

## Summer Reading Assignment 2022

Dear Incoming Seniors,

This is it! Your Final Preston Summer Reading Assignment has arrived!

You already know that reading prepares you for college's academic challenges. This year, however, to directly ready yourself for college, you should also spend some time writing as you explore your college essay.

What follows, then, involves a mixture of writing and reading assignments—mostly so you continue honing those talents necessary for writing personal narratives. In addition to these assignments, we also ask you to read two books: as in previous years, we have provided a fiction and non-fiction list, and you can choose one book from each selection. Such a task allows you to read for enjoyment while preserving your critical thinking skills.

As always, feel free to use *The New York Public Library* as a resource. For more information on *SimplyE*, the library's free version of *Kindle*, please access this link: <https://www.nypl.org/books-music-movies/ebookcentral/simplye>

If you have any questions, feel free to email Ms. Esposito, the English Department Chairperson, at [mesposito@prestonhs.org](mailto:mesposito@prestonhs.org)

Enjoy your summer and see you next year!

Sincerely,

The Senior-Level Faculty

## Assignment

**1, 2, 3.** For tasks I, II, and III, see pages 3-12. Ensure you complete all this work on *one* Google-Document, that you should submit to your teacher's particular Google-Classroom during the first week of school.

**4.** For the remaining assignment, you must choose one book from the fiction list and one book from the non-fiction list (on this document's pages 13-18). Exposure to each of these genres enables cross-cultural understanding. These lists provide a wide variety of subject matters and difficulty levels from which you may choose. You must complete these two choices by the first day of class in September. Read for understanding and enjoyment but prepare yourself to write knowledgeably about these books during the first week of classes.

## **Tasks 1, 2, 3. Senior Summer Reading—College Essay Preparation**

Complete all the following work on *one* Google-Document, that you should submit to your teacher's particular Google-Classroom during the first week of school.

## I. Discover what colleges want...

1. Carefully read the below college testimonials. Feel free to highlight any parts that specifically describe the traits admissions members look for in college essays.
2. After reading, start your Google-Doc through answering the subsequent questions.

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1. “To be honest, when I start reading a college essay, I need to know by the first sentence or paragraph that this is a unique and truthful experience, and that the writer shows bravery in telling it. I don’t mind reading about applicants’ relationships with their parents, dead pets, and even break-ups, but when it becomes the same old story about losing someone and then remembering that their spirit lives on, my eyes just get glossy and I want to throw it in the trash. I want to know that I can’t predict how this experience will end. I want to keep guessing so I *have to* keep reading because I just can’t imagine how this experience might turn out.” —Julie Mulvaney, Admissions Board, Bard College

2. “Your experience can be the most adventurous, unexpected thing anyone’s ever read, but it means nothing unless it taught you a thing or two. If an applicant can make sense of what happened to him, then I know he can think abstractly and find meaning from even the most unexpected tools. That makes him the perfect candidate for my school.” —Jason Elevatios, Admissions Board Member, Harvard University

3. “High school students have a hard time discussing general *and* specific topics in one essay, so when I read an essay from an applicant that manages to discuss a particularly focused experience but then expounds on the general implication of this event, I assume he is rather sophisticated and may excel in my school. Most writers underestimate the value of specific-to-general-to-specific writing and instead fill pages with one or the other. ... I can tell that the writer truly understands that his experience offers meaning for his future.” —Sarah Dardaroney, Admissions Board Member, Sacred Heart University

4. “This answer may seem too dogmatic, but I think it bears mention. When I clearly discern that an essay has a clear focus—it talks about one experience in depth rather a plethora of random situations—then I know the applicant has spent much time and care in her writing and therefore values her process. If the question requires two pages and the applicant wrote for one or three, I can assume he doesn’t care about following directions and right away he’s off to a bad start. The same is true for actually addressing the application question. You’d be surprised at how many applicants start off discussing the question, but by the end of their essay, they never answer the prompt!” —Laura Bernstein, Admissions Counselor, Hunter College

5. “A quality that most people overlook—but that I think is integral to accepting an applicant—is the overall positive outcome of the experience she mentions in her essay. Of course, she can write about trauma or a tragedy she endured, and she can certainly explore that experience in detail that may seem heart-wrenching to me as I read it. But by the end of her essay, she must have pulled the positive message from that account. I remember one applicant wrote about losing her father in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Her father actually died while returning to the soon-to-crumble building, as he tried to save others. I was reading this thinking, ‘there’s no way she can end this on a happy note,’ but her last paragraph discussed how she remembers her father as a hero, and that heroism inspired her to pursue nursing, as she imagines she could help save lives the way her father did. I actually teared while I read that essay. And then it made me see that she was optimistic and would never find reason to give up at my school.” –Michael Foy, Stanford Provost Administration

