

Staff Picks

Spring 2014



Fiction

***Beautiful Ruins*, by Jess Walter.** A funny, quirky read with flowing language and gorgeous settings. We follow the flawed, yet sympathetic characters -- some glamorous, some not -- through 50 years as they search for love and meaning in life, and find that each has at least one redeeming characteristic. A movie based on the book is currently in production. *Davonne's pick*

***The Fault in Our Stars*, by John Green.** Sixteen-year-old Hazel has incurable cancer and grudgingly attends a Cancer Kid Support Group to appease her mother, and meets heartthrob Augustus Water, which changes the course of her young life. A heart-rending yet witty novel that explores the important questions of life and death in a straightforward manner. Winner of the 2013 Children's Choice Teen Book of the Year Award and soon to be a movie. *Davonne's pick*

***The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd:** Historical fiction at its best, Ms. Kidd tells the story of the Grimke sisters, champions of abolition and women's rights in the 1830's who hailed from Charleston, South Carolina. She narrates the story through the voice of Sarah, the elder of the sisters, and the young slave girl, Handful, given to Sarah when both girls are 11. Sarah is so repulsed by the gift, and by "that peculiar institution", that she tries to free the slave girl immediately. Her father refuses her decree, so her revenge is to teach Handful to read. There is much more in this remarkable story based on the Grimke sisters' letters and newspaper accounts of the time. *Judith's pick*

***Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline:** The **Orphan Train Movement** was a supervised welfare program that transported orphaned and homeless children from crowded Eastern cities of the United States to foster homes located largely in rural areas of the Midwest. The orphan trains operated between 1853 and 1929, relocating about 250,000 orphaned, abandoned, or homeless children. This novel is an interesting approach to describing the Orphan Train Movement in which a young foster care child makes friends with an elderly lady who, as an orphaned immigrant, was shipped from New York City to the Midwest on an orphan train. *Roger's pick*

***Mr. Penumbra's 24-hour Bookstore* by Robin Sloan.** The best books carry the reader into a world where it is no longer possible (unless one has a search-engine at hand) to tell fiction from reality. In this book, it may be easy to pick out the fiction (first off, could there really be a bookstore with bookshelves that go three stories high-minus the stories?). The reality may be harder to discern (was there or wasn't there ever a printer named Aldus Manutius?). It is apparent straight off that there may be some fantasy involved in this story (or not), but the plot also revolves around conspiracy, technology, and friendship, with a big puzzle in the middle of it all. I listened to this book while traveling, and found it to be a delightful way to cover miles. Plus, the audiobook contains a surprise toward the end that is not possible to present in print form. This is a fable for the Age of Google. *Beth's Pick.*

***The Pursuit of Mary Bennet* by Pamela Mingle:** In yet another sequel to *Pride & Prejudice*, this novel centers on the serious and unpolished middle sister, Mary. Long overshadowed by her beautiful and confident older sisters and the flirtatious younger ones, Mary grows into a respectable young woman who's about to face choices that will define her future. When separated and pregnant, Lydia returns home to Longbourn, Mary and Kitty then move in with Jane and her husband. That's where Henry Walsh tests Mary's skills at the game of love. This is a delightful story of a woman's search for acceptance and identity and a man's quest for her affections. *Beth's pick.*

***On Such a Full Sea* by Chang-rae Lee:** This novel is set in a future where a long-declining American society is strictly stratified by class. Long-abandoned urban neighborhoods have become self-contained labor colonies. The members of the labor class are descendants of those brought over years earlier from China. In this world lives Fan, a female fish-tank diver, who leaves her settlement when the man she loves mysteriously disappears. Fan's journey to find him takes her out of the safety of her settlement. Lee proves himself to be a very skilled writer. *Sarah's pick.*

***Perfect* by Rachel Joyce:** This is a beautifully written novel that is hard to put down. Perfect's narrative alternates between the perspectives of Byron, a young boy living in the British countryside in 1972, and Jim, a man with crippling obsessive-compulsive disorder who lives in the same area during the modern day. Joyce unfolds the connection between the two characters in such a way that she creates a unique and meaningful tale. Although sad, Joyce's messages—about the limitations of time and control, the failures of adults and the fears of children, and our responsibility for our own imprisonment and freedom—have a ring of truth to them. *Sarah's pick*

