



30-2

English Language Arts

**Authorized Novels and Nonfiction
Annotated List**



ALICIA: MY STORY

Alicia Appleman-Jurman

"I felt that old sickening feeling again, and pure hatred for those people. My God, I thought, you people feed me, visit with me, suffer with me for a week, and at the first opportunity you betray me to the Germans. May you all burn in hell, every one of you!" p. 232

In *Alicia: My Story*, Alicia, an adolescent Polish Jew, suffers the horrors of living and trying to survive under the Nazis. She sees her mother murdered, and experiences terrible hardships while hiding from the Nazis and their collaborators. Through luck, street sense, and the help of many good people, she is able to hide, survive and maintain her faith in the family and the essential goodness of people. Eventually, she organizes and leads a group who settle in the Palestine region. Later, she marries an American and moves to the United States.

This vivid personal account of survival, and great personal courage, deals with atrocities committed for racial and ethnic reasons; an account of man's inhumanity to man. The topic, by its very nature, may be sensitive in some communities. Teachers should also be aware that this lengthy biography contains some stereotyping of Germans and Ukrainians.

Alicia Appleman-Jurman's autobiography, however, has the potential to broaden understanding and sensitivity to personal sufferings and to holocaust events. While chapters are short, the book may be most appropriate for small group or individual study.

New York, NY: Bantam Books,
1990
[original 1988]

ISBN 0553282182

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Erich Maria Remarque

In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Paul Baumer, a German schoolboy, enlists with his classmates in World War I. Although youthful and optimistic, they lose their childhood, their connection to humankind, and their lives, through years of horror. Paul tries to fight against the hate that destroys all the young people regardless of country or uniform.

Preservation of life and the overcoming of prejudices are the main themes of the novel. The destructive powers of war, both mental and physical, are depicted through the many hardships the soldiers endure. Their struggles are heroic and universal. Classroom discussions can be enriched by the realization that people everywhere are similar, no matter what war they are fighting or cause they are defending.

As in all war stories, there is profanity, violence, sexuality and stereotyping, all necessary for the framework of the novel's setting. War is violent and destructive, and these young boys initially respond in a similar manner, but they also mature, realizing the senselessness of violence and death, and become aware of the need for greater tolerance and understanding in the world.

This novel relates well to the social studies curriculum and is appropriate for full class study.

"It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us...." p. 223

New York, NY: Fawcett
Crest, 1982
[original 1928]

ISBN 0449213943

BUSH PILOT WITH A BRIEFCASE: THE HAPPY-GO-LUCKY STORY OF GRANT McCONACHIE

Ronald A. Keith



“There were damn few breaks in the drab routine. Meals were served at the fish company’s cook-house. Good food, lots of meat. Nobody ate fish. The pilots did the cabin housekeeping, which meant sweeping the plank floor once a week. They hauled cordwood from the cook-house woodpile and melted snow in a tub on the stove for drinking, bathing and brewing coffee. In the evening, the crews played bridge or read in the flickering yellow light of the kerosene lamps.” p. 115

Bush Pilot with a Briefcase is the engaging biography of Grant McConachie. From his youth in Edmonton to, at age 38, his rise to president of Canadian Pacific Airlines, and through his continuing escapades, Grant McConachie was an irrepressible figure. As an early bush pilot flying over the rugged and dangerous northland, his ebullient self-assurance, sheer force of personality, and luck, enabled a meteoric rise to the top.

Written in a well-paced and colourful style, this is an easy, absorbing read. Despite careful focus on McConachie, the result seems more a surface treatment than an analytical study. The book illustrates the effects of personal relationships and the force of personality in achieving success.

Markham, ON: PaperJacks Ltd.,
1973
[original 1972]

ISBN 0770102093

THE CHOSEN

Chaim Potok

The Chosen is a story of friendship that develops when two Jewish boys are rivals during a baseball game. Reuven Malter is an Orthodox Jew; Danny Saunders is a Hasidic Jew and oldest son of his sect's rebbi. In spite of their religious differences, the two develop a strong bond of love and friendship that is able to survive all adversity. The story not only revolves around their friendship, but also examines the difficulties faced when the desires of a child do not match the desires that parents and culture place on the individual. A central question of the novel is: Should the individual sacrifice personal desires to the aspirations of the community?

Students may require extensive background information on the differences between Orthodox and Hasidic Jews. Furthermore, students need to understand that the Hasidic Jews do not represent the mainstream of Jewish thought and belief.

This is an excellent novel for the study of character and how society helps define who and what an individual is.

