

**DANA HALL SCHOOL 2005 FACULTY & STAFF
SUMMER READING BIBLIOGRAPHY**

CULTURE & RACE

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress, Dai Sijie

Set during China's Cultural Revolution in 1960s and 70s, this charming and poignant novel follows two young, learned men who are banished to a tiny peasant village where they are to be "re-educated." They are denied all intellectual stimulation until they discover a suitcase filled with "forbidden" books, including the works of many famous European authors such as Balzac, Dumas, and Dickens. The books allow them not only to escape their surroundings but also to fall in love with and woo a young woman in the village, the Little Chinese Seamstress. (Jenny Heath)

Interpreter of Maladies, Jhumpa Lahiri

The past few years have seen a number of fine writers springing from India--some living on the subcontinent and others, like the author of this collection of stories, who live elsewhere but whose work is still imbued with Indian culture and sensibilities. In varying degrees, Lahiri explores "Indianness" in all her stories, wherever they are set. Some, such as "A Real Durwan," take place in urban settings in or near Calcutta. Others deal with immigrants at different stages on the road to assimilation. In "A Temporary Matter," Lahiri's sensitive and subtle portrayal of a troubled marriage, the fact that the couple is Indian seems almost incidental. In the title story, Mr. and Mrs. Das, both born in America, are taking their children to visit India for the first time. One of Lahiri's gifts is the ability to use different eyes and voices. (Mary Ellen Quinn, *Booklist*)

The Kite Runner, Khaled Hosseini

Hosseini's debut novel opens in Kabul in the mid-1970s. Amir is the son of a wealthy man, but his best friend is Hassan, the son of one of his father's servants. His father encourages the friendship and dotes on Hassan, who worships the ground Amir walks on. But Amir is envious of Hassan and his own father's apparent affection for the boy. Amir is not nearly as loyal to Hassan, and one day, when he comes across a group of local bullies raping Hassan, he does nothing. Shamed by his own inaction, Amir pushes Hassan away, even going so far as to accuse him of stealing. Eventually, Hassan and his father are forced to leave. Years later, Amir, now living in America, receives a visit from an old family friend who gives him an opportunity to make amends for his treatment of Hassan. Current events will garner interest for this novel; the quality of Hosseini's writing and the emotional impact of the story will guarantee its longevity. (Kristine Hunte, *Booklist*)

The Known World, Edward P. Jones

In one of the most acclaimed novels in recent memory, Jones tells the story of Henry Townsend, a black farmer and former slave who falls under the tutelage of William Robbins, the most powerful man in Manchester County, Virginia. Making certain he never circumvents the law, Townsend runs his affairs with unusual discipline. But when death takes him unexpectedly, his widow, Caldonia, can't uphold the estate's order and chaos ensues. In a daring and ambitious novel, Jones has woven a footnote of history into an epic that takes an unflinching look at slavery in all of its moral complexities. *The Known World* won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. (Amazon.com)

NECTAR & AMBROSIA

The Art of Eating, M.F.K. Fisher

A collection of essays by one of America's best-known food writers, that are often more autobiographical or historical than anecdotal musings on food preparation and consumption. The book includes culinary advice to World War II housewives plagued by food shortages, portraits of family members and friends (with all their idiosyncrasies) and notes on her studies at the University of Dijon, in France. Through each story she weaves her love of food and passion for cooking, and illustrates that our three basic needs as human beings--love, food and security--are so intermingled that it is difficult to think of one without the others. (Amazon.com)

Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood, Koren Zailckas

Zailckas doesn't have the "genetically based reaction to alcohol that addiction counselors call 'a disease.'" But throughout her adolescence and early adulthood, she abused alcohol heavily: "I drank for the explicit purpose of getting drunk, getting brave, or medicating my moods." Her first sips of hard liquor, before she started high school, hit her with the force of a crush-- "as hopeful and as heartbreaking as kissing a boy." By the time she entered Syracuse University, she had already been hospitalized for alcohol poisoning, and her binge drinking through college, wholly supported by the Greek system, contributed to heartbreaking, empty sexual encounters and difficulty relating to anyone without "the third wheel" of alcohol. Zailckas muses about the societal factors that contribute to the astonishing rise in women's drinking. Most unnerving, though, are her honest, detailed accounts of her own profound abuse, which was accepted, encouraged, and chillingly commonplace; thousands of young women share her story. A raw, eye-opening memoir. (Gillian Engberg, *Booklist*)

