The summer is an open book ...

WCU ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
SUMMER READING LIST
2008

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle
Barbara Kingsolver
An insightful consideration of the foods people in the U.S. eat and why we know so little about them.

The Audacity of Hope & Dreams from My Father
Barack Obama

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress: A Novel
Dai Sijie
Two adolescent Chinese boys during the cultural revolution are sent to the country for re-education; one smuggles a copy of a Balzac novel—the only thing they have to read. A book about reading and culture.

Bearing the Body
Ehud Havazelet
Daniel dies mysteriously and violently in San Francisco. His estranged brother, Nathan, and his father Sol, a Holocaust survivor who lost his own brother in the camps, travel from Boston to California to gather Daniel's ashes. In two days, a family history unfolds: who has born what body, for how long, and in what ways. Lovely, silently beautiful prose.

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears
Dinaw Mengestu
"Barely suppressed despair and black wit infuse this beautifully observed debut from Ethiopian émigré Mengestu. Set over eight months in a gentrifying Washington, D.C., neighborhood in the 1970s, it captures an uptick in Ethiopian grocery store owner Sepha Stephanos's long-deferred hopes, as Judith, a white academic, fixes up the four-story house next to his apartment building, treats him to dinner and lets him steal a kiss. Just as unexpected is Sepha's friendship with Judith's biracial 11-year-old daughter, Naomi (one of the book's most vivid characters), over a copy of The Brothers Karamazov." —Publishers Weekly

The Blind Assassin
Margaret Atwood

The Book Thief
Markus Zusak
The narrator of The Book Thief is many things -- sardonic, wry, darkly humorous, compassionate—but not especially proud. …Death meets the book thief, a 9-year-old girl named Liesel Meminger, when he comes
to take her little brother, and she becomes an enduring force in his life, despite his efforts to resist her. "I traveled the globe . . . handing souls to the conveyor belt of eternity," Death writes. "I warned myself that I should keep a good distance from the burial of Liesel Meminger's brother. I did not heed my advice." As Death lingers at the burial, he watches the girl, who can't yet read, steal a gravedigger's instruction manual. Thus Liesel is touched first by Death, then by words, as if she knows she'll need their comfort during the hardships ahead. ——The Washington Post's Book World

**Bridge of Sighs**

Richard Russo

A moving story about lower-class childhood and small-town life in economically declining upstate New York; Russo at his best.

**The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao**

Junot Díaz

2008 Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction; this Dominican-American author won the Pulitzer for his first novel.

**The Brooklyn Follies**

Paul Auster

Who would have thought that post-modern genius Auster could write a touching story about ordinary, human life? The Coen brothers will never film this one, but people will enjoy reading about Nathan Glass.

**Childhood's End & Rendezvous with Rama**

Arthur C. Clarke

Two classics by the master of science fiction, Arthur C. Clarke. In honor of the recent passing of this prolific and insightful author who wrote more than 100 books in his lifetime and wrote about many technological developments (like geocentric satellites) before they had been invented, pick up one of these fairly brief (fewer than 300 pp.) classics. Though science fiction is oftentimes given short shrift as a genre, it can comment on our world through the creation of a futuristic world. *Childhood's End* gave us the Overlords, and *Rama* sparked a whole series of books (*Rama II, The Garden of Rama, Rama Revealed*).

**Cold Mountain**

Charles Frazier

**Collected Short Stories**

Andre Dubus, Sr.

Dubus’s short stories have been adapted into movies like “In the Bedroom.” His work is genius. Most recommended are “A Father's Story” and “The Killings.”

**The Count of Monte Cristo**

Alexandre Dumas

Complexly plotted and intensely exciting, this nineteenth-century French novel will enthral you with its tale of retribution, justice, and punishment, as Edmond Dantès inexorably pursues his prey. Read it during the summer because, at upwards of 1000 pages, you’ll never get the time to do it during the academic year. You won’t regret the time spent.