"I went away and cried to the Master of the Universe, 'What have you done to me? A mind like this I need for a son? A heart I need for a son, a soul I need for a son, compassion I want from my son, righteousness, mercy, strength to suffer and carry pain, that I want from my son, not a mind without a soul!'" p. 264

New York, NY: Fawcett
Crest, 1982
[original 1967]

ISBN 0449213447

CROW LAKE

Mary Lawson



“Love goes deeper than anything else, I guess. It gets to the core of you, and when Daniel got to the core of me I found that Matt and Luke and Bo were there too. They were part of me. In spite of years apart I still knew their faces better than my own. Anything I knew of love, I had learned from them.”
pp. 193–194

Crow Lake is set in a northern Ontario farming community and the labs of University of Toronto. Narrator Kate Morrison is a zoologist in her late twenties who lives for her hero, her brother Matt. The book portrays realistic family battles and a painful past that gets in the way of Kate’s relationship with another boy, Daniel. Eventually, Kate learns to change her views and becomes a survivor of sorts.

Lawson’s novel is about misunderstandings, sibling love, repressed resentment, loyalty, emotional isolation, and surviving poverty and tragedy. *Crow Lake* will resonate for rural readers in particular, because of the setting and culture, but it has appeal for all students. It is a realistic and honest novel about family. It is ideal for teaching about character and conflict, and for generating both personal and critical responses. Teachers should be aware that this novel contains scenes of domestic violence and abuse, sexual relationships, and coarse language that may trouble some readers.

Toronto, ON: Random House
of Canada Ltd., 2003
Delta Book edition
[original 2002]
291 pages

ISBN 0–385–33763–9

DEATH AND DELIVERANCE

Robert Mason Lee



Death and Deliverance is about a military transport airplane that crashed on October 31, 1991, 10 miles short of its destination, Alert, North West Territories. Fourteen people survived the crash to face a bitter arctic storm with little protection. Hampered by weather and inadequate and outdated equipment, Canadian search and rescue technicians, or Sartechs, risked their own lives to save the survivors. A number of Edmontonians were involved in the crash and the rescue.

This intensely personal account reveals the thoughts, feelings and dreams of the survivors and their rescuers during the three tense days between leaving the south and arriving in Alert. The occasional use of vulgar language is realistic in time, character and situation. This easy-to-read survival story may be especially appealing to male students or to those who enjoy plentiful technical details.

“My boys are going nuts back here. You’ve got to get us over the site. Those bastards are going to waltz in and beat us to it.’... Frigging Americans! ... Of course the Americans would get in. They had the technology. They’d pull off the most daring rescue in Canadian history, and his SARtechs would be bystanders.” p. 215

Toronto: MacFarlane Walter & Ross, 1992

ISBN 0921912498

DOWNHILL CHANCE

Donna Morrissey



“... I don’t mean to make big of myself, Clair, for I’m no more than your father, carrying around a piece of hell as though it were separate from the other. But I’ve not lost sight of it, lovely, like your father did. He lost sight of his good and became caught in the other. And that’s what killed him.” p. 397

Downhill Chance is the tale of the Osmonds and the Gales—two families in crisis, connected by love but torn apart by secrets and fears. Set in pre-Confederation Newfoundland during and after World War II, the book is a realistic comic melodrama about ordinary folk written in lively, informal, sensuous language. The book’s colourful vocabulary (e.g., scroop, slouse) is a wonderful realization of Maritime–Canadian regionalism and dialect.

Downhill Chance is a long but lively book about passion, love, family secrets, childhood and maturity, good and evil, tragedy, optimism, and reconciliation. Students will find this a reasonable challenge yielding worthwhile insights into family, relationships and turning points.

Toronto, ON:
Penguin Books Canada Ltd.,
2002
Penguin Books edition
428 pages

ISBN 0–14–303360–3

ENDURANCE: SHACKLETON'S INCREDIBLE VOYAGE

Alfred Lansing

Written by a veteran journalist, *Endurance* is a gripping, intense and suspenseful read. Ernest Shackleton was the famous Antarctic explorer, whose boat, Endurance, became locked in ice, drifting until it was crushed. After five months of staying with the ship, the crew set out in lifeboats to head 850 miles to the nearest outpost. Incredibly, all of Shackleton's men were saved. This definitive, illustrated account is composed of diaries by team members and interviews with survivors.

