

Summer Reading Recommendations 2009

Compiled and Reviewed by Natalie Elisabeth Schultz

All material by Natalie unless stated otherwise

Key:

★ = How did this get published?

★ ★ = Not worth your time

★ ★ ★ = If you have nothing better to read

★ ★ ★ ★ = Good

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ = AMAZING! Life changing!

(PG) = If rated as a movie, (only fiction)

Beach read = Beach read rating (only fiction)

Literary = Genre, may be more than one

(Molly P.) = name of submitter

Fiction:

Orpheus Lost* by Janette Turner Hospital ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ (R) *Maybe not beach read—Literary

In a modern retelling of the myth of Orpheus, Australian student and gifted musician Mishka Bartok is studying music in Boston. He entralls others with the passion of the music he creates, including Leela, a mathematical genius and postgraduate student at MIT. She hears Mishka playing his violin in the subway and can't resist the siren call of his music and the two soon become lovers. When a local train is targeted by terrorists, Mishka is suspected of connections with the bombing and Leela is interrogated. Her childhood friend Cobb runs the investigation. When someone connected with the bombing approaches Mishka with information about his Lebanese father, he naively travels to Beirut where he is captured, interrogated and tortured. Leela must choose who to believe and trust, Cobb or Mishka, as she fights her growing desperation to find Mishka. (Summary © Susan Whelan)

Praying for Sleep* by Jeffrey Deaver ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ (R) *Maybe beach read—Mystery

Schizophrenic murderer Michael Hrubek has escaped from the mental hospital he was confined to, and it seems he is headed after the woman he almost killed.

Sold* by Patricia McCormick ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ (R) *Maybe not beach read—Literary

Living in a poor, remote Nepalese village during a time of severe drought, Lakshmi's father sells her into sexual slavery to a traveling 'dealer', who in turn sells her to an inner-city brothel in India, where she is forced to 'entertain' her clients—men who want her body and often force her to perform other unspeakable acts. Yet it is here in "Happiness House" that Lakshmi finally realizes who she is and who she can be.

The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie ★ ★ ★ ★ (R) *Definitely not beach read—Literary

In a stunning amalgamation of Islamic tradition, fantastical journeys, and the epic confrontation between good and evil, Salman Rushdie brings his readers first to the site of an airplane's explosion, where two men hurtle thousands feet to certain death. Yet they both survive, and one grows wings and a halo; the other grows horns, hooves, and a tail. Meanwhile, Rushdie offers a glimpse into a small Indian village where a prophetess claims to have visions of the archangel Gibreel and leads her entire village on a pilgrimage on foot to Mecca. Rushdie then sweeps the reader into ancient Arabia, to a time when the prophet Mahound begins to call the unfaithful to the one true God, after a series of visions from the same angel.

***Jude* by Kate Morgenroth ★★☆☆☆ (PG-13) Probably not beach read—Literary/Mystery**

When fifteen year old Jude's father is brutally murdered, Jude is a witness. But to save his own life, he can't tell the police what he knows. Still, Jude is determined to clear his name and win the approval of his mother—the district attorney he has not seen since he was an infant. At the urging of his mother's longtime companion, Jude agrees to a crazy scheme to protect her political future. But what Jude doesn't know is that there are buried secrets that will require him to sacrifice more than he ever dreamed. And his search for approval will turn into one for revenge. (Synopsis from Simon Pulse)

***Blood on the Leaves* by Jeff Stetson ★★☆☆☆ (PG-13) Not beach read—Literary/Mystery**

James Reynolds is a black prosecutor in Jackson, Mississippi - the only one [when] old white men begin to be die in scenes staged to mirror the 1960s murders of black people. It turns out that a black history professor, Martin Matheson, has been documenting the dead men's roles in past atrocities. Martin, whom James has never really liked, is the son of Reverend Samuel Matheson, a prominent civil rights leader and also pastor to the Reynolds family. Martin has compiled and distributed bios of 'civil rights 'war criminals', inciting his students to action. Many of these good ol' boys were arrested but subsequently acquitted by all-white juries. Now someone's after vengeance, and is systematically taking them out. James Reynolds is a friend of Todd Miller, 'the last native-born white liberal lawyer in Mississippi'. They end up on opposite sides of a courtroom drama, after Martin Matheson is arrested for murder. The Reynolds are chucked out of church. James believes in justice, but is torn by horror at what was done to the original victims, and by memories slowly emerging from his continuing nightmares. On the other side of the celebrity trial, Miller expunges his own demons. Both lawyers are vilified by their communities. *Blood on the Leaves* is an excellent legal thriller, but there's much more to it. It shows two men, more alike than either will admit, on different sides of a moral divide. It covers the effects of an exposure to violence on children, and the legacy of the 60s to the black community in general. And it takes the stand that color (black or white) should never decide justice. (summary © Hilary Williamson)