**The Design of Everyday Things**

Donald Norman

Have you ever tried to operate a new product or attempted to use a software program, and get frustrated because the product or program doesn’t work as you expected? Most likely, it’s the design – not you – that’s responsible for the problems. Norman explores why disconnects often occur between product/program design and human interaction. This book is a classic “usability” text.

**Disgrace**

J. M. Coetzee

Excellent: challenging, disturbing, and a really good read.
**The Electronic Literature Collection**  
Available for free at <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>  
Various contributors, published by the Electronic Literature Organization. A collection of multimedia texts that challenge traditional conceptions of the literary and narrative or poetic modes.

**Farewell, My Lovely**  
Raymond Chandler  
Jane Jeffrey  
Crime—literary noir #1.

**Five Quarters of the Orange**  
Joanne Harris  
Carla Verderame

**Fixer Chao**  
Han Ong  
Seth Kahn  
Phillipino-American grifter is drawn into a plot to defraud New York City socialites by pretending to be a feng shui expert. Scathing parody/critique of social class and identity.

**The Gathering**  
Anne Enright  
Bob Fletcher  
Winner of the Booker Prize.

**Gentleman and Players**  
Joanne Harris  
Carla Verderame

**God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater**  
Kurt Vonnegut  
Walter Fox  
One of Vonnegut's best novels but often overshadowed by his other works.

**The Hakawati**  
Rabib Alameddine  
Eleanor Shevlin  
"Alameddine mingles a four-generation family saga with a cornucopia of Arabian tales and historical dramas to create a one-of-a-kind novel. Osama al-Kharrat returns in 2003 to Beirut, where his family once owned a prosperous car dealership, to visit his dying father Farid. . . . Osama, who has lived most of his adult life in California, speedily sinks back into the excitable embrace of his extended family (including numerous strongminded women) as they take turns at his father’s hospital bedside. The history of the al-Kharrats and of Lebanon unfolds side by side with multiple strands of Arabian folklore creatively reimagined by Alameddine.” –Kirkus Reviews

**The Iliad & The Odyssey**  
Homer  
Kostas Myrsiades, John Ward  
The two works that establish the Western literary tradition.

**In a Lonely Place**  
Dorothy B. Hughes  
Andrew Sargent  
Fascinating hard-boiled pulp fiction from the late 1940s that puts us inside the head of a serial killer named Dix Steele as he goes to pieces in postwar Los Angeles; lots of great noir atmosphere and interesting characterizations; part of the Feminist Press’s ‘Women Write Pulp’ series; adapted into a well-regarded 1950 film noir starring Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Graham.

**Istanbul: Memories and the City**  
Orhan Pamuk  
Peter Kent  
This is a delightful, if rather quirky book, translated from Turkish, and it celebrates the city in which the author has lived all his life. As the NYT remarks, it is not a conventional guide book, but it "tells of an invisible melancholy and the way it acts on an imaginative young man, aggrieving him but pricking his creativity."
**The Jewel in the Crown**  
Paul Scott  
This first of four novels in Scott’s *Raj Quartet* is an absolute masterpiece of fiction. It is wonderful, and anyone who reads it will be driven to read the rest of them.

**King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa**  
Adam Hochschild  
Excellent history of the Congo—would be very interesting to someone interested in Joseph Conrad.

**The Kite Runner**  
Khaled Hosseini

**The Known World**  
Edward P. Jones  
Carolyn Sorisio

**Let Me Stand Alone: The Journals of Rachel Corrie**  
Rachel Corrie  
The moving and very human journal of Rachel Corrie, a young American woman who was crushed to death by a military bulldozer in 2003 while trying to save a Palestinian family's home from demolition.

**Ludlow**  
David Mason  
Mike Peich  
A verse novel that recounts the bloodiest coal-mining disaster in Colorado when owners tried to suppress miners’ rights.

**Maps for Lost Lovers**  
Nadeem Aslam  
Lynette McGrath

**March**  
Geraldine Brooks  
Judy Scheffler  
Novel that imagines the Civil War experiences of March, the absent father character in *Little Women*. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 2006.