Thematically, this book is about survival against tremendous odds and the importance of hope and determination in achieving survival. *Endurance* is also memorable for its accounts of the crew's boredom, hunger, lack of creature comforts, and numerous setbacks. The book contains some profane language within the historical context of the crew members' diaries.

This text can be easily supported by numerous other books and movies available on this popular topic. Students may be inspired to conduct Web searches or other research related to this remarkable story.

"They made a pitiable sight—three little boats, packed with odd remnants of what had once been a proud expedition, bearing twenty-eight suffering men in one final, almost ludicrous bid for survival. But this time there was to be no turning back, and they all knew it."
p. 160

New York, NY:
Carroll & Graf Publishers,
2002
Avalon edition
[original 1959]
280 pages

ISBN 0-7867-0621-X

FAHRENHEIT 451

Ray Bradbury

“Montag’s hand closed like a mouth, crushed the book with wild devotion, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were hurling shovelfuls of magazines into the dusty air. They fell like slaughtered birds and the woman stood below, like a small girl, among the bodies. Montag had done nothing. His hand had done it all, his hand, with a brain of its own, with a conscience and a curiosity in each trembling finger, had turned thief.” p. 36

In *Fahrenheit 451*, a speculative fiction work, the state controls all thinking. The general theme is that “Books are bad. Books are burned because books are ideas.” The protagonist, Guy Montag, is a fireman whose job is to burn books. Complications arise in Montag’s professional and personal life when, out of curiosity, he steals a book from a burning library and is subsequently denounced by his wife and workmates. He escapes to a faraway land where books are preserved in an amazing manner.

The ideology of state-controlled communication, as outlined by Montag’s fire chief, Beatty, is closer to today’s reality; e.g., information highways, than it was at the time Bradbury wrote the novel. The author equates freedom with the expansion of ideas through reading, writing and conversation.

The novel is an excellent example of social satire and should generate lively discussions by technologically astute students. Although the style is fairly simple, and the plot easily followed, the emphasis is on character study and the idea of individual choice.

New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981
[original 1953]

ISBN 0345294661

FALLEN ANGELS

Walter Dean Myers

In *Fallen Angels*, Perry, a 17-year-old black youth, has no future in Harlem, and so enlists in the army to fight in the Vietnam war. He and his friend, Peewee, survive physically, but not before the horrors of war and the deaths of men, women and children embed themselves in their psyches. Disillusioned, Perry must find meaning in life. Realistic, harsh language reflects the violence and killing that is constantly questioned throughout the plot. The novel leads to philosophical reflections on war, as young soldiers yearn for the child within. Overcoming ethnic differences, political biases, religious beliefs, interpersonal relationships and racial hatreds are all components of the novel. However, concerns may arise when dealing with this well-written, compassionate novel. Teachers should be prepared for the controversial discussions and responses that this work may engender. Sensitivity to Vietnamese students in the classroom, school or community is strongly recommended. This is a powerful and moving novel. The composition, tempo, craft and rhythm are well-tuned and ring true. Although engrossing, fascinating and violently graphic, the male characters display blasphemy, prejudice, discrimination, sexism, despair and violent reactions within a war setting. This novel may be most appropriate for small group or individual study, or offered on an optional basis.

“The chopper came down and we handed up Lieutenant Carroll. A burnt offering. We didn’t hand him up gently through the chopper doors, we pushed him as hard as we could. It was his life, but it was our lives as well. God have mercy. We all climbed on and the chopper tilted, jerked, and was off. The door gunner kept spraying the village as we moved off into the night.” p. 127

New York, NY: Scholastic Inc., 1988

ISBN 0590409433

Awards:

Best Young Adult Book Award, American Library Association (ALA), 1988

FINDING FISH: A MEMOIR

Antwone Quenton Fisher

“So here I am, in a chair sitting outside of his office, determined to be as nice as I can, thinking maybe he’ll like me and think about keeping me. Inside, to myself, I make a promise, like a prayer, that if my father does keep me and I don’t have to go back to the Picketts, I’ll be good for the rest of my life.” p. 90

Finding Fish is a searing memoir about an African–American orphan who survived emotional abandonment, sexual abuse, orphanages, reform school, and a cruel adoptive mother to join the navy and eventually become a well-known screenwriter and producer. Fisher was a sensitive, withdrawn, but intelligent and imaginative boy whose spirit remained unbroken despite his experiences. This book recounts how he developed strategies for survival and eventually assumed control of his life. There is redemption for the long-suffering Fisher as he moves from betrayal and abuse to liberation, manhood and success.

