English Reading List for Teenagers 8/12/2020

Here is an opinionated and non-inclusive list of English novels or literature worth reading. I emphasize recent (post-1850) literature. **Start with a subject that interests you. I would buy these books used at Amazon**. The books are roughly presented in order of which ones should be read first, **but choose by subject matter first (what interests you)** ratherthan by my judgment.

1. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K Rowling. Modern classic; enough said.

2. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. This parable, maybe even several parables in one of a shepherd who goes in search of fortune and his personal legend, should appeal to most people older than fifteen. I think it should be especially appealing to teenagers.

3. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. GoodReads says, “Bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot.

Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings by Ellen Forney that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he was destined to live.”

I think this book will appeal to most minorities.

4. *Bluford* Series. According to their website, “The Bluford Series is a collection of twenty-one young adult novels that focus on the lives of a group of high school students and their families.”

“**Set in contemporary urban America [and mostly featuring black Americans**], each **novel addresses complex topics relevant to the lives of today's students:** family, friendship, trust, isolation, violence, and peer pressure, to name a few.”

“In addition, the books feature male and female characters and include elements from many literary genres, such as mystery, suspense, romance, and a touch of the supernatural. In other words, the Bluford Series offers something for almost every reader.”

“**Finally, the books are short (less than 200 pages) and written in a highly readable style [written at a low level].** Reviewed in a national reading journal and praised by students and teachers nationwide, the Bluford Series appeals to readers of all ages.”

This is young adult fiction for inner city youth, or black youth.

5. *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. The following quote is from Wikipedia. “The story is narrated by Hazel Grace Lancaster, a 16-year-old girl with thyroid cancer that has affected her lungs. Hazel is forced by her parents to attend a support group where she subsequently meets and falls in love with 17-year-old Augustus Waters, an ex-basketball player and amputee.” It is a tear jerker and is more for girls than boys.

6. *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. This classic about adolescence still holds it own because it captures the isolation of the teenage years, and the end result that some teenagers never succumb to society or grow up. “The novel's protagonist Holden Caulfield has become an icon for teenage rebellion.”(Wikipedia). The novel is written from the point of view of HC.

7. *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton. The following description paraphrases Wikipedia. Hinton was 15 when **she** started writing the novel but **did most of the work when she was 16** and a junior in high school. Hinton was 18 when the book was published. **The book details the conflict between two rival gangs divided by their socioeconomic status: the working-class "greasers" and the upper-class "Socs" (pronounced /ˈsoʊʃɪz/—short for Socials). The story is told in first-person perspective by teenaged protagonist Ponyboy Curtis.** The story in the book takes place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1965, but this is never explicitly stated in the book. In America, often kids are “outsiders”; they do not feel part of society or the group.

8. *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. The following description paraphrases Wikipedia. The main characters, Meg Murry, Charles Wallace Murry, and Calvin O'Keefe, **embark on a journey through space and time, from universe to universe, as they endeavor to save the Murrys' father and the world**. The novel offers a glimpse into the battles between light and darkness, and goodness and evil, as the young characters mature into adolescents on their journey. The novel wrestles with questions of spirituality and purpose, as the characters are often thrown into conflicts of love, divinity, and goodness.” It has received numerous awards.

9. *Collections* textbook.

10. *Hoops* (1983) by Walter Dean Myers

More for the guys. This novel is about African-Americans who live in American cities and play basketball. It is poor quality fiction. It is written at a low level so it might be appropriate for an English as a Second Language Learner. Hopes, dreams, and life lessons is what HOOPS is about. We all have some sort of dream or game plan for our future, as well does 17 year old Lonnie (the main character of this book). But do we all know what it's like to live in a bad neighborhood? To deal with the pressures of drugs, alcohol, and the treat of violence lurking in the air? These are all things Lonnie deals with in life, all the while just wanting to play his game-basketball.

11. *Holes* (1998) by Louis Sachar

Many people say this is a modern classic. Stanley Yelnats is under a curse. A curse that began with his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather and has since followed generations of Yelnatses. Now Stanley has been unjustly sent to a boys’ detention center, Camp Green Lake, where the boys build character by spending all day, every day digging holes exactly five feet wide and five feet deep. There is no lake at Camp Green Lake. But there are an awful lot of holes.

It doesn’t take long for Stanley to realize there’s more than character improvement going on at Camp Green Lake. The boys are digging holes because the warden is looking for something. But what could be buried under a dried-up lake? Stanley tries to dig up the truth in this inventive and darkly humorous tale of crime and punishment—and redemption.

12. *Hunger Games* (2010) by Suzanne Collins

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. Long ago the districts waged war on the Capitol and were defeated. As part of the surrender terms, each district agreed to send one boy and one girl to appear in an annual televised event called, "The Hunger Games," a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. The terrain, rules, and level of audience participation may change but one thing is constant: kill or be killed.

13. *The Lightning Thief* (Percy Jackson and the Olympians) (2006) by Rick Riordan [Mr. Gamble has not read this book.]