***tor'cha* by Todd Craig ★★☆☆☆ (R) Probably not beach read—Literary**

The only time a conversation ends is when a life is taken. I'm the direct connect that lends the extended ghetto pass to anyone. And after the hood nods its head, and lets you through its entrance, then you gotta put down the other guard ...nah, them Muslim dudes, I be seeing what they do on the News... Leave that home... If you take this roller coaster ride with me, I will strap you in and take you through it. You get to live at the end. (Intro © Todd Craig) An amalgamation of gangsta life, the Ten Commandments, Supreme Mathematics, and Islam, Todd Craig's novel is an excellent read with unique stylistic choices and characters that leap off the pages.

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon**

★☆☆☆☆ (PG-13) Maybe beach read—Literary

Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone, the novel's protagonist discovers the corpse of his neighbor's dog impaled by a pitchfork. The incident acts as a catalyst, setting Christopher on a quest-inspired by his favorite character Sherlock Holmes-to find out who is responsible for the gruesome crime. Christopher, though, is not the kind of run-of-the-mill precocious young detective we all remember reading about as kids. Rather, Christopher suffers from a fairly

intense autism, an affliction that seriously effects the way he comes to research the case, the way he interprets the information he uncovers, and ultimately how that information is passed on to the reader. Christopher's autism is also what sets Haddon's novel apart from those other young detective novels, as the focus of the story is much less about who killed the dog, and much more about the way Christopher goes about uncovering who is responsible.
(synopsis © Michael O'Connor, www.about.com)

Fake ID* by Walter Sorrells ★★★★★ (PG-13) *Maybe beach read—Mystery

Chastity Pureheart is not her real name. In fact, it's the latest in a series of names she has used throughout her life. She and her mom, whose real name she also doesn't know, have been on the run from someone—or something—for ages, and when her mom mysteriously disappears, Chass is forced to come face to face with exactly what her mother has tried to hide from.

Club Dread* by Walter Sorrells ★★★★★ (PG-13) *Maybe beach read—Mystery

Sequel to "Fake ID". After having to move once more, Chass witnesses the murder of rock star Josh Emmitt as he mocks her while she is hanging up a musicians wanted flier, and she is the only suspect. If she can solve the murder, she can stay in San Francisco. If she can't, she and her mom will have to pack up and move again, and risk being found.

So B. It* by Sarah Weeks ★★★★★ (PG) *Maybe beach read—Literary

Although she lives an unconventional lifestyle with her mentally disabled mother and their doting neighbor, Bernadette, Heidi has a lucky streak that has a way of pointing her in the right direction. When a mysterious word in her mother's vocabulary begins to haunt her, Heidi's thirst for the truth leads her on a cross-country journey in search of the secrets of her past.
(Synopsis from HarperCollins)

The Rag and Bone Shop* by Robert Cormier ★★★★★ (PG) *Maybe beach read—Literary

When a young Alicia Bartlett is murdered, twelve year old Jason Dorrant was the last one to see her, except the murderer, unless he is the murderer. Renowned interrogator Trent, known for always obtaining a confession, is brought in. Will the truth come out?

***Whom Shall I Fear?* by Athol Dickson ★★★★★**

(PG-13) *Maybe beach read—Religious/Mystery*

When a body is found in the lake, Garrison Reed is believed responsible. The sheriff is convinced he murdered his best friend; yet he will do anything to prove he is innocent, except reveal his darkest secret to his wife and potentially destroy his marriage. The truth is that he is not a devout Christian. He isn't even sure if God is real. But that knowledge could ruin his relationship with his believing wife.