Finding Fish deals directly with delicate, controversial issues, and, remarkably, is narrated without self-pity. Well worth the emotional challenge of reading, this unflinching memoir may be the most memorable book that some students will study in high school. Teachers are advised to approach the book cautiously and to forewarn students about its emotional impact and content, including questionable language and references to foster care, race/ethnicity and sexuality. Some teachers may prefer to use *Finding Fish* as an individual or small group novel study.

New York, NY:
HarperCollins Publishers, 2001
Perennial edition
340 pages

ISBN 0–06–000778–8

FINDING FORRESTER

James W. Ellison

Finding Forrester is about Jamal, a sixteen-year-old South Bronx African–American basketball player who gets involved in the life of Forrester, a reclusive seventy-year-old Caucasian Pulitzer Prize writer. Jamal is a gifted teen with a private passion for reading and talent as a creative writer. As Forrester provides writing instruction and helps mentor Jamal through a snobby Manhattan prep school, the two form a close attachment despite their differences in colour and age.

This book is about friendship and acceptance. It also explores the dangers of cheating and the importance of education in improving one's life. *Finding Forrester* recognizes diversity and promotes respect; as such, it lends itself to personal response and decision-making activities. The text is a novel adaptation of the popular movie by the same name.

“He took a deep breath and cracked open the top notebook ... Notes filled the margins of every page. They were written in a tiny, precise hand, and the more Jamal studied them the more struck he was with their brilliance. The man had torn his work to shreds, and yet the care and insight that had gone into his critiques were signs to Jamal that his work had value.” p. 39

New York, NY:
Newmarket Press, 2000
192 pages

ISBN 1–55704–479–1

INTO THE WILD

Jon Krakauer

“The prevailing Alaska wisdom held that McCandless was simply one more dreamy half-cocked greenhorn who went into the country expecting to find answers to all his problems and instead found only mosquitoes and a lonely death.” p. 72

Into the Wild is an eloquent nonfiction account of Chris McCandless, a well-to-do young man who ‘dropped out’ of society in 1992 and ended up dying in the Alaskan wilderness. McCandless is an unforgettable, somewhat likable character who gave his money to charity, abandoned his car, burned the cash in his wallet, and took on a new identity—that of Alexander Supertramp.

Krakauer, the author of *Into Thin Air*, first wrote an article on McCandless that was later expanded into this book. He traces the young man’s travels, interviews people who knew Chris, includes Chris’s journal entries and letters, and tells of parallel stories over the years before allowing the reader to pass final judgement on the victim. *Into the Wild* goes beyond one person’s tragedy to look at why certain male individuals feel compelled to escape society and recklessly test themselves against nature.

Krakauer examines the effects of the wilderness on imagination and decision making and the blurring of the lines between dreams and reality. The fascinating psychological profile of the hiker will be of particular interest to students taking wilderness components of physical education classes and those who have camped out or lived in the wild. Infrequent coarse language used in context in the book should not be of a concern to English Language Arts 30-2 students.

Toronto, ON:
Random House of Canada,
1997
Anchor Books edition
[original 1996]
203 pages

ISBN 0-385-48680-4

JURASSIC PARK

Michael Crichton

In *Jurassic Park*, Dr. Allan Grant and Dr. Ellie Sattler join other consultants and guests at a dinosaur theme island off the coast of Costa Rica. Dinosaurs have been cloned from Jurassic-era DNA, combined with more recent DNA from frogs. The resulting offspring develop overly aggressive characteristics leading to lots of excitement, adventure and violence, in which all the bad guys die, and all the good guys survive.

Although somewhat gruesome and violent, this futuristic novel should encourage extensive discussion on philosophical ideals, the implications of genetic and scientific research, the ethics of reproductive technology, dinosaurs, and ecosystems. These topics lend themselves to cross-curricular research, discussion or projects. The “Malcolm theory,” named after one of the novel’s scientists, provides a focus for moral and ethical discussions and observations. Either full class or small group study should elicit strong personal responses to this work.