Percy Jackson is a good kid, but he can't seem to focus on his schoolwork or control his temper. And lately, being away at boarding school is only getting worse—Percy could have sworn his pre-algebra teacher turned into a monster and tried to kill him. When Percy's mom finds out, she knows it's time that he knew the truth about where he came from, and that he go to the one place he'll be safe. She sends Percy to Camp Half Blood, a summer camp for demigods (on Long Island), where he learns that the father he never knew is Poseidon, God of the Sea. Soon a mystery unfolds and together with his friends—one a satyr and the other the demigod daughter of Athena—Percy sets out on a quest across the United States to reach the gates of the Underworld (located in a recording studio in Hollywood) and prevent a catastrophic war between the gods.

14. *All Our Pretty Songs* (2013) by Sarah McCarry [Mr. Gamble has not read this book.]

An incredibly lyrical narrative, *All Our Pretty Songs* explores the history of grunge, but it's also about friendships, magical interference, and what happens when your life starts falling apart. It's one of my most highly recommended books for a reason. It slams the myth that literary fiction and YA are mutually exclusive in the head and then knocks it around the ring a few times to boot.

15. *The Maze Runner* (2009) by James Dashner

Thomas wakes up in an elevator, remembering nothing but his own name. He emerges into a world of about 60 teen boys who have learned to survive in a completely enclosed environment, subsisting on their own agriculture and supplies from below. A new boy arrives every 30 days. The original group has been in "the Glade" for two years, trying to find a way to escape through a maze that surrounds their living space. Then a comatose girl arrives with a strange note, and their world begins to change.

16. *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) by Katherine Paterson.

The following quote is from Wikipedia. *BTT* “…is a work of children's literature about two lonely children who create a magical forest kingdom in their imaginations. It was written by Katherine Paterson and was published in 1977 by Thomas Crowell. In 1978, it won the Newbery Medal. Paterson drew inspiration for the novel from a real event that occurred in August 1974 when her son's friend was struck dead by lightning.

The novel tells the story of fifth grader Jesse Aarons, who becomes friends with his new neighbor, Leslie Burke, after he loses a footrace to her at school. She is a smart, talented, outgoing tomboy from a wealthy family, and he thinks highly of her. He is an artistic boy from a poorer family who, in the beginning, is fearful, angry, and depressed. After his meeting Leslie, his life is transformed. He becomes courageous and learns to let go of his frustration. They create a kingdom for themselves, which Leslie names "Terabithia."

17. *Lord of the Flies* (1954) by Willliam Golding

Mr. Golding won the Nobel Prize for this book about a group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves but wind up acting like savages. Mr. Golding portrayed the dark side of human nature, and made a statement about individual welfare versus the common good, and civilization. The main characters were Ralph, Piggy, and Jack Merridew. Published in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was Golding’s first novel. Although it was not a great success at the time—it soon went on to become a best-seller

18. *Divergent* (2011) by Veronica Roth

In a world divided by factions based on virtues, Tris learns she's Divergent and won't fit in. When she discovers a plot to destroy Divergents, Tris and the mysterious Four must find out what makes Divergents dangerous before it's too late.

19. *Okay for Now* by Gary Schmidt

The following quote is from Wikipedia. “Douglas "Doug" Swieteck is a fourteen-year-old boy living somewhere on Long Island in 1968 during the Vietnam War. After Doug's dad is fired for mouthing off to his boss, the Swietecks move to the small town of Marysville, NY, where Doug feels out of place and unwelcome.“

“In Marysville, Doug is fascinated by *The Birds of America*, a book illustrated by John James Audubon, on display under glass at the local library. Doug starts to learn how to draw, starting with a copy of Audubon's Arctic Tern under the tutelage of Mr. Powell, a librarian. Doug also meets a girl named Lillian "Lil" Spicer, on whom he eventually has a crush. Lil's father owns a deli, and hires Doug as a delivery boy, which lets him get to know other residents of Marysville. Around Christmas, Doug's oldest brother Lucas returns home from Vietnam with permanent injuries, and Doug helps him adjust. As the novel progresses, Doug faces issues such as his father's abuse, problems at school, and the illness of his friend, with maturity and confidence that he develops through learning to draw and his interactions with the townsfolk.”

20. *Voices of Teens: In Their Own Words* by Michael Galbraith and Robert Vogel.

This book is out of print and very expensive. The following is a quote from Amazon. “Eighth grade students at Grover Washington Jr. Middle School in Philadelphia are the prime authors of the powerful, compelling, and reflective writing in this book designed specifically for middle school students. Based on Erin Gruwell's work with her students and told in the Freedom Writer's Diary and the film, teacher Michael Galbraith and university professor Bob Vogel adapted this idea and developed a writing program that provided an opportunity for students to write about their lives.”

This is a superb collection of teenage poetry, directed at inner city youth but good for youth outside the city as well.

21. *The Hate You Give T.H.U.G.* (2017) by Angie Thomas.