6. “Something I imagine would be the hardest to include is vivid language. Anyone can use a dictionary and thesaurus to litter their essays with SAT-words, but I know I’ve found a gem when I read appropriate, vivid, memorable imagery, metaphors, and other memorable language. It might not surprise you that an applicant can ruin his impression with one bad simile. I remember one applicant who compared himself to a bacon sandwich—seemingly soft on the outside but hard on the inside. It was awful. I felt bad for him, but he still didn’t sit well with me. He should have had someone look at his essay before handing it in.”  
—Gail Martin, Admissions Board, Pace University

**1. List 5 of the top qualities these board members seek in college application essays.**

**2. For each quality you list, explain why you consider it most important.**

## II. Create a timeline of your life...

Creating a list of important events can help you gather memorable information for your college essay. Writing it in timeline form allows you to organize it chronologically so you can better cull events when you must craft several admissions essays and supplementary pieces.

### Your timeline *must*:

- \*start with your birthdate and include the present
- \*end with your future aspirations
- \*include dates—at least the year, but try to include the month and day if you can (if you're unsure, approximate)
- \*write down *at least* ten slots, including the future—the more you have the greater selection for your college essay

### Your timeline *can* (optional):

- \*appear horizontally (left to right) or vertically (up and down)—whichever works for you
- \*display events in words and/or images—whatever captures the essence of your memory (personal photos work great)

To help you craft this timeline, consider these topics. You can answer all, some, or none of them—use whatever helps you with your timeline:

Consider memories about a time when...

- you might have moved from one place to another;
- a significant person in your life did something you would hardly expect (good? mistake?);
  - you made a significant friend;
  - siblings were born
- you started school—at any stage (elementary, middle, high school)
- a teacher, coach, or other adult (not related to you) impacted you (and why)
- you dealt with a loss (loved one passing away; pet dying; sports team losing big, and so on);
  - you experienced your first love
  - you endured your first real break-up
- you learned something new about someone that surprised you (positive and/or negative)
  - you worked your first real job, or any job that helped shape you
    - you hated a job and therefore realized what to avoid in life
    - you or another experienced an accident—of any proportion
  - you witnessed a historical event
- you began considering your future (Ex: Where do you see yourself ten years from now?)

### III. Explore award-winning personal essays...

Reading other lauded responses will, of course, help you sharpen your own writing style. The following four pieces won *The New York Times*' 2021 Personal Narrative Essay Contest for Students, an event the publication finalizes every October. After reading each piece, complete these questions on that Google-Document:

You should answer five questions for *each* written piece. You might find it easier, then, to create a heading for each essay, and then write your answers below each heading.

Your responses may look like the following example:

"Guilty"	"504 Hours"	"Lips or Slug?"	"Autocorrect"
(1) Answer	(1) Answer	(1) Answer	(1) Answer
(2) Answer	(2) Answer	(2) Answer	(2) Answer
(3) Answer	(3) Answer	(3) Answer	(3) Answer
(4) Answer	(4) Answer	(4) Answer	(4) Answer
(5) Answer	(5) Answer	(5) Answer	(5) Answer

#### Questions:

- (1) How does the writer open his/her essay? What advantages (to the reader) might occur from this type of opening?
- (2) Paraphrase (in a sentence), the writer's thesis. Also explain in which paragraph it appears. Why might the writer choose to place it in this spot?
- (3) Quote one line where the writer reflects or analyzes his/her experience. How does this analysis affect your reaction to the story?
- (4) Remember Harvard's Jason Elevatios, and his statement that an experience "means nothing unless it taught you a thing or two"? In a sentence, what did this experience teach the writer? Or, in other words, why did the writer bother to discuss this experience?
- (5) What other qualities from the "Discover what colleges want..." sheet does this essay display? List at least two and explain them using at least one direct quote from the essay.

Answer this sixth question *once*, through noticing a pattern in your answers to the other essays:

- (6) Based on the similarities you should notice in the structures and styles of the four winning essays, explain, in a paragraph (4-5 sentences) how someone should craft her college essay. We should, of course, spend time in class creating our essays, but use these examples to start uncovering the steps.

# “Guilted”

By Lyat Melese, age 16, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Va.

Illustration by Melinda Josie



The shrill sound of a whistle slices through the gym, slowly halting the bouncing basketballs, squeaking tennis shoes and background chatter. My P.E. teacher stands in the middle of the room, looking around in distaste at the disarray of basketballs, hula hoops, and volleyball nets. He asks for volunteers to help clear the gym.