*“Didn’t bite it—
twisted and ripped it.
Just ripped his leg
off.’ Muldoon stood
up, holding the
severed leg upside
down so the
remaining blood
dripped onto the
ferns. His bloody
hand smudged the
white sock as he
gripped the ankle.
Gennaro felt sick
again.
‘No question what
happened,’ Muldoon
was saying. ‘The
T-rex got him.’”
p. 222*

New York, NY: Ballantine
Books, 1991
[original 1990]

ISBN 0345370775

KEEPER 'N ME

Richard Wagamese



"... I lost touch with who I was pretty quick. Growing up in all-white homes, going to all-white schools, playing with all-white kids can get a guy to thinking and reacting all-white himself after a while. With no one pitching in any information I just figured I was a brown white guy."
p. 12

Keeper 'n Me is a positive story about an Aboriginal young man who finds redemption by returning to his cultural roots. When Garnet Raven was 3 years old he was removed from his home on an Ojibway reservation and placed in a series of foster homes. In his mid-teens, he escapes to the urban streets and ends up in jail at age twenty. While there, he receives a letter from his long-forgotten Aboriginal family, and decides to return to the reservation when he is released. Back on the reservation, Keeper, his grandfather and friend, becomes his personal mentor and spiritual conscience. As Keeper teaches him about the ways of the Ojibway—modern and ancient—Garnet finds peace and a sense of identity for the first time.

There are two narrators in this funny, poignant, mystical book: Garnet and Keeper, whose witty observations are printed in italics. Students will enjoy the odd, informal conversational tone of Keeper's sections and the relationship that forms between the young man and his grandfather. Most English Language Arts 30-2 classes will not have a problem with the book's minor and infrequent coarse language.

Wagamese's novel will entertain and inspire students as they explore issues around family, identity, values and decisions, and coming-of-age.

Toronto, ON: Random House
of Canada Ltd., n.d.
Doubleday Canada edition
[original 1993]
214 pages

ISBN 0-385-25452-0

KING RAT

James Clavell

King Rat depicts the life of British and American personnel in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. The key figure in the novel is "the King," an American corporal who manages to retain a standard of living envied by all other PoWs. The King is surrounded by countless underlings who both support and betray him. He has one friend, British Flight Lieutenant Peter Marlowe. The King's "greatest enemy" is L. Gary, Provost Marshall, a lonely fanatic who is determined to entrap him.

Clavell carefully describes the highly structured nature of a PoW camp and the British concern with "class." These descriptions parallel one another and are used to advantage to reveal the individuals who manipulate the system. The incidents that make up the story help to develop the idea that survival requires adaptation.

Some of the characters use colloquial language that may, at times, be considered offensive. However, the setting is a prisoner of war camp, and the language used realistically reflects these circumstances. The transvestite Clavell writes about is sympathetically portrayed. Women, as in most war stories, are presented in traditional and subservient roles. This novel may be most appropriate for mature readers in small group or individual study.

"I suppose so," Peter Marlowe replied. What an awful thing to say. He was hurt by the King and did not understand that the American mind is simple in some things, as simple as the English mind. An American is proud of his money-making capacity, rightly so. An Englishman, such as Peter Marlowe, is proud to get killed for the flag. Rightly so."
p. 181

New York, NY: Dell
Publishing, 1982
[original 1962]

ISBN 0440145465

LETTERS FROM WINGFIELD FARM

Dan Needles



“Go play farmer for the summer,’ he said, ‘and tell me in October what you’re going to do, with the rest of your life. And leave that dumb hat at home next time you come down for a board meeting.’ He’s got a point. I do have to decide where I belong. I like the life here all right but it seems that trying to farm these days means taking a vow of poverty. Especially the way I do it.” p. 105

In *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, Walt Wingfield leaves his position as board chairman of a Toronto brokerage house to take over the “old Fisher place” on Rural Route 1, Persephone County. He begins to farm his newly acquired 100-acre plot as a philosopher–farmer. He believes he can establish an economically viable operation based on sound, big business principles, while using only horse-drawn equipment.

In his attempt to become one with the land, Walt encounters many of the well-established locals. Two neighbours in particular, a dour, inarticulate auctioneer, and an old horse trainer, provide colourful characterization in vignettes about Walt’s mishaps as a farmer.

Wingfield’s Pyrrhic victories are chronicled with wit in the form of letters to the editor of the local newspaper. By the end of the novel, Walt’s letters reflect a respect and appreciation for his new life and friends, and reveal his emerging self-awareness. Although humorous, Walt’s growth is no less important or evocative.

The letter format of this novel can provide students with a refreshing approach to journal writing. The main character laughs at himself and his mishaps, and invites the reader to do the same. Rich in irony, understatement and dramatic pacing, the work is valuable as a study of dramatic character presentation and the vignette format.

