

**Talking About Books:
Using Book Clubs to Foster Adolescent
Literacy and a Love of Reading in Class,
Outside of Class and for Life**

Presenters: Deborah Appleman, Carleton College dapplema@carleton.edu
Carol Jago, www.caroljago.com, jago@gseis.ucla.edu

**Minneapolis, MN
May 5, 2009**

Opening and Closing Questions

Getting Started: Some Suggestions for Opening Book Club Conversations

"Book Club is not my classroom. Book Club is not my classroom. Book Club is not my classroom." I love discussions with students about books and ideas where ever they happen, but I have to remember that the Book Club is designed to be a different experience than students have in class. Here are some questions to get you started. Many of them are like the questions we ask in our classrooms. Maybe the difference is that since we have only a half hour or so, we really need to stay on the sidelines. One or two of these and kids will take off on their own. (In some cases I've tied the question to one of the books we've read.)

Questions about characters:

How does Susie (or _____) surprise you? *Lovely Bones*

What seems to be _____'s most important characteristic?

Does this character seem familiar? How is he or she like or unlike you? *Getting In*

What does it mean to be a winner? --in this book? To you? *It's Not About the Bike, In These Girls Hope is a Muscle*

What would it be like to have to fight so hard to learn? What was it like for these boys? *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

How (or why) has the author used a figure from popular culture to explore philosophy? Is he effective? *Simpsons, Tao of Pooh*

Who do you like best (or least) in this book?

Who is the most important participator in the story?

What does _____ (main character or someone else) believe?

Questions about conflict:

What is the most important problem in the book?

Why is the story resolved in this way?

Would you have done what the character did? Did you like (approve of, disapprove of) the decision of _____.

Other:

What does _____ have to say in this book (a character or the author)? What do you think about that statement?

What are the "rules" of this world? Would you like to live there?

What idea or character do you think the other is most interested in? Who or what were you most interested in?

Was the book interesting (entertaining, important)? Why or why not?

What made the book worth reading? Worth discussing?

What did you find important in the text? (Or surprising? Or reassuring? Or troubling?)

How did you feel about a character, the end, a decision the character made.

What does mean to you. (Heaven if you read *Lovely Bones*, for example. Or getting into college if you read *I Getting In*. Or winning if your read *Lance Armstrong* or *In These Girls Hope is a Muscle*.)

Possibilities for students to bring to book club

Bring one important question that has to do with a character (or the problem, or the end of the work) to talk about.

Bring a line or passage you really want to talk about to Book Club.

Transcript Excerpts
Deborah Appleman, Carleton College

Deep Talk- Discussing the Tao of Pooh

In book clubs, students seem willing to offer their perspective on themselves, on high school, and on life in general in ways that feel more authentic and more substantive than what sometimes happens in class talk. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from a discussion of *The Tao of Pooh*:

Student 1: Well, I really enjoyed, like on page 112 of the same chapter that talks about how “enjoyment of the process is the secret that erases the myths of the Great Reward and Saving Time.” It just like shows, like, every year we go through Christmas and you just anticipate the gifts, but then once it’s over you’re just back where you started. But that anticipation is the part that is the most fun. So it’s kind of not necessarily the reward, but the time before it. I like that idea.

Like everyone just goes through high school and tries to get good grades, so that they can get into a good college. But high school is four years of your life that you could be enjoying. Obviously, that doesn’t stop you from enjoying necessarily, but if you *focused* more on enjoying the process of your life... That doesn’t mean don’t work, but it just means, like, enjoy where you are right now. I think, you know, that people would be a lot happier.

Student 3: I thought Katie brought up an interesting point about how he shows contrast between Pooh and the Chinese proverbs. On page 68 and 69 when he’s talking about the Wu Wei, he says, “Literally, Wu Wei means without doing, causing, or making,” and then he kind of talks about that. Then, right at the bottom, he says, “Let’s take an example from the writing of Chuang-Tse,” and then right after that on the next page he goes, “Now look at the most effortless bear we’ve ever seen” and then he goes through examples of Pooh. I think it’s cool how he can, like, show the contrast and show the parallels between those two. I think it’s interesting.

Student 4: Well, what you were saying about high school, I thought that was one of the most interesting things too. And my favorite passage was, “ ‘It is today, sweet Piglet, my favorite day’ says Pooh” and that everyday could be his favorite day. And he just enjoys it. That would be incredible to embrace, and that’s what I like best about the book.

Flying On Their Own: An excerpt from the *The Kite Runner* conversation

What follows now is an extended exchange between two students. This exchange is particularly noteworthy for those skeptics who might be tempted to conclude that book club discourse merely changes the setting for participants who always dominate, in almost monologic turns. As Marshall (1991) points out, most classroom talk is comprised of student-teacher turns. Here there is a sustained exchange with no mediating adult.

Student 1: I mean, didn’t he try to put him in the orphanage after he saved his life? It’s just ridiculous how much he owed this boy and he still did that.

Student 2: But wasn’t the whole point of putting him into the orphanage that he could help him to escape?

Student 1: Yeah, but I mean, come on, you can’t have children and your wife really wants a kid and you find a blood relative, this little boy, who is sweet and you owe him a ton, I mean...

Student 2: He was trying to get him out, though.

Student 1: No, that’s good, but after his friend like came to Pakistan...

Student 2: But how’s he supposed to know before that he was a relative...

Student 1: No, but once he knew, he’s like, ooh, I just made the decision...

Student 2: But how would you react to that?

Student 1: I know it’s scary, but...

Student 2: It’s one of those situations that it’s hard to know. It’s hard to judge his moral decisions in that extreme circumstance that none of us has ever had to experience.

The conversation then resumes with other participants.

Student 6: Personally, I think Amir was kind of afraid to take Hassan's son into his home because that would be a constant reminder of everything, all the things that happened in his childhood. And how much Hassan suffered for him, because he looked exactly like Hassan. I mean, don't you think it would be kind of hard to go back and accept this child who would be a constant reminder every day that you let Hassan get raped. I think that would be really hard. I think he had the chance to redeem himself, but it was just really hard.

Student 7: Do you guys think it made it more believable that he first didn't think he should take him back, or do you think it would have been more believable if he had instantly though this is my future son.

Student 4: Well, it kind of goes along with how he isn't really an adult yet. Well, he is an adult, he does go to Pakistan and decides to go into