Saanvi raises a lone hand into the air. Everybody else refuses to meet the teacher’s eyes, focusing on the floor, their hands or the ceiling.

I sigh as it strikes again.

*Yilugnta*

It is hard to define the Amharic word in English. It describes the feeling comprising a mishmash of extreme empathy and the inability to say “no.” It is a trait I see in my mother and, much to my annoyance, myself. While *yilugnta* makes me a kind and respectful daughter at home, it makes me a pushover susceptible to guilt-tripping at school.

I raise my hand, “I can do it.”

Saanvi and I collect all the balls and ropes, rolling the carts into the storage room.

We are alone when she suddenly stops and looks at me.

“Did you get accepted?” she asks, referring to the highly selective admission to the local STEM high school.

“Yeah,” I reply. “You?”

She looks away. Her hands fist at her sides as a frown is etched on her face.

I look down. “I’m sorry. I know how badly you wanted to go.”

“You don’t understand,” she spits out. “You obviously got in because you are Black.”

I don’t respond, focusing instead on the colorful hula hoops I am stacking in a pile: green, yellow, blue.



When we first moved to America, my parents went to great lengths to avoid the term “Black.” They instilled in me that I was not just Black, I was Ethiopian. I used to think it was because they didn’t want me to forget my culture. Now I think they were protecting me because the term “Black” shoulders the weight of history.

My Nigerian neighbor always grits his teeth and talks to himself when he watches Nigerian news. He blames Britain for forcing the tribes together. He says Nigeria should not have existed. Now, his wife hides the remote because his blood pressure grows too high.

My mom’s friend’s African-American partner goes to town halls and protests every week. He still waits for the day he will get the reparations his ancestors were owed.

My mom tells me that we are not like them. Our ancestors were not colonized or enslaved. Don’t carry the burden that is not yours.

In my head, I want to scream that I did not choose to carry anything. It was shoveled on top of my head. Much like my *yilugnta*, it is a trait I have to own, no matter how I wish otherwise.

The age of shackles and scramble for land has long passed, but the aftermath reverberates in our ears, whispering words like “victim,” “predator” and “diversity hire.”

Black is black is black.

I turn back to look at Saanvi.

“The admissions are race-blind,” I state.

“Everybody knows that’s not true,” she scoffs. “So few Black people apply, you are guaranteed a spot.”

She pushes past my shoulders and marches out of the room.

Her bag lies forgotten on the floor, a key chain with a colorful peace sign dangling from the front.

I stare at it, contemplating leaving it there.

*Yilugnta*

I pick up the straps and haul it over my shoulder, once more carrying the weight I do not own.

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# “504 Hours”

By Elise Spinner, age 15, Burlingame High School, Burlingame, Calif.

Illustration Holly Wales



It felt like there was no air in the room. Mom sat on the mint green chair in the corner. The white exam paper crinkled under me as I gripped my knees to my chest and rocked back and forth. My tears blurred the cheery posters on human anatomy, balanced eating and mask etiquette into a mosh pit of swirling words and colors. The doctor’s words were garbled, blocked out by a rushing storm of shame.

“Hospital ... patient care ... check if they have beds.”

“Disordered eating ... bradycardia ... not enough blood to the heart ...”

I didn’t need to listen to her. I already knew everything. I am a straight-A student. I have a solid grasp on cause and effect. Two plus two is four; not eating and exercising too much is an eating disorder. I’ve watched enough “Grey’s Anatomy” to know when doctors have bad news. I could tell by the way she walked into the room: the weary smile that screamed pity and heartache and the look that said, “I came into this profession to save lives, but that means I have to ruin yours.” I knew before that, when the nurse’s brow furrowed at the 42 on the heart rate monitor, and her icy fingers pressed my wrist to recalculate. I knew when I left that morning for my ritualistic five-mile run, leaving the remains of a breakfast pecked at and shuffled around on the plate. Of course I knew.

For a moment, as I listened and cried and the world swirled around me, I was relieved. Relieved that I could let go. That I wouldn’t have to think about what I ate or how fast I ran because my hands were being forcibly removed from the steering wheel.

But the world wouldn’t stay on hold until I was ready to start living again.

While I sat shell-shocked, Mom canceled next week’s vacation to the bungalow rental by the beach. Dad sent a terse email to my soccer coach explaining why I would miss our first training camp in a year. For the next three weeks, I would participate in my summer courses from the four walls of a hospital room, with my computer angled to block out the nurse that would routinely flush my IV, the tangled mess of green and yellow wires that would tie me to a 24-hour heart rate monitor, and the makeshift sofa that one of my parents would sacrifice their back to sleep on each night. And two months later, my dad would open the mail to find a bill for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Enough to account for the 504 hours I would spend in a hospital room, the 126 meals and snacks I would eat over those 504 hours, and the nurses who would wait on me for every single one of those 504 hours.