Toronto, ON: Seal Books,
1989

ISBN 0770423868

MEDICINE RIVER

Thomas King



With *Medicine River*, Thomas King has created a tongue-in-cheek account of the inhabitants and the social structure of Medicine River. The protagonist, Will, returns to a small Blackfoot community in southern Alberta to sort out the details of his mother's death. This return to his roots stirs many long-buried issues from his childhood and forces him to confront his true values. His encounter with Harlen Bigbear results in a series of events which direct his life and affairs into otherwise unconsidered directions. He opens the only Native photography shop in Medicine River and agrees to compile the band directory. This project is the framework for Will's encounter with the Native population. A progression of escapades—sometimes painful, often hilarious—brings Will to an understanding of his own identity and commitments.

The characters in this novel are warm and engaging, and the story line is lighthearted without being predictable. Will's quest to understand himself is universal, in spite of his unique experiences. Life in Medicine River exposes dilemmas and contradictions that exist in many small Alberta towns.

This novel is written in a clear, forthright manner and contains enough good character dialogue and plot intrigue to hold student interest. Often, the personal stories are painful and touching, but there is an overriding sense of humour and optimism to the work, which leaves the reader with a sense of compassion for and understanding of the characters and an appreciation of Native culture.

“People like that,’ said Elwood, ‘don’t shoot themselves. Shit. Only mistake Jake made was turning his back on January. That women’s liberation’s what’s doing it. Fellow puts a woman in her place once in a while don’t give her any call to shoot him. Hell, we’d all be dead.” p. 50

Toronto, ON: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1991
[original 1989]

ISBN 0140126031

Awards:

Writer’s Guild of Alberta Best Novel Award, 1990

NO GREAT MISCHIEF

Alistair MacLeod



“Sometimes my brothers played their battered violins themselves. And sometimes we hummed or sang the old Gaelic songs. And when we talked, often in Gaelic, it was mostly of the past and of the distant landscape which was our home.” p. 146

No Great Mischief is described by critics as MacLeod's masterpiece. This gentle-humoured novel is a love letter to the author's native Cape Breton. The narrator, Alexander MacDonald, is an Ontario orthodontist who goes to Toronto to help his alcoholic older brother, Calum. The two eventually drive to their beloved Cape Breton to join their family members working in a mine, where they encounter the conflict between Cape Bretoners and French Canadians.

Along the way, Alex relates a 200-year cross-generational saga that traces his family from Scotland to the New World. Alex, it turns out, was orphaned at age three, along with his twin sister, when both parents fell through the ice near their home. His three much older brothers were already on their own, while the twins were raised by their grandparents. Now, Alex, Calum (who seems to carry the legacy of the original, tragedy-stricken Calum MacDonald) and their sister are all haunted by the links between their family and the past.

This novel explores themes of family, love, loyalty, identity, and the influence of history. Students will enjoy the stories of loggers, miners, drinkers, exiles and adventurers, but the book also contains beautiful haunting scenes depicting the sadness of human beings. There are numerous references to violence, ethnic loyalty and sexual behaviour that may be disturbing to some students or community members. Examples of coarse language are incidental and appropriate to the context of the novel. This book might create student interest in telling anecdotes of their own about family and family pride.

Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2001
Emblem edition
[original 1999]
283 pages

ISBN 0-7710-5570-6

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich tells of survival in a Siberian camp for political prisoners. Ivan Denisovich depends upon his shrewdness and skills as a mason to survive. Solzhenitsyn introduces Ivan at 5 o'clock on a cold winter morning, and the reader follows him through a typical day. In Ivan's life, the overriding factor is self-preservation.

The novel is short and easy to read. Its apparent simplicity is deceptive. Based on Solzhenitsyn's own experiences, Ivan becomes a type of "Everyman" in a novel whose main theme is the overwhelming impulse and courage of the human spirit to survive. The book is not depressing in tone, in spite of the rigours and privations of a prison camp.

"In all the time he spent in camps and prisons, Ivan Denisovich had gotten out of the habit of worrying about the next day, or the next year, much less how to feed his family. The fellows at the top thought of everything for him, and it was kind of easier like that. Winter after winter, summer after summer—he still had a long time to go."
p. 147

London, England:
Heinemann Educational
Books Ltd., 1974
[original 1963]

ISBN 0435122002

THE PIANIST: THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY OF ONE MAN'S SURVIVAL IN WARSAW: 1939–1945

Wladyslaw Szpilman

"I was now alone in this quarter of the city. The SS were visiting the building where I was hiding more and more often. How long could I survive in these conditions? A week? Two weeks?" p. 164

The Pianist, long suppressed by the Polish government, is a Holocaust memoir of life in under Nazi occupation. Dodging arrest and certain death in increasingly desperate circumstances, the author, a successful concert pianist and composer, was fortunate to receive unexpected compassion from a German soldier. Set entirely in the Warsaw ghetto, this unusual take on the Holocaust documents humanity's primordial survival instinct and reveals the power of music to keep people's hopes and spirits alive in dangerous times.