***The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion:** What a delightful debut novel from the land "downunder". Don Tillman is brilliant yet socially challenged (Asperger's spectrum) professor of genetics who decides he wants to find a wife; he develops a sixteen page survey to weed out the unsuitable. Enter Rosie Jarman, who is completely unsuitable but has a genetics quest. As the two begin the evidence gathering necessary to find Rosie's biological father, Don is attracted to Rosie despite her many disqualifying characteristics. Their conversations are hilarious. Davonne was reminded of Sheldon, a character from *The Big Bang Theory*. I loved the insight into the way Don's mind works, and the proof, in the end, that love is NOT logical. *Judith and Davonne's pick*

***The Testament of Mary* by Colm Toibin:** This riveting audiobook is Mary's account of the life of her son. It is one woman's perspective on what her son chose to do with his life and how he died. It gives a mother's perspective that is provocative, haunting and indelible. Meryl Streep's performance brings the words to life brilliantly. *Linda's Pick CD FIC Toib*

Non-Fiction

***David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, by Malcolm Gladwell.** 155.24 Glad -- An interesting interpretation of the well-known Bible story, David & Goliath, which challenges commonly held beliefs about obstacles including discrimination, disabilities as well as other difficulties in life. As in his other books such as *The Tipping Point*, he points to history and psychology to illustrate his opinion, and tells great stories along the way. Gladwell also discusses these ideas in a TED Talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_the_unheard_story_of_david_and_goliath
Davonne's pick

***Happier at Home* by Gretchen Rubin** 158 Rubi: With the stress of day to day schedules and routines, I was failing to appreciate the amount of happiness that was in my own home, so I picked up this book. It was an unexpected delightful read that is a blend of memoir, science, philosophy, and experimentation. Each month, Rubin tackles a different theme as she experiments with concrete, manageable resolutions, such as possessions, marriage, time, and parenthood. It truly does inspire readers to find more happiness in their own homes. *Sarah's pick*

***Her: a Memoir*, by Christa Parravani.** Bio Parr -- A grief-stricken, painful, and unvarnished memoir relating the experience of Christa Parravani when her twin dies. After a long, wrenching journey, the story leads to hope and healing. The book is listed on Library Journal's Best of 2013 Memoirs.
Davonne's pick

***The Reason I Jump* by Naoki Higashida (Forward by David Mitchell)** 616.8588 Higa: April is National Autism Awareness month, and so it is a good time to read this book written in 2007 by a 13 year-old Japanese boy who is severely autistic. Although there is a saying that "If you meet one autistic person....you have met one autistic person", I found that some of what Naoki wrote helps me to better understand my autistic nephew. The book (after the insightful forward by Mitchell, himself the father of an autistic son) is written mostly in a question and answer format. Though Naoki uses the pronouns "we" and "us" in describing how people with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) feel and react to things, he is speaking out of his own experience. Still, this book goes a long way in increasing understanding and compassion for those who live with the disorder. *Beth's Pick*

***Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope and Repair*, by Anne Lamott,** 204.4 Lamo -- Full of witty, pertinent, and sometimes self-deprecating stories, Lamott offers insights into coping with the mistakes and tragedies of life, finding meaning living each day "stitch by stitch." *Davonne's pick*

***The Wonder of Aging: A New Approach to Embracing Life After Fifty* by Michael Gurian** 613.2 Guri: Gurian breaks life after 50 into three eras: "Age of Transformation(50-65), Age of Distinction (65-80), and Age of Completion" (80 - ??). He talks about the physical and hormonal changes for both men and women, and presents solid scientific research behind the biology of these changes. Rather than be in mourning for loss of our youth, Gurian challenges us to embrace the next several decades - if we are lucky enough to have them - with passion and joy. Given our youth oriented culture, this book is a welcome balm of encouragement. *Judith's pick*