As I rocked compulsively on the glaring, white exam paper, relief quickly gave way to guilt. Gnawing guilt that in my undying pursuit for some ideal, I had destroyed my parents, my relationships and my life. I thought the numbers on the scale were some test to be passed or game to be won, until winning left me in a hospital bed for the summer. My choices were real. And the consequences? They were even more real. First, after I finished sobbing, I wanted to scream, “Why me?” Then I wanted to pray to a god I didn’t believe in to turn back the clock and rewrite my story. But finally, with my face still buried in my knees, all I could do was whisper “I’m sorry” over and over and over again.

## “Lips or Slug?” By Daniella Canseco, age 17, Saint Mary’s Hall, San Antonio



When I was younger, I romanticized the thought of my first kiss. I thought it would be the most extravagant thing I would experience with the most handsome boy ever. I wanted the whole shebang: a Zac Efron look-a-like, roses, candles. When I did have my first kiss, was it like this? Nope. My first kiss was in a church parking lot after a musty dinner at the local food court. Just like everyone else, I remember the experience vividly, even though I try to forget.

The first red flag with this guy should’ve been the fact that when my mother Googled him, a picture of my last failed attempt at a relationship came up. They knew each other. Why didn’t I bail that very moment? Well, I was so desperate

for even a hue of male validation that I put my blinders on for all red flags. I even ignored the fact that he had shirtless mirror pictures on his Instagram. How I cringe.

In my blue Mazda with the sticker “Let me see your kitties” on the back, I drove into the desolate Mission City Church parking lot, not knowing what fate awaited me. For about 30 minutes this guy showed me his entire music library, which consisted of subpar rap songs that his ex-girlfriend had introduced him to, and his entire camera roll, which was all pictures of him shirtless in front of a mirror, except for two, which were, surprisingly, shirtless pictures of him *not* in front of a mirror. So unpredictable!

A heavy rain started and, with each drop of water smacking my car, a loud slap would reverberate inside and inhibit our ability to hear one another. This unfortunate turn of events resulted in a conversation where the question “WHAT?” was said every other statement. We made small talk by screaming (well, him just screaming about himself at me) for about 10 minutes until the atmosphere in the car thickened with anticipation.

“Have you ever been kissed before?” he asked, breaking the silence.

“WHAT?!”

“HAVE YOU EVER BEEN KISSED BEFORE?!” he howled at me.

Taken aback by this overwhelming question, I felt heat rush to my face as my body tinged with panic: Will he think I’m weird if I say no? Should I lie? I shouldn’t have eaten that Greek salad with onions.

“It’s OK if you haven’t.”

I pulled out my metaphorical white flag of surrender and admitted to my lack of achievement of this milestone. Suddenly, I saw his body lean over the dashboard that separated us; his hand reached for my cheek and, just like that, he started kissing me. The fumes of hot onion breath were shared between us as his wet lips slid against mine like a slug. This went on for a good three seconds, which really felt like a good three years, until I pushed him away, overwhelmed by the discomfort I had just experienced. My hand lunged for my cup of water as I attempted to wash down the dissatisfaction of something I had yearned for for years.

“Oh, are you OK?” he questioned, as I violently gulped down my water.

“WHAT?!”

“ARE!? YOU!? OK!?”

I drove him back to his house, the only sounds the ending of the once violent storm and his ex-girlfriend’s rap music playlist. The awkward end-of-date goodbye ensued, and I drove back home in silence rethinking what happened, my lofty expectations deflated. Most of life’s presumptions will not be close to reality, but that’s just how things work.

# “Autocorrect”

By Ellen Xu, age 16, Del Norte High School, San Diego

Illustration by Melinda Josie

I stare at the texts on my phone screen, sent from Dad an ocean away: “Love you.” “Miss you.” “Call?” When I was young, I used to play a game where I would repeat a word enough times for it to sound foreign. Now, I’m playing the same game but in reverse, attempting to remember what it was like when his texts still held their meaning.



Out of habit, I type out “Lub” — my way of saying “love” — and press send, a fraction of a second too late before I see the letters rearrange themselves on their own accord. “Lin.” My mom’s name. Not again. I’m convinced autocorrect has a mind of its own; or, maybe it knows that there is a part of me that has a hard time letting go, that wants to revert to a time when her name was not taboo when sent to him.

