 1988, he was criticized by the fundamentalist Islamic sects for his blasphemous depiction of Muhammad. The drama reached an apex when the Ayatollah of Iran issued a fatwa, or bounty, for his death, forcing Rushdie to go into hiding. Years later Rushdie compiled East/West, a collection of short stories that he wrote while in hiding. The result is an anthology of intermingled stories that combine pop culture and social commentary with a sharp sense of humor.

MR. JIM O'BRIEN

In recommending summer reading, one never knows where to start. In that case, it is probably wise to start at the beginning or with some seminal works of great importance that everyone presumes the decently educated person has read or is familiar with to some extent. I would recommend that you consider reading all or some part of one or more of the milestone books in Western civilization, perhaps...

Cervantes' Don Quixote. Written in two volumes and extending for close to a thousand

pages in some editions, the book would be a challenge to finish, but it is worth a visit, and the modern reader may start at the beginning and read quite a bit before getting bored or worn out. At this point, he/she will have discovered the background for some of the famous images of Spain's original odd couple, the concept of tilting at windmills, and the goal of the "impossible dream."

Dante's Divine Comedy. A defining work of the Middle Ages, the Comedy is packed with historical allusions and references which will not be obvious to anyone who does not have an edition that contains elaborate notes. However, even without notes this epic poem is very readable and interesting at a basic narrative level. If the reader only reads one book of Dante's three parts, he/she will have a sample of work that stunned and engaged its audience then and still entertains readers today, centuries later.

Or read some of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, or one of those Shakespearean plays you've heard about but have never read. These are big books of varying degrees of difficulty, but they are rewarding experiences for students who want to see what inspired the significant authors of our culture.

MR. CHRISTIAN PATRAGONI

***The Glass Castle* Jeannette Walls**

This monumental, swift-moving, non-fictional account delves into one of America's favorite pastimes – the dysfunctional family unit. In this unforgettable tale of a family constantly on the move, Jeannette Walls takes us inside her eccentric little world, as she illustrates a child's response to some of the most non-traditional set of family values/rules you will ever encounter.

***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. CHRIS RUPERTUS

***The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* Junot Diaz**

A hilariously funny and tense novel, Diaz's work follows Oscar de Leon and his friend, Yunior, both late-adolescent Dominican-Americans living in Patterson, NJ. Oscar is a comic-book reading, video game-playing nerd whose family believes it is the victim of a curse, called a fuku, that followed them when they emigrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. The quest of Oscar and his family to break the supposed curse before it is too late becomes a doorway for readers to gain insight into Oscar's engaging, unusual mind.

***The Color of Water* James McBride**

This memoir chronicles the childhood and adolescence of James McBride, whose father was African American and whose mother was a Polish Orthodox Jew. On the surface it attempts to capture the critical and life-changing experiences of McBride's young life, such as being a black boy with a white mother in a predominately black section of a town in Virginia, but underneath, it reveals the challenges and riches of examining one's own familial and cultural identity.

MRS. KATHLEEN SULLIVAN

***The Book Thief* 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.

Monster

Walter Dean Myers

Monster is a novel presented as a mixture of screenplay and diary, used to tell the story of teenager Steve Harmon's murder trial. It is written from Steve Harmon's perspective. Steve says that he is writing the screenplay to keep his sanity while being held in prison during his trial for murder. "I am so scared. My heart is beating like crazy and I am having breathing trouble," he writes. "The trouble I'm in keeps looking bigger and bigger. I'm overwhelmed by it. It's

(Mrs. Sullivan, cont'd)

crushing me." In a story about a young man who gets in deep trouble by wanting to look tough, the sheer terror of prison and the prospects for conviction are conveyed in blunt descriptions. Monster's peer pressure and introspection about how he got himself into his current situation are all part of his coming to terms with his own identity.

MR. ANDREW WHELAN

The Fountainhead

Ayn Rand

This compelling and original stunner is the story of a bullheaded young architect, his violent battle against conventional standards, and his explosive love affair with a beautiful woman who struggles to defeat him.

Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim

David Sedaris

In this collection of hilarious -- and often touching -- short stories, Sedaris offers his unique, satirical, and always self-deprecating perspective on ordinary life, and reveals the absurdity below its surface. Sedaris is considered by many critics to be one of the most shameless and witty of all contemporary short story writers.