Toast: The Story of a Boy's Hunger, Nigel Slater

Slater, celebrated in Britain for his food columns in London's *Observer*, recalls his childhood in great and moving detail, interweaving his hunt for oral gratification with prose portraits of his family. His mother, utterly devoted to him yet something of a kitchen klutz, could not make up for the physical abuse that burst from his conflicted father. Slater's mother's early demise and his father's remarriage to the family's cleaning woman did little to enhance the sensitive lad's self-image. What joy the boy found stemmed from occasional culinary successes out of his mother's kitchen and from an endless, stereotypically English cascade of sweets. Readers of Slater's accounts of eating out in the 1960s may come to believe that the British really invented fast food, something for which Americans generally shoulder blame. Slater's hunger for both food and human love are achingly recorded. (Mark Knoblauch, *Booklist*)

Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia, Marya Hornbacher

Why, Hornbacher asks in this profoundly distressing chronicle of her struggle with eating disorders, do so many young women suffer from self-hatred, a mania for being thin, and the twisted sense of power self-starvation engenders? Hornbacher entered with the realm of the body-obsessed at the precocious age of nine, came a frail heartbeat away from dying in her teens, and now, at age 23, has the gumption to tell her wrenching story in an effort to expose the societal roots of this complex disease. In spite of coming of age during the 1980s, an allegedly sophisticated and open-minded time, she was denied the same basic information about puberty, sexuality, and self-respect that women have always been denied, a crime made even more deplorable by virtue of the media's glorification of thinness. Hornbacher's severe illness was willfully ignored by every adult in her life, from her parents to her therapists, a failure to recognize the severity of her self-destructiveness appalling in its implications. Hornbacher's courage and candor may help solve the riddle of why young women punish themselves for being female. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

SCHOOL STORIES

Family Matters: How Schools Can Cope with the Crisis in Childrearing, Robert Evans

Too many Americans are eager to blame the media or teachers for their children's failure to learn. In *Family Matters* Rob Evans has the courage to tell the simple truth: parents in America are abdicating their responsibilities. They are not sending children to school who are ready to learn, and educators are being overwhelmed by the behavioral problems and emotional needs of under-parented children. In this persuasive and powerful book, Dr. Evans cuts through our national denial and offers both a hardheaded analysis of our parenting failures and realistic school-based solutions to these problems. (Michael Thompson)

Losing My Faculties: A Teacher's Story, Brendan Halpin

A 10-year veteran of the Boston Public School system, Halpin shares his recollections with the kind of humor and affection reserved for a family scrapbook. Starting with his days as an exploited (read "free") student teacher, Halpin describes the trepidation he felt at entering a classroom for the first time and his often failed attempts to keep his rambunctious students focused on the business of learning. He shares his most fallible moments (like when a student nails him with a basketball during a lesson and he fails to respond.) We feel his frustration when, exhausted from trying to commute more than 50 miles to work and still come up with daily lesson plans, he breaks down crying to his wife, fearful he'll never measure up. How gratifying it is, then, to witness his golden moments in the classroom when he connects with his students, and they respond in turn with enthusiasm and ideas. A joyous trek through the memories of one dedicated teacher. (Terry Glover, *Booklist*)

Prep: A Novel, Curtis Sittenfeld

The world was so big!" 17-year-old Lee thinks in wonder as she prepares to graduate from Ault, the tony East Coast prep school that provides the setting for this bittersweet coming-of-age novel. A scholarship student from South Bend, Indiana, the relentlessly introspective and self-absorbed Lee has always regarded herself as an invisible outsider, "one of the mild, boring, peripheral girls." No wonder she's astonished when the most popular boy in class shows up in her bedroom one night, and they begin an increasingly intimate affair that lasts throughout their senior year. Saving the book from formula are some fine writing and assorted shrewd insights into both the psychology of adolescence and the privileged world of a traditional prep school. (Michael Cart, *Booklist*)

Where Girls Come First: The Rise, Fall, and Surprising Revival of Girls' Schools, Ilana DeBare

This timely overview of the history of girls' schools in the U.S. coincides with the recent resurgence in the popularity of single-sex education. The author, one of the founders of the Julia Morgan School for Girls in Oakland, California, takes a fascinating glance backward, recounting the lives and times of the revolutionary educators--male and female alike--who labored long and hard to establish educational opportunities for women. Interestingly enough, though most girls' schools began as daring nineteenth-century experiments, many eventually atrophied into glorified finishing schools in the staid 1950s or were branded as outdated or irrelevant in the radical 1960s. Though they seemed to die a natural death, recent studies have suggested that single-sex schools enhance confidence and empower young women to assume leadership positions in all areas of professional and personal life. Given the fact that interest in this subject is booming, there will be an eager audience for this enlightening retrospective on a hot contemporary topic. (Margaret Flanagan, *Booklist*)