Dad moved to China the summer after sixth grade. I remember the long nights we would sit at kitchen table discussions, a tug of war between “job” and “family.” Whenever I look back, I’m reminded of the movie “Interstellar”; not just because it was our favorite movie, but because if I had only been smart enough like Murphy, I would have told him to stay. It was not long after he left that distance severed the bond between my parents, like the expanding universe pulling stars out of orbit. Like Cooper pounding his fist on an interdimensional bookshelf, I am banging on the keyboard hoping the right words will fall out. But all that ends up on the other side is empty text and autocorrect.

I write “Lub” again, this time removing the autocorrect and appending a gauche apology. He texts back: “Call for just one minute?” I think of all the things I want to say: It’s not the same to call. It’s been two years since I was last with you. I just had my first driving lesson today and don’t you remember promising me years ago that you would be the one to teach me to drive? Do you know how many memories we’ve traded for texts and calls?

But I don’t say this. I bite back the frustration and text back “OK,” and in the next instant, his face lights up my screen.

We don’t say much in that minute. He doesn’t ask me how I am, because “good” is never a good enough answer. I don’t ask about his new life, his job, his family, or any of the questions I used to hurl at him. His tear-filled smile, creased with hope and sadness, makes me swallow all the things I want to say. The fact that he is OK with this, that he would keep calling and texting me every night even if I never answered, that just being able to see me on the other side of the screen is enough, makes it enough for me to let go. To move past my anger and regret at how, when I needed it the most, my words came out jumbled in those crucial moments at the kitchen table, where I could have changed things.

I’m not angry anymore. He looks at me and tells me he loves me. And for once, my words come out just as I want them to: no longer autocorrecting to the bitterness of a past left behind.

“I lub you, too.”

## **Independent Summer Reading, Section One:**

**Choose at least one title from these fiction selections (alphabetized by author). Feel free to read more.**

### ***A Long Petal of the Sea*, by Isabel Allende**

Isabel Allende's *A Long Petal of the Sea* gets to the heart of immigrant struggle. . . . [It] begins, as it ends, with the heart. . . . Victor and Roser's story is compelling. . . . Allende's prose is both commanding and comforting. The author writes eloquently on the struggle of letting go of one culture to embrace a new one and shows that one's origin story is not the whole story. . . . While debate and policy surround the issues of refugees and immigration, Allende reminds us that these issues, at their core, are made up of individuals and their love stories.

### ***Yo! (Yo!)*, by Julia Alvarez (in English or Spanish)**

Alvarez's novel happily returns us to the rambunctious Garcia family, who appeared in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). Here the focus is on one particular Garcia girl, Yolanda, nicknamed "Yo," who has grown up to be a writer. Alvarez smartly chooses not to have Yo tell her own story, which certainly would have been sufficiently interesting, given that she has followed a colorful path as writer, wife, and teacher. Alvarez selects a different technique: having Yo's life story told by the people around her, including her mother, her cousin, the maid's daughter, her teacher, her third husband, a man who stalks her (!), and her father. This cumulative effect, as each person who knows Yo has his or her say, results in a remarkably multifaceted portrait that will at once provoke, amuse, and warm readers.

### ***Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury**

Bradbury's novel explores the eternal battle between censorship and freedom of thought and continues to be relevant today more than ever. In Bradbury's future, books are illegal and happily so--citizens are too busy watching their wall-sized televisions and listening to their in-ear "seashell" radios to care about the loss of good literature. Guy Montag begins the novel as a fireman who enforces the temperature of the title--that at which books burn--but then transforms and tries to show his society the mistake of censorship.

### ***Please, Mr. Einstein*, by Jean-Claude Carrière**

It is the early 21st century, and a young, nameless student intent on learning more about Einstein finds her way into a mysterious office that houses—Einstein himself, walking and talking, full of generosity and the urge to make his ideas plain. The expected thought-experiments (an elevator with no frame of reference, two trains moving side by side) cover the basics of relativity, but soon the young student presses Einstein, who thought deeply about such questions, to examine the morality of his achievements: could the world after Hiroshima truly be a better place? Carrière's Einstein, like the real one, has mixed feelings on the topic, and one of the novel's few dramatic moments comes when the smartest man in the world is unable to provide all the answers.