A quick read, *The Pianist* is written in an understated, detached manner that emphasizes both the horror and the banal details of life in the ghetto. The book includes descriptions of the horrors of the Holocaust including suicide as a choice people made to escape the atrocities of war. The memoir also includes excerpts from the German officer's wartime journal and an epilogue on Szpilman's life after the war.

Toronto, ON:
McArthur & Company, 2000
[original 1946]
222 pages

ISBN 1-55278-142-9

SIDDHARTHA

Hermann Hesse

Siddhartha traces the life of a young Indian man, Siddhartha, as he embarks on a spiritual quest. Throughout his journey, he struggles with worldly materialism, sensuous pleasures and inner conflicts of spiritual truth.

The novel's rich imagery and numerous allusions to the life of Buddha will provide the skilled, more mature student with exposure to an Eastern philosophy. This work, however, should not be construed as a document for teaching about Buddhism.

The novel is most suitable for small groups of mature students who may wish to explore the quest motif, the metaphor of life as a journey, the difficult and elusive nature of wisdom and truth, and the complexity of the imperfections of humankind.

“And he thought: It was the Self, the character and nature of which I wished to learn. I wanted to rid myself of the Self, to conquer it, but I could not conquer it, I could only deceive it, could only fly from it, could only hide from it. Truly, nothing in the world has occupied my thoughts as much as the Self, this riddle, that I live, that I am one and am separated and different from everybody else, that I am Siddhartha; and about nothing in the world do I know less than about myself, about Siddhartha.”
p. 31

New York, NY: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1957
[original 1922]

ISBN 081120068X

STARSHIP TROOPERS

Robert A. Heinlein

“There are a dozen different ways of delivering destruction in impersonal wholesale, via ships and missiles of one sort or another, catastrophes so widespread, so unselective that the war is over because that nation or planet ceased to exist. What we do is entirely different. We make war as personal as a punch in the nose.” p. 99

Starship Troopers is a science fiction classic in which the narrator Johnnie, a young recruit in the future, signs up with the Terran Mobile Infantry of the Federal Reserve. He is determined to make the grade at grueling boot camp. As he trains to fight the enemy Klendathu, and later goes off to war, Johnnie learns why he is a soldier. The war scenes and technology of this 1959 novel are still plausible even without the modern details. The appeal of the book lies in the ideas and moral philosophy rather than a fast paced plot.

The main theme of this controversial book is the conflict between individual freedom and government control. Secondary themes concern citizenship, duty and responsibility, and crime and punishment. This thoughtful, readable novel will invite discussions about the relationships between individuals and society; values and choices; good and evil; and conformity and rebellion. This is an ‘idea book’ for students to relate and respond to critically. Teachers should be aware of two issues: inappropriate language and disrespectful references to people with disabilities.

Note: This novel should not be confused with the movie of the same name.

New York, NY:
Berkley Publishers
Group/Penguin Putnam, Inc.,
1987
Ace Books edition
[original 1959]
264 pages

ISBN 0-441-78358-9

THE SUSPECT

L. R. Wright



In *The Suspect*, George Wilcox, at the age of 80, commits the near-perfect crime. The murder happens quickly, quietly, and very unexpectedly, in a small town on the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia. This unusual turn in George's life would have gone undetected had his conscience not started to bother him. The suspense mounts as George befriends the local librarian, Cassandra Mitchell, and her new boyfriend, Karl Alberg, the local RCMP Staff Sergeant. Together, these three find themselves on a collision course of conflicting values and loyalties.

This Canadian mystery allows for the study of characterization, plot development and foreshadowing. Also, the examination of right and wrong could lead to interesting response journal writing, character analysis and the examination of points of view. Students may need help with vocabulary, particularly at the beginning of the book.

Teachers should be aware of blasphemy and scenes of domestic violence, which may be distressing to some students. However, the depiction of such violence provides a classroom opportunity to discuss the issue of domestic violence, its traumatic causes and effects.

