

Western Reserve Academy

# BOOKWATCH

Reading Recommendations from the John D. Ong Library

SPRING 2009

ISSUE 27



## A Word from...YOUR Library

Thanks to all of the faculty and staff who contributed to this issue of **Bookwatch!** Be sure to check in at the library for some great new books. There are many choices for your Spring Break reading.

Congratulations to our winner of the Learned Owl gift certificate drawing... Adam Tassile

## Faculty and Staff Recommendations:

**Russ Morrison** recommends:

*Blood and Thunder: An Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West* by Hampton Sides

"I really enjoyed [this book about] Kit Carson, a remarkable man and a legend in his own day. Read and find out about the man behind the legend as his life intertwined with U.S. government's conquering of the American Southwest."

**Chris Monfiletto** recommends:

*Miracle at St. Anna* by James McBride

"The book is phenomenal, especially if you like African American History and World War II specifically."

**Carm Smith** recommends:

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan

"In a remote mountain village where ghosts and tradition rule, LuLing grows up in the care of her mute Precious Auntie as the family endures a curse laid upon a relative known as the bonesetter." (Product description)

**Tracy Finn** recommends:

*The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls

"It's a short book and an easy read."

"Hers is a [true] story of triumph against all odds, but also a tender, moving tale of unconditional love in a family that despite its profound flaws gave her the fiery determination to carve out a successful life on her own terms."

(Product description)

**Jeannie Kidera** recommends:

*Regeneration* by Pat Barker

"*Regeneration* is the classic exploration of how the traumas of war brutalized a generation of young men. The first book in the *Regeneration* trilogy."

(Product description)

# Faculty and Staff Recommendations cont...

**Stephanie White** recommends:

***The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness: Five Steps to Help Kids Create and Sustain Lifelong Joy***  
by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

"A parenting book that offers real, useful ideas on how to help your child grow up to be happy. Some of the ideas would be good for teachers, too, especially here at Reserve where we function as parents to the students as well."

***The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn from Each Other*** by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

"An excellent book about communications between parents and teachers. It really made some good points about how both parents and teachers approach their conversations and what each can do to make them more meaningful and helpful to the students."

***Run*** by Ann Patchett

"I loved this book about a non-traditional family...a good read any time!" (Bookwatch review Spring 2008)

**Jill Evans** recommends:

***Say You're One of Them*** by Uwem Akpan

"A variety of short stories from different countries in Africa."

**Adam Tassile** recommends:

***The Stand*** by Stephen King

"It's the end of the world... as only Stephen King could imagine it." (Product description)

**Pattie Campbell** recommends:

***I Am the Messenger*** by Markus Zusak

"...a cryptic journey filled with laughter, fists, and love." (Product description) (See the book review on page .)

**Tom Davis** recommends:

***Replay*** by Ken Grimwood

"The book opens with a forty-three year old man dying from a heart attack; he awakes to find he is ten years old again, with the knowledge of his former self. This happens three or four times--each time he comes back at a later stage in his life. Interesting premise."

**Christine Borrmann** recommends:

***Gentlemen and Players***  
by Joanne Harris

"It is quite interesting! An English boarding school drama/mystery of sorts with a real twist at the end. I think anyone could enjoy this--especially faculty! A nice read for break."



**Jen Nagano** recommends:

***Group Theory in the Bedroom and Other Mathematical Diversions***

by Brian Hayes

"The book *Group Theory in the Bedroom and Other Mathematical Diversions* was great. I would highly recommend it as a worthwhile non-fiction book to read."



**Lisabeth Robinson** recommends:

***The Soloist*** by Steve Lopez

"It's about a reporter who tries to save a schizophrenic Juilliard drop-out. It reveals the issues of dealing with mental patients in big cities and the reality of 'skid row.'"