The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger ★★★★★ (R) *Maybe beach read—Literary

A young man dealing with the loss of his brother wants to protect the innocents around him; yet by protecting these innocents he is being hypocritical to himself and acting more like an adult than he should. He analyzes everyone around him in a negative way, but by the time he figures out what his problem is, he suffers a mental breakdown, leaving him right back where he was in the beginning. —Submitted by I. L.

If I Should Speak* by Umm Zakkiyah ★★★★★ (PG-13) *Maybe beach read—Religious

After a fight with her narcissistic roommate, Tamika is reassigned to an apartment where her two new roommates are two different types of Moslems—Dee (Durrah) is the school's beauty queen and Amina is the school's conservative, veiled Moslem crusader. When Tamika is assigned to do a report on a world religion, and is given Islam as her topic, her life will change forever.

A Tree Grows In Brooklyn* by Betty Smith ★★★★★ (PG-13) *Maybe beach read—Historical

A poor family growing up in Brooklyn in the depression. From the view point of the daughter. Sounds kind of boring but it's beautifully written and has great philosophies of life.

—Submitted by E. D.

The Ruins* by Scott Smith ★★★★★ (R) *Maybe beach read—Horror/Adventure

There are four friends who go on a trip to Mexico and they go looking for adventure, trying to find someone who hasn't contacted them. Getting to a hill covered with vines, they must survive against the wild and nature. Then, at the worst possible time, the worst possible thing happens.

—Submitted by I. L.

Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger ★★★★★ (PG) *Maybe beach read—Literary/Religious

It's hard to summarize, but it's about a boy and his relationship with his dad. The son has health problems and the dad has a special ability to get him breathing again by being very in tune with his son. I guess you could say it's a metaphor for our relationship with God, but that might be more than the author intended. —Submitted by B. A.

The Giver* by Lois Lowry ★★★★★ (PG) *Maybe not beach read—Literary

In his perfect life and perfect society, Jonas is waiting with the other twelve year olds for his assignment in life. Yet he is not assigned. Instead, he is selected to be the next Receiver of Memory, to gain all of the memories before Sameness, which is how his society is perfect. As Jonas receives the memories from the previous Receiver, he realizes how shallow his community is. —Submitted by R. S.

The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini ★★★★★ (PG13) *Probably not beach read—Literary

Raised in the same household and sharing the same wet nurse, Amir and Hassan nonetheless grow up in different worlds: Amir is the son of a prominent and wealthy man, while Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant, is a Hazara, member of a shunned ethnic minority. Their intertwined lives, and their fates, reflect the eventual tragedy of the world around them. When the Soviets invade and Amir and his father flee the country for a new life in California, Amir thinks that he has escaped his past. And yet he cannot leave the memory of Hassan behind him. (synopsis from Khaled Hosseini)

A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini ★★★★★ (R) *Probably not beach read—

Literary This is a breathtaking story set against the volatile events of Afghanistan's last thirty years—from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to the post-Taliban rebuilding—that puts the violence, fear, hope, and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. It is a tale of two generations of characters brought jarringly together by the tragic sweep of war, where personal lives—the struggle to survive, raise a family, find happiness—are inextricable from the history playing out around them. [This is] a remarkable chronicle of three decades of Afghan history and

a deeply moving account of family and friendship. It is a striking, heart-wrenching novel of an unforgiving time, an unlikely friendship, and an indestructible love—a stunning accomplishment. (synopsis from Khaled Hosseini)

Hope Was Here* by Joan Bauer ★ ★ ★ ★ (PG) *Definitely beach read—Teen/Literary

When sixteen-year-old Hope and the aunt who has raised her move from Brooklyn to Mulhoney, Wisconsin, to work as waitress and cook in the Welcome Stairways diner, they become involved with the diner owner's political campaign to oust the town's corrupt mayor.

--Submitted by E. H.

Rules of the Road* by Joan Bauer ★ ★ ★ ★ (PG) *Definitely beach read—Teen/Literary

Meet Jenna Boller, star employee at Gladstone's Shoe Store in Chicago. Standing a gawky 5'11" at 16 years old, Jenna is the kind of girl most likely to stand out in the crowd - for all the wrong reasons. But that doesn't stop Madeline Gladstone, the president of Gladstone's Shoes 176 outlets in 37 states, from hiring Jenna to drive her cross country in a last ditch effort to stop Elden Gladstone from taking over his mother's company and turning a quality business into a shop-and-schlock empire. Now Jenna Boller shoe salesperson is about to become a shoe-store spy as she joins her crusty old employer for an eye-opening adventure that will teach them both the rules of the road - and the rules of life.