The following is a quote from Wikipedia. “The Hate U Give is a 2017 young adult novel by Angie Thomas. It is Thomas's debut novel, expanded from a short story she wrote in college in reaction to the police shooting of Oscar Grant. The book is narrated by Starr Carter, a 16-year-old black girl from a poor neighborhood who attends an elite private school in a predominantly white, affluent part of the city. Starr becomes entangled in a national news story after she witnesses a white police officer shoot and kill her childhood friend, Khalil. She speaks up about the shooting in increasingly public ways, and social tensions culminate in a riot after a grand jury decides not to indict the police officer for the shooting.”

The book was hyped and a NYT best seller for 50 weeks before being made into a movie.

Okay book for allegedly accurately describing inner city living and problems. In my opinion, this is poor literature.

22. *Esperanza Rising* (2000) by Pam Munoz Ryan. Junior high or low level readers.

The following is a quote from SparkNotes. *Esperanza Rising* is a YA historical fiction novel by American writer Pam Muñoz Ryan, published in 2000. Set in Mexico and California during the Great Depression, the story follows Esperanza Ortega, who, at the opening of the novel is a wealthy girl living in a mansion with her loving family. Esperanza's father and some of his men are killed by bandits, throwing Esperanza's life into chaos. Due to a loophole in her father's will, the family's property will go to her father's step brother, Luis Ortega, whom Esperanza calls Tio Luis. Tio Luis is implicated in the murders, though not charged, and tries to manipulate Esperanza's mother Ramona into marrying him. Ramona and Esperanza escape to America with their loyal servants, leaving behind Esperanza's Abuelita because she is injured. Ramona and Esperanza then try to make a life in a poor Mexican labor camp in Arvin, California, while waiting to be reunited with Abuelita. *Esperanza Rising* received several commendations, including the Pura Belpre award.

23. *Bud, Not Buddy* (1999) by Christopher Paul Curtis. Elementary school level or low level readers.

The following is a quote from Wikipedia. “The novel is set in Michigan, the home state of the author. This is also the setting of his first novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. Bud, the main character, travels from Flint to Grand Rapids, giving readers a glimpse of the midwestern state in the late 1930s; he meets a homeless family and a labor organizer and experiences life as an orphaned youth and the racism of the time, such as laws that prohibited African Americans from owning land in many areas, the dangers facing blacks, and racial segregation.

The effects of The Depression on this area are described throughout the story of Bud's journey across the state. Bud spends an evening in Flint's Hooverville, a hobo encampment, where he comments on the mixture of races; the author points to the police presence and the tension between police and those attempting to hop trains, their poverty and desperate migration characterizing the Great Depression. The uncertainty of the era is reflected in Bud's own life, as his transience and loss of home were experienced by many migrant families and orphaned children.

Jazz music and musicians are a central part of the narrative; the author was inspired to create the story by his own grandfather, who was a jazz musician during The Depression.”

24. *Letters to a Young Sister* (2008) by Hill Harper.

The following is a paraphrased quote from Amazon. In the follow-up to his award winning national bestseller, *Letters to a Young Brother*, Hill Harper (actor and star of CSI: NY) shares advice for young women, drawing on the advice of the women in his life.

*Letters to a Young Sister* unfolds as a series of letters written by older brother Hill to a universal young sister. She's up against the same challenges as every young woman: from relating to her parents and dealing with peer pressure, to juggling schoolwork and crushes and keeping faith in the face of heartache. Hill offers guidance, encouragement, personal stories, and asks his female friends to help answer some truly tough questions. Every young sister needs to know that it's okay to dream big and to define her own destiny. This is a book that will educate, uplift and inspire.

25. *Letters to a Young Brother* (2006) by Hill Harper.

The following is a quote from Amazon. Hill Harper (actor and star of CSI: NY) shares advice for young men.

“Offering inspirational advice in a down-to-earth style, this unique compilation of letters provides wisdom, guidance, and heartfelt insight to help the reader chart their own path to success. Based on the author’s motivational speaking at inner-city schools across the country, the letters deal with the tough issues that face young people today.

Bombarded with messages from music and the media, Harper set out to dispel the stereotypical image of success that young people receive today and instead emphasizes alternative views of what it truly means to be a successful male, such as educational and community achievements and self-respect. Intended to provide this frequently regarded “lost generation” of young men with words of encouragement and guidance, Harper’s deep-rooted passion regarding the plight of today’s youth drove him to write this book, sure to change the lives of readers for years to come.”

30. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (ZAMM) (1974) by Robert Pirsig.

This is a work of philosophical fiction in which the author explores his Metaphysics of Quality. The title is an apparent play on the title of the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel. In its introduction, Pirsig explains that, despite its title, "it should in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice. It's not very factual on motorcycles, either." He is telling the truth.

The book describes, in first person, a 17-day journey by the author (though he is not identified in the book) on his motorcycle from Minnesota to Northern California. His son Chris accompanies him. The trip is punctuated by numerous philosophical discussions, referred to as Chautauquas by the author, on topics including epistemology, ethical emotivism and the philosophy of science. The author mainly talks about Platonic, Aristotelian, and Socratic philosophy. Many of these discussions are tied together by the story of the narrator's own past self, who is referred to in the third person as Phaedrus (after Plato's dialogue). The narrator had experienced a mental breakdown at one point in the past.