### ***Ordinary People*, by Judith Guest**

A remarkable book about an ordinary family's response to an extraordinary tragedy; it was so popular in its time precisely because the Jarretts could be any American family and what happened in their family could happen in anyone's family. Well, maybe not in anyone's family; most Americans aren't wealthy enough to live in a McMansion in an upper-middle-class bedroom community, nor do most families own a boat. But, income aside, the Jarretts are like most people one knows: a hardworking father, a mother who wants the best for her family, and two teenage sons, one outgoing and confident, the other quiet and retiring, living in his older brother's shadow. A freak boating accident leaves the older brother dead by drowning, and the family devastated. The parents, Cal and Beth, and their younger son Conrad, are left to cope with the aftermath. *Ordinary People* is the story of how they cope--or fail to.

***Catch-22***, by Joseph Heller

Set in a World War II American bomber squadron off the coast of Italy, *Catch-22* is the story of John Yossarian, who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. Yossarian is also trying to decode the meaning of *Catch-22*, a mysterious regulation that proves that insane people are really the sanest, while the supposedly sensible people are the true madmen. And this novel is full of madmen -- Colonel Cathcart, who keeps raising the number of missions the men must fly in order to finish their tour; Milo Minderbinder, a dedicated entrepreneur who bombs his own airfield when the Germans offer him an extra 6 percent; and Major -- de Coverley, whose face is so forbidding no one has dared ask his name.

***Lost Children Archive***, by Valeria Luiselli

In Valeria Luiselli's fiercely imaginative follow-up to the American Book Award-winning *Tell Me How It Ends*, an artist couple set out with their two children on a road trip from New York to Arizona in the heat of summer. As the family travels west, the bonds between them begin to fray: a fracture is growing between the parents, one the children can almost feel beneath their feet. Through ephemera such as songs, maps and a Polaroid camera, the children try to make sense of both their family's crisis and the larger one engulfing the news: the stories of thousands of kids trying to cross the southwestern border into the United States but getting detained—or lost in the desert along the way. A breath-taking feat of literary virtuosity, *Lost Children Archive* is timely, compassionate, subtly hilarious, and formally inventive—a powerful, urgent story about what it is to be human in an inhuman world. —*The New Yorker*

***The Life of Pi***, by Yann Martel

The imaginative and unforgettable *Life of Pi* is a magical reading experience, an endless blue expanse of storytelling about adventure, survival, and ultimately, faith. The precocious son of a zookeeper, 16-year-old Pi Patel is raised in Pondicherry, India, where he tries on various faiths for size, attracting "religions the way a dog attracts fleas." Planning a move to Canada, his father packs up the family and their menagerie and they hitch a ride on an enormous freighter. After a harrowing shipwreck, Pi finds himself adrift in the Pacific Ocean, trapped on a 26-foot lifeboat with a wounded zebra, a spotted hyena, a seasick orangutan, and a 450-pound Bengal tiger named Richard Parker ("His head was the size and color of the lifebuoy, with teeth").

***In Country***, by Bobbie Ann Mason

In the summer of 1984, the war in Vietnam comes home to Sam Hughes whose father died there before she was born. This is an extraordinary novel of reconciliation and shared hopes--and a youthful confrontation with the legacy of Vietnam. *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe In direct, almost fable-like prose, the novel depicts the rise and fall of Okonkwo, a Nigerian whose sense of manliness is more akin to that of his warrior ancestors than to that of his fellow clansmen who have converted to Christianity and are appeasing the British administrators who infiltrate their village. The tough, proud, hardworking Okonkwo is at once a quintessential old-order Nigerian and a universal character in which sons of all races have identified the figure of their father. Achebe creates a many-sided picture of village life and a sympathetic hero. This is a seminal work.

***The English Patient***, by Michael Ondaatje

With ravishing beauty and unsettling intelligence, Michael Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel traces the intersection of four damaged lives in an Italian villa at the end of World War II. Hana, the exhausted nurse; the maimed thief, Caravaggio; the wary sapper, Kip: each is haunted by the riddle of the English patient, the nameless, burned man who lies in an upstairs room and whose memories of passion, betrayal, and rescue illuminate this book like flashes of heat lightning.

***The Shipping News***, by Annie Proulx

In this touching and atmospheric novel set among the fishermen of Newfoundland, Proulx tells the story of Quoyale. From all outward appearances, Quoyale has gone through his first 36 years on earth as a big loser. He's not attractive, he's not brilliant or witty or talented, and he's not the kind of person who typically assumes the central position in a novel. However, Proulx creates a simple and compelling tale of Quoyale's psychological and spiritual growth. Along the way, we get to look in on the maritime beauty of what is probably a disappearing way of life.