--Submitted by E. H.

Billy Budd* by Herman Melville ★ (PG) *Definitely not beach read—Historical/Literary

Handsome, loyal sailor Billy Budd, accused of mutiny, strikes out in anger against his accuser, a man who hates him without reason, and is tried and sentenced to death for murder.

tfn* by Lauren Myracle (R) *Maybe beach reach—Teen/High School

Now 16, Atlanta teens Angela, Zoe, and Madigan continue to cope with the issues related to romance, family problems, and their own friendship. Once again the story is written mostly in instant messages, with the narrative unfolding in three distinct voices and in the girls' interactions on the screen. This time, Madigan becomes involved with booze, pot, and another girl's boyfriend; Zoe worries that she's frigid; and Angela must move to northern California.

(synopsis by Francisca Goldsmith © American Library Association)

Nonfiction:

Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* by Carl Medearis ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Religious

A discussion of Christians and Muslims, their respective beliefs, and how to cross religious barriers, written by a Christian living in Lebanon, with several anecdotes.

***The Grand Inquisitor's Manual: A History of Terror in the Name of God* by Jonathan Kirsch**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *History/Politics*

Looking back at the practices of the Spanish Inquisition, and tracing them through Nazi Germany and the modern day War on Terror, author Jonathan Kirsch presents a well-researched history of terror in the name of God.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey ★ ★ ★ ★ *Self-help

Seven habits to add into your life in order to be more fulfilled, content, and happy. With anecdotes and a witty sense of humor, Sean Covey explains how to rebuild broken relationships, find lost time, develop a good sense of self, and more.

Woman on Death Row by Velma Barfield ★★★★★ Memoir

Velma Barfield, executed in North Carolina in 1984, was the first woman to be executed after the reinstatement of capital punishment in 1977. In this powerful recounting of her life, she speaks about her abusive father, failed marriages, and escalated drug abuse, all the while careful not to blame her crimes on her past. While in prison awaiting trial, Velma experienced a powerful conversion to the true nature of Christianity, knowing for herself the peace and comfort only Christ can provide. This memoir reveals how she touched the lives of many, including Mrs. Ruth Bell Graham (Billy Graham's wife) before her eventual execution.

The House Where the Hardest Things Happened by Kate Young Caley ★★★★★ Memoir

Growing up in a small town, Kate Young's mother was voted out of the congregation of her church after 'breaking the church covenant' by working as a waitress in a restaurant that sold alcoholic beverages even though she didn't drink herself while trying to feed her family when her husband Dick suffered a mental breakdown. Kate's beloved brother was gay, and she too struggled with her feelings towards God and love and family.

Live From Death Row by Mumia Abu Jamal ★★★★★ Memoir/Politics

Sentenced to death for a murder he claims he never committed, ex-Black Panthers journalist Mumia Abu Jamal writes about the injustice of America's justice system from his front row seat on Death Row.

God's Politics: Why the Right is Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It ★★★★★ by Jim Wallis Politics

Exploring the positions held by today's typical conservative and liberal, Jim Wallis takes apart these views and seeks to find God in the issues, instead of a political platform to shout from. If you have a hard time dealing with people who disagree with you, don't read this book. Otherwise, it's quite amazing.

Inside the Wire: A Military Intelligence Soldier's Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantánamo by Erik Saar ★★★★★ Memoir/Politics

Erik Saar was a military intelligence soldier who worked as an interpreter and spoke Arabic. While stationed at Guantánamo, he was initially assigned to the Joint Detainee Operations Group (JDOG) and worked with the detainees and guards on a day to day basis. Later he joined the Joint Interrogations Group (JIG) and worked interrogations. This is an account of his time there.

Look Me In The Eye: My Life With Asperger's by John Elder Robison ★★★★★ Memoir

John Elder Robison is one of the millions of adults and children with Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism. Living today in Amherst, MA, Robison dropped out of high school because he was bored, became interested in the science of the sound of music, and travels the lecture circuit to talk about his life with Asperger's. This is the story of his life.