"Alberg wondered if she knew they had been brothers-in-law. If so, she wasn't telling him. He found this mildly distressing, even though he hadn't convinced himself yet that the old relationship between the two men had anything to do with Burke's death. Cassandra looked at the irises. ... She heard it again: He got exactly what was coming to him. She had never heard George Wilcox say anything so unfeeling. It must have been the shock, she thought." p. 60

Toronto, ON: Seal Books,
1986
[original 1985]

ISBN 07704421229

Awards:

Edgar Allan Poe Award,
Mystery Writers of America,
1986

SWITCHBACKS: TRUE STORIES FROM THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

Sid Marty



*"I like the Kid's cockiness. In fact, I distrust any young bush ape who isn't a bit on the cocky side. Boundary patrol is no place for weenies."
p. 11*

Switchbacks is a collection of fourteen mountain tales and a glossary of related terms, written by a veteran Alberta poet and climber. Using his own memories and those of others, the author presents a variety of experiences—some tragic, others humorous or redemptive—to create this colourful collection.

Marty's main purpose is to bring readers closer to the unique stories of people who climb mountains. In the process, he explores thoughts, feelings and experiences familiar to all Alberta nature-lovers. The book also contains selections about coming-of-age, apprenticeship, and the influence of mountains on people.

Switchbacks invites both personal and creative response work. Teachers should be aware of the book's coarse language, descriptions of careless alcohol use, and critical references to operations in the National Parks.

Toronto, ON:
McClelland & Stewart, 2001
[original 1999]
316 pages

ISBN 0-7710-5670-2

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE: AN OLD MAN, A YOUNG MAN, AND LIFE'S GREATEST LESSON

Mitch Albom

Tuesdays with Morrie is an enriching memoir about a teacher–student relationship. After a long separation, Albom becomes reacquainted with his former sociology professor, Morrie Schwartz, who by then is terminally ill. The two begin visiting every Tuesday to talk about youth, aging, fear, forgiveness and numerous other topics reflecting life's complexity. The flashback-flashforward structure alternates between the time when the younger Albom was in Morrie's class and the time of their weekly visits.

Through these discussions, the book shares wisdom, insights, valuable lessons in living, and the common desire to form a philosophy of life that transcends the fact of mortality. The book is moving without being sentimental or self-pitying, and maintains a humorous tone despite its serious subject matter.

This short-sentenced page-turner will remind students of mentors from their own past and will probably stimulate personal anecdote writing. Very minor incidental coarse language adds realism and is appropriate to the situations. Teachers should be aware that the subject matter could be sensitive for students who have experienced the serious illness or death of a family member or friend.

“He repeated it carefully, pausing for effect. ‘Love is the only rational act,’ I nodded, like a good student, and he exhaled weakly. I leaned over to give him a hug. And then, although it is not really like me, I kissed him on the cheek. I felt his weakened hands on my arms, the thin stubble of his whiskers brushing on my face. ‘So you’ll come back next Tuesday?’ he whispered.”

New York, NY:
Random House, Inc., 2002
Broadway Books edition
[original 1997]
192 pages

ISBN 0-7679-0592-X

WALKING WITH THE GREAT APES: JANE GOODALL, DIAN FOSSEY, BIRUTÉ GALDIKAS

Sy Montgomery

“Although no fighting erupted over access to Flo, all the males seemed almost frantic with fear that she might walk away and they would lose another opportunity to mate with her; they would follow her every movement with eager, hungry eyes. For nearly six weeks she was followed everywhere by this retinue of up to fourteen males. One day Jane counted Flo copulating fifty times.” p. 30

Walking with the Great Apes is about Jane Goodall’s work with the chimpanzees of Gombe; Dian Fossey’s defence of the mountain gorillas of Risande; and Biruté Galdikas’ study of orangutans in Borneo. It presents a composite picture of three women who forge careers through their study of primates. While this book portrays the work of these women, it also compares the different psychological characteristics of each researcher and is, therefore, as much a perceptive study of the women as it is of the primates.

Different perspectives can be obtained from reading this book. From one point of view, three admirable women scientists are presented as role models and innovative leaders in their field. Also, it can be viewed as a perceptive and insightful portrait of feminist ideas. From another point of view, the book could be interpreted as extreme and bizarre, and illustrative of a spiritual relationship with animals that could be defined as animistic, or possibly even shamanistic. While there are images of death, sexuality and violence, a study of this nonfiction book could give students insight into various ways of seeing, understanding and appreciating others, especially those with different cultures, religious and belief systems. It might be best offered on an optional basis.

This book is a fascinating read for a wide range of student abilities and interests. Further reading on environmentalism and interaction with nature could easily follow.

New York, NY: Houghton
Mifflin Company, 1991

ISBN 0395611563