***Riding the Bus with My Sister***, by Rachel Simon

When she received an invitation to her mentally retarded sister's annual Plan of Care review, Simon realized that this was Beth's way of attempting to bring her back into her life. Beth challenged the author to give a year of her life to riding "her" buses with her. Even though Simon didn't know where it would take her, she accepted. During that time, she came to see her sister as a person in her own right with strong feelings about how she wanted to live her life, despite what others thought. Not everyone on the buses, drivers or passengers, liked or even tolerated Beth, and it shamed the author to realize that she sometimes felt the same way about her sibling. As the year passed, Simon came to the realization that "No one can be a good sister all the time. I can only try my best. Just because I am not a saint does not mean that I am a demon." The time together became a year of personal discovery, of acceptance, and of renewed sibling love and closeness.

***The Nickel Boys***, by Colson Whitehead

Based on a real school for boys that closed in Florida in 2011 after more than one hundred years in existence, Colson Whitehead's Nickel Academy is the kind of institution that purports to rebrand bad boys into good young men. So in theory it should be a good place for Elwood, a young black man who, although he had planned to attend a nearby college, was caught unknowingly riding in a stolen car. But what happens inside Nickel Academy does not match its public image, and Elwood is about to learn that, no matter how idealistic or optimistic he is, his life is taking a very bad turn. He is lucky to meet Turner, who does not share Elwood's idealism and who helps him to survive Nickel Academy. But what Elwood experiences there will never leave him. Set in the 1960s during Jim Crow, 2019 Pulitzer Prize winning *The Nickel Boys* is both an enjoyable read and a powerful portrayal of racism and inequality that acts as a lever to pry against our own willingness to ignore it.

***Any fiction selection from the Summer 2022 (June to August) Get Lit with All of It Book Club:***

<https://www.wnyc.org/shows/all-of-it/get-lit>

## Independent Summer Reading, Section Two:

**Choose at least one title from these non-fiction selections (alphabetized by author).  
Feel free to read more.**

***The Fire Next Time***, by James Baldwin

A national bestseller when it first appeared in 1963, *The Fire Next Time* galvanized the nation and gave passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement. At once a powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, the book is an intensely personal and provocative document. It consists of two "letters," written on the occasion of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, that exhort Americans, both black and white, to attack the terrible legacy of racism. Described by *The New York Times Book Review* as "sermon, ultimatum, confession, deposition, testament, and chronicle...all presented in searing, brilliant prose," *The Fire Next Time* stands as a classic of our literature.

***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier***, by Ishmael Beah

A twelve-year old boy first flees from attacking rebels with his friends, but later is transformed into a cold-blooded soldier. This is a heartbreaking personal memoir of a boy growing up in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 1998 and his rehabilitation.

***A House of My Own: Stories from My Life***, by Sandra Cisneros

From Chicago to Mexico, the places Sandra Cisneros has lived have provided inspiration for her now-classic works of fiction and poetry. But a house of her own, a place where she could truly take root, has eluded her. In this jigsaw autobiography—made up of essays and images spanning three decades, and including never-before-published work—Cisneros has come home at last. Written with her trademark lyricism, in these signature pieces the acclaimed author of *The House on Mango Street* and winner of the 2018 PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature shares her transformative memories and reveals her artistic and intellectual influences. Poignant, honest, and deeply moving, *A House of My Own* is an exuberant celebration of a life lived to the fullest, from one of our most beloved writers.

***Man's Searching for Meaning***, by Viktor Frankl

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir has riveted generations of readers with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Between 1942 and 1945 Frankl labored in four different camps, including Auschwitz, while his parents, brother, and pregnant wife perished. Based on his own experience and the experiences of those he treated in his practice, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. Frankl's theory holds that our primary drive in life is not pleasure, as Freud maintained, but the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful. A 1991 reader survey by the Library of Congress that asked readers to name a "book that made a difference in your life" found *Man's Search for Meaning* among the ten most influential books in America.

***Eleni***, by Nicholas Gage

In 1948, as civil war ravaged Greece, communists abducted children and sent them to communist "camps" behind the Iron Curtain. Eleni Gatzoyiannis, forty-one, defied the traditions of her small village and the terror of the communist insurgents to arrange for the escape of her three daughters and her son, Nicola. For that act, she was imprisoned, tortured, and executed in cold blood. Nicholas Gage joined his father in Massachusetts at the age of nine and grew up to become a top New York Times investigative reporter, honing his skills with one thought in mind: to return to Greece and uncover the one story he cared about most--the story of his mother. Eleni takes you into the heart a village destroyed in the name of ideals and into the soul of a truly heroic woman.