SCIENCE MATTERS

Ecology of a Cracker Childhood, Janisse Ray

Even though the vast and now legendary longleaf pine forests that once covered south Georgia had been cut down before she was born, Ray feels as though she has walked within their green filtered light. This knowledge must be genetic, she muses, since her clannish people, called crackers, have lived on this flat and sun-pressed land for 180 years. She explores the complex connection between earth and blood in a spellbinding memoir that entwines family, cultural, and natural history. A tomboy in spite of her strict Apostolic upbringing, Ray always loved the outdoors, although her surroundings were hardly pristine: her family lived in a junkyard and made their modest livelihood as scavengers. Ray describes the junkyard games she and her siblings played and recounts riveting stories from her grandparents' and parents' demanding lives, tales of colossal physical strength, towering faith, unfailing love, and, sadly, mental illness. Ray compares human dramas to the lives of plants and animals and ponders our habits of both abusing nature and praising its beauty. (Donna Seaman, *Booklist*)

Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees, Roger Fouts

Can chimpanzees talk? As Fouts explains in this fascinating account, the answer to this question is no. But if the question is rephrased as, Can chimpanzees communicate using nonverbal language? the answer is a resounding yes. In the late 1960s, Washoe, a female chimpanzee, was taught American Sign Language in a groundbreaking study. Fouts was involved with Project Washoe from the beginning, and this account of the experiment and its aftermath reads like a novel. The ups (such as Washoe's inventions of novel signs or names for things) and downs (working with an unpredictable and arrogant senior scientist) of the unfolding story are intertwined with the scientific theories and concepts that underlie all the research being described. By comparing Washoe's behavior in captivity with both the behavior of wild chimpanzees and with autistic children, Fouts leads readers through complex scientific concepts while entertaining them with Washoe's (and his own) stories. What makes this book an exceptional popularization of scientific research is the authors' ability to charm with a fascinating story while also teaching *why* the story is so fascinating. (Nancy Bent, *Booklist*)

A Short History of Nearly Everything, Bill Bryson

Confessing to an aversion to science dating to his 1950s school days, Bryson here writes for those of like mind, perhaps out of guilt about his lack of literacy on the subject. Bryson reports he has been doing penance by reading popular-science literature published in the past decade or two, and buttonholing a few science authors. The authors Bryson talks to are invariably enthusiasts who, despite their eminence, never look on his questions as silly but, rather, view them as welcome indicators of interest and curiosity. Making science less intimidating is Bryson's essential selling point as he explores an atom; a cell; light; the age and fate of the earth; the origin of human beings. Bryson's organization is historical and his prose heavy on humanizing anecdotes about the pioneers of physics, chemistry, geology, biology, evolution and paleontology, or cosmology. To those acquainted with the popular-science writing Bryson has digested, his repackaging is a trip down memory lane, but to his fellow science-phobes, Bryson's tour has the same eye-opening quality to wonder and amazement as his wildly popular travelogues. (Gilbert Taylor, *Booklist*)

Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood, Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks's luminous memoir charts the growth of a mind. Born in 1933 into a family of formidably intelligent London Jews, he discovered the wonders of the physical sciences early from his parents and their flock of brilliant siblings, most notably "Uncle Tungsten" (real name, Dave), who "manufactured lightbulbs with filaments of fine tungsten wire." Metals were the substances that first attracted young Oliver, and his descriptions of their colors, textures, and properties are as sensuous and romantic as an art lover's

rhapsodies over an Old Master. Seamlessly interwoven with his personal recollections is a masterful survey of scientific history, with emphasis on the great chemists like Robert Boyle, Antoine Lavoisier, and Humphry Davy (Sacks's personal hero). Yet this is not a dry intellectual autobiography; his parents in particular, both doctors, are vividly sketched. His sociable father loved house calls and "was drawn to medicine because its practice was central in human society," while his shy mother "had an intense feeling for structure ... for her [medicine] was part of natural history and biology." For young Oliver, unhappy at the brutal boarding school he was sent to during the war, and afraid that he would become mentally ill like his older brother, chemistry was a refuge in an uncertain world. He would outgrow his passion for metals and become a neurologist, but as readers of *Awakenings* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* know, he would never leave behind his conviction that science is a profoundly human endeavor. (Wendy Smith, *Amazon.com*)

Compiled by Liz Gray
Library Director
Dana Hall School
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