**Offshore**  
Penelope Fitzgerald  
Peter Kent  
A great find! Fitzgerald was awarded the Booker Prize for *Offshore*, and three of her others have been shortlisted for that prize.

**The Omnivore’s Dilemma**  
Michael Pollan  
Cheryl Wanko  
Engagingly and critically examines the ingredients and processes that created four meals (from industrial to organic). You’ll never look at food on your plate in the same way.

**Out Stealing Horses**  
Per Petterson  
Walter Fox  
This novel by a Norwegian writer was named one of the "ten best books of the year" for 2007 by the *NY Times Book Review*.

**The Places in Between**  
Rory Stewart  
Michael Brooks  
The author walked across Afghanistan two weeks after the fall of the Taliban. This is a brilliant introduction to the daily lives of people who practice a culture very different from the one most of us are familiar with in a countryside wracked by more than thirty years of war. It is also a superb introduction to one of the great modern literary genres – travel writing.
The Postman Always Rings Twice
James M. Cain
Crime—literary noir #2.

The Professor’s Daughter
Emily Raboteau
Beautifully written contemporary fiction dealing with African-American identity.

Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida
Ayan Gangopadhyay
Hent De Vries
Drawing upon as well as critiquing foundational thinkers such as René Girard, this book is a philosophico-theoretical attempt to rethink, and thereby reconfigure, the relationship between violence and religion. This book quite convincingly shows the irreducibility of violence in religious thinking—and is even more topical today—while it shows that “philosophy” is not that innocent, either!

The Rings of Saturn
W. G. Sebald
The book recounts a walking tour of England's Suffolk coast, which activates the most haunted (and haunting) historical imagination I've ever encountered. (I should add that Sebald's writing is 100% humorless, so don't take this book to the beach.) Genre? Unclassifiable or, maybe, we can shoot for "faction."

The Road
Cormac McCarthy
A riveting journey on foot taken by a father and his young son across a post-apocalyptic America that is scorched beyond recognition, unable to grow crops and occupied by ravenous survivors trying to stave off starvation. Horrific but impossible to put down.

The Ruling Caste
David Gilmour

The Sacred Games
Vikram Chandra
Simply the most marvelous book on my home city, Bombay, and about its underworld. Ciao, Joyce; Enter, Vikram!

The Stone Gods
Jeanette Winterson
A cyberpunk literary novel, or something like that.

Team of Rivals
Doris Kearns Goodwin
About Abraham Lincoln, the people who surrounded him, and political intrigue. A page-turner for a history book!

Things Are Disappearing Here
Kate Northrop
Just an incredibly beautiful book of poetry, by a colleague who will be sorely missed.

The Things They Carried
Tim O’Brien
Although it takes place during the Vietnam War, it's relevant to the Iraq War, too.
Summer reading 2008

**The Time Traveler's Wife**
Audrey Niffenegger

Harr DeTareble, a librarian, travels involuntarily through time, and the life of his friend/girlfriend/wife parallels his at times as their paths cross and then diverge. Hopefully the movie will do it justice!

**Three Cups of Tea**
Anne Herzog

Greg Mortenson

Moving description of Mortenson’s project that builds schools for girls in Afghanistan as a way of promoting peace.

**Tao Te Ching**
Walter Fox

A new English version by Stephen Mitchell that is close to poetry.

**Waiting for the Barbarians**
Teddie West

J. M. Coetzee

A remarkable novel; an allegory in the best Kafka tradition that points to modern paranoia: “we don’t know who they are or what they want, but we should go kill them.”

**White Teeth**
Luanne Smith

Zadie Smith

Debut novel, at a very young age. Won the Whitbread first novel award, *NY Times Book Review* Editor's Choice, etc. From the book blurb: a humorous book about "three cultures, three families and three generations," dealing with "friendship, love, war," and the past returning to haunt and all that.