**Eric Unhold** recommends:

***Ragtime*** by E.L. Doctorow

"Fascinating, well-written, and based on many real people and events. Its issues of ethnocentrism, prejudice, social classism, love, imagination, heroics, and the human spirit are just as real and poignant today as they were at the time of the book's setting at the turn of the last century."

***The Great Gatsby*** by F. Scott Fitzgerald

"It's one of my favorite stories."

**Fran McHugh** recommends:

***The Letters*** by Luanne Rice and Joseph Monninger

"...a powerfully moving novel of an estranged husband and wife through a series of searching, intimate letters." (Product description) (Also recommended in the Winter 2008 issue of *Bookwatch*)

**Kristen Huntley** recommends:

***Peony in Love*** by Lisa See

"Betrothed to a suitor she has never met, Peony is the cloistered daughter of a wealthy family, trapped like a good-luck cricket in a bamboo-and-lacquer cage. Though raised to be obedient, Peony has dreams of her own." (Product description)

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

"Children have become soldiers of choice. In the more than fifty conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them." (Product description) (See review in Winter 2008 issue of *Bookwatch*.)

## Faculty and Staff Recommendations cont...

**Rich Hoffman** recommends:

**Cy Young: A Baseball Life**  
by Reed Browning

"Browning, a professor of history at Kenyon College, chronicles the life of the man for whom Major League Baseball's most coveted pitching award is named. Denton True "Cyclone" (which became Cy) Young, of Gilmore, Ohio, won more games as a pitcher than most others ever even played in, let alone won. Reading this book will help history buffs learn more about early twentieth-century Ohio and professional baseball's place in Cleveland; it will help baseball fans learn more about the roots of the American pastime; and it will help any reader see into the soul of this perceived hayseed, the pitcher who came before Feller, Koufax, Ryan or Maddux. A great read for this time of year!"



**Anansi Boys** by Neil Gaiman

"Gaiman is a master storyteller with a style all his own. If you've read and enjoyed either *American Gods* or *Neverwhere*, the chances are quite good that you'll like this one as well."

**Judy Israelson** recommends:

**The Last Lecture** by Randy Pausch

"A lot of professors give talks titled 'The Last Lecture.' Professors are asked to consider their demise and to ruminate on what matters most to them. When Randy Pausch, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon, was asked to give such a lecture, he didn't have to imagine it as his last, since he had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer." (Product description) (see review in Fall 2008 Bookwatch)

**Jeff Namiotka** recommends:

**Fiasco** by Stanislaw Lem

"Lem, a philosopher and science fiction writer, possessed a genius that was simply staggering. He is a demanding author – his books are not easy – but very well worth the time and attention. *Fiasco*, which tells the story of a team of human beings endeavoring to make contact with an alien species that appears to be intelligent, grapples with the questions of how (if at all) intelligence can be measured, whether or not our communication with a truly alien species would even be possible, and what we would hope to gain from such a contact. The book's conclusion is quite confusing – deliberately so, I think – and I would be eager to hear other people's interpretation of that conclusion."



**Solaris** by Stanislaw Lem

"A shorter novel dealing with the same sorts of questions addressed by *Fiasco*. This is perhaps the most famous of Lem's novels; two films have been made from it, the more recent of which starred

George Clooney. What if there was a planet out there somewhere that did not house living beings but was itself a living being? What if it was an intelligent being? A strange hypothesis? Certainly. Impossible? Perhaps not."

**Descartes' Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict between Faith and Reason** by Russell Shorto

"What I liked most about this book was the very cogent case it makes for claiming that Descartes was one of the most (if not the most) seminal thinkers in the pre-Enlightenment period; it also does not shy away from one implication of this fact, namely that there was a great deal of continuity between the late medieval period and the early Enlightenment period."



## Fiction Reviews:



**Plum Spooky** by Janet Evanovich

I admit it--over Mid-Winter Break I just read for the fun of it (no professional journals on this break!). I discovered that Janet Evanovich (author of the number books featuring bails bonds woman Stephanie Plum) came out with a new "between the numbers" book this month. If you've read any of her other "between" books, then you know the romantic sparks are not with Joe Morelli or Ranger but with Diesel. This time the mysterious Diesel recruits Stephanie to help him find his "evil-doer" cousin. Along the way, Stephanie runs into a new cast of characters (of the unmentionable variety). If you are a fan of Evanovich, this book is guaranteed to have you chuckling if not laughing out loud. (Review by Holly Bunt)

**The Tenderness of Wolves** by Stef Penney

This intriguing story takes place in the wilds of northern 19<sup>th</sup>-century Canada. More than a story about wolves, it is about rugged and timeless people and how they interact and face problems and challenges in a lawless land. A gruesome murder takes place and a teenager disappears. Footprints leave a trail through the snowy, Canadian landscape as the adventure unfolds in this great winter mystery. A good book to read by a warm fire in the dead of winter. (Review by Sue Donnelly)

**Die With Me** by Elena Forbes

First-time author, Elena Forbes, has written a well-paced story. The police discover the body of a 14-year-old girl in a deserted church. At first the death is thought to be an accident, but a witness reports seeing the girl kissing an older man in the churchyard. Now it becomes murder as the investigator is soon able to link other similar deaths--and suddenly the police are faced with finding "The Bridegroom." How the police capture this serial killer is a great read! (Review by Jane Spencer)

**Exiles** by Ron Hansen

In December 1875, the steamship Deutschland left Germany for America. On board were 5 young German Catholic nuns who, having been exiled by Bismarck, were coming to America to lead a Catholic order in the western part of the U.S. The ship ran aground in a storm on the Thames and more than 60 on board including the nuns were killed. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote his famous ode, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, about this event. Hopkins own life story is interwoven with the details of this famous disaster. (Review by Melissa Slager)

**Child 44** by Tom Rob Smith

Recommended in our last issue by Dan Dyer, this is an outstanding novel set in Stalinist Russia in the 1950's. This suspenseful thriller provides an outstanding plot full of twists and turns and political intrigue, riveting characters, and a look into the Stalinist regime that will chill you to the bones. Former war hero and loyalist MGB (State Security) agent Leo Stepanovic Demidov begins to question his role and the State when he refuses to denounce his wife as a traitor and then discovers what appear to be multiple murders of children killed in the same gruesome fashion. In Stalinist Russia there is no murder according to the State—and to question that position is to be labeled a traitor. Never a dull moment in this gripping debut novel... (Review by Jacque Miller)

**I Am the Messenger** by Markus Zusak

Nineteen-year-old Ed Kennedy, whose only ambitions are making enough money as a cab driver to pay the rent and hanging out with his friends playing cards at night, is in love with his best friend, but she won't let the relationship go any further because she does not want to lose him as a friend. Ed's rather unremarkable life changes when he finds himself an unexpected hero one day when he stands up to a bank robber. After that day, Ed begins to get playing cards in the mail with clues on them for Ed to solve. This mystery, by the author of *The Book Thief*, is fast-paced and keeps you guessing up until the very end of the book. (Review by Kim Barsella)

**The Associate** by John Grisham

It's no surprise that John Grisham's latest novel, *The Associate*, is about a wet-behind-the-ears lawyer embroiled in a convoluted plot that could get him disbarred. However, with that said, I still enjoyed Grisham's fictional inside peek at the world of associates working in the largest law firm in the world. The storyline has several suspense-filled moments as you wonder, "How exactly is this young lawyer going to get himself out of this mess?" (Review by Holly Bunt)



**The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo** by Steig Larsson

The first in a trilogy, acclaimed Swedish author Larsson's thriller is a well-crafted effort with fascinating characters and intriguing plots that intertwine and keep the reader on the edge of his seat. The story opens with well-respected magazine publisher and financial reporter, Mikael Blomkvist, receiving a three-month jail sentence and fine for libeling a shady businessman. What happened and why didn't he defend himself during the trial? Trying to decide what to do next as his career disintegrates, a wealthy Swedish captain of industry, Henrik Vanger, approaches him with an intriguing offer—try to find who murdered his niece forty years ago. The bait? Proof that will help Blomkvist exonerate himself... Blomkvist accepts the offer and eventually the assistance of a rather strange, but highly effective "researcher", Lisbeth Salander—the girl with the dragon tattoo.

(Review by Jacque Miller)

**Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist** by David Levithan and Rachel Cohn

Nick asks Norah if she will be his girlfriend for the next five minutes and Norah, who has nothing better to do, decides to take Nick up on his offer. Following Nick and Norah through the rest of the evening, their story unfolds in chapters that go back and forth between Nick's and Nora's versions of the night. Riddled with teen angst, the book is not for everyone. However, those following the punk music scene will be delighted by all of the references to that music genre. (Review by Kim Barsella)

# Non-Fiction Reviews:

## *The Tenth Muse: My Life in Food* by Judith Jones

Cookbook editor Judith Jones takes the reader on a culinary journey as she describes her work with some of the world's greatest chefs including Julia Child, James Beard, and Paul Prudhomme. Additionally, she includes her experience as a young editor at Knopf when she was instrumental in bringing *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* to the U.S. as well as stories of some of her other "conquests" as editor, authors such as John Updike and Ann Tyler. The emphasis is on, however, her editorial and cooking experiences with the great chefs.

(Review by Melissa Slager)



## *The Middle Place* by Kelly Corrigan



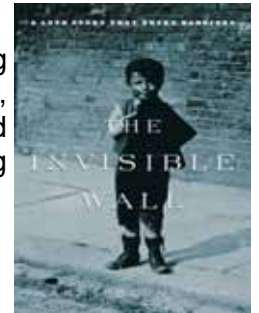
Like many of us who are thirty and forty-something, Corrigan is in the middle place--parenting her own children and still needing and wanting the love and support of her parents. In a familiar voice that is at times hysterical and heart-breaking, Corrigan's memoir relates her 36<sup>th</sup> year when her father is faced with a life-threatening illness and she is diagnosed with breast cancer. George Corrigan is not just her father but also her hero and her cheerleader—and the namesake of her first-born, Georgia. As Corrigan faces mortality in this chronicle of both her diagnosis and her father's treatment, she finds solace in childhood memories of growing up in suburban Philadelphia with her father, mother, and her two older lacrosse-playing brothers. I personally connected with her story about "The Guess Jeans War of 1984," but all of her stories have stayed with me. Highly recommended--don't miss it! (Review by Paula Campanelli)



## *The Invisible Wall* by Harry Bernstein

A wonderful memoir for readers who enjoy reading books about real people and how they interact with their surroundings, neighbors and family, managing to face lives wracked with poverty, adversity and sociological circumstances beyond their control. This memoir is also a love story that "broke barriers." I recommend this amazing tale written by a gifted writer who just so happened to be in his 90s when he wrote it.

(Review by Sue Donnelly)



## *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from an Unfinished War* by Tony Horwitz

This is the third book I've read by the Pulitzer-Prize winning author and it is my favorite. What an insightful look at the Civil War and the issues that still resound deeply in much of the country today. As in his other books, Horwitz investigates his subject on the road, in this case, going to battlefields and other locations that played pivotal parts in the Civil War. For some of his visits, he is accompanied by a "hardcore" Civil War enthusiast—one of a select few who transform their weekends and vacations into "living the life" of a Civil War soldier as close as possible—while scorning the casual weekend Civil War enactors who don't really leave the modern day world behind. Horwitz weaves the modern day perceptions of the Civil War from an wide assortment of personalities with historical facts, showing once again that history is often conveniently modified to fit the beliefs and agendas of the living... An exceptional look at an devastating period of American history. Highly recommended. (Review by Jacque Miller)