***Bad Feminist***, by Roxanne Gay

A collection of essays spanning politics, criticism, and feminism from one of the most-watched young cultural observers of her generation, Roxane Gay. “Pink is my favorite color,” she writes. “I used to say my favorite color was black to be *cool*, but it is pink—all shades of pink. If I have an accessory, it is probably pink. I read *Vogue*, and I’m not doing it ironically, though it might seem that way. I once live-tweeted the September issue.” In these essays—some funny, some raw, all insightful—Roxane Gay takes us through the journey of her evolution as a woman (*Sweet Valley High*) of color (*The Help*) while also taking readers on a ride through culture of the last few years (*Girls*, *Django in Chains*) and comments on the state of feminism today (abortion, Chris Brown). The portrait that emerges is not only one of an incredibly insightful woman continually growing to understand herself and our society, but also one of our culture.

***In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton***, by Elizabeth Griffith

The first comprehensive, fully documented biography of the most important woman suffragist and feminist reformer in nineteenth century America, *In Her Own Right* restores Elizabeth Cady Stanton to her true place in history. Griffith emphasizes the significance of role models and female friendships in Stanton's progress toward personal and political independence. *In Her Own Right* is, in the author's words, an "unabashedly 'great woman' biography."

***A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes***, by Stephen W. Hawking

Perhaps the most famous popular science book of recent years, *A Brief History of Time* even had the distinct honor of being made into a film. This tenth anniversary edition has been revised and updated to reflect discoveries made since its original 1988 publication. It also contains a new introduction and a chapter on wormholes.

***Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life***, by Anne Lamott

Think you have a book inside of you? Anne Lamott isn't afraid to help you let it out. She will help you find your passion and your voice, beginning from the first crummy draft to the peculiar letdown of publication. Readers will be reminded of the energizing books of writer Natalie Goldberg and will be seduced by Lamott's witty take on the reality of a writer's life, which has little to do with literary parties and a lot to do with jealousy, writer's block and going for broke with each paragraph. Marvelously wise and best of all, great reading.

***The Biology of Belief***, by Bruce Lipton

This is a groundbreaking work in the field of New Biology. The author is a former medical professor and research scientist. His experiments, and those of other leading-edge scientists, have examined the processes by which cells receive information. The implications of this research radically change our understanding of life. It shows that genes and DNA do not control our biology; that instead, DNA is controlled by signals from outside the cell, including the energetic messages emanating from our positive and negative thoughts. Dr. Lipton's profoundly hopeful synthesis of the latest and best research in cell biology and quantum physics is being hailed as a major breakthrough showing that our bodies can be changed as we retrain our thinking.

***The Blue Sweater***, by Jacqueline Novogratz

This is the education of a patient capitalist. Novogratz was an idealistic college graduate hired by Chase Manhattan to investigate and write off loans to the Third World. What she discovers in her journey is a blue sweater she gave away to Goodwill many years early on the back of a small Rwandan boy. This sweater becomes a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the world. Later, Novogratz founds The Acumen Fund that underwrites investments to rising entrepreneurs in the Third World to foster economic growth from the bottom of the pyramid up.

***Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers***, by Mary Roach

Those curious or brave enough to find out what really happens to a body that is donated to the scientific community can do so with this book. Bodies are divided into types, including "beating-heart" cadavers for organ transplants, and individual parts--leg and foot segments, for example, are used to test footwear for the effects of exploding land mines. Just as the non-emotional, fact-by-fact descriptions may be getting to be a bit too much, Roach swings into macabre humor. In some cases, it is needed to restore perspective or aid in understanding both what the procedures are accomplishing and what it is hoped will be learned. In all cases, the comic relief welcomes readers back to the world of the living.

***Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love***, by Dava Sobel

Galileo's Daughter is a fascinating biography that gives an intimate look at the life of Galileo through the 124 letters written by his eldest daughter, Virginia, published in translation for the first time from the Italian. Virginia was one of Galileo's three children born out of wedlock. Together with her depressive younger sister, she was placed in the Convent of San Matteo near Galileo's Florence home at the age of 13, where she took the name Suor Maria Celeste, in tribute to her father's work. Galileo recognized in Virginia an "exquisite mind," and she, in turn recognized the depth of her father's faith in Catholicism and proved to be an unwavering source of loyalty, support, comfort, and strength for him when he was brought to trial before the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1633.

***Einstein: The Life and Times***, by Ronald William Clark Ronald W.

Clark's definitive biography of Einstein, the Promethean figure of our age, goes behind the phenomenal intellect to reveal the human side of the legendary absent-minded professor who confidently claimed that space and time were not what they seemed. Here is the classic portrait of the scientist and the man: the boy growing up in the Swiss Alps, the young man caught in an unhappy first marriage, the passionate pacifist who agonized over making The Bomb, the indifferent Zionist asked to head the Israeli state, the physicist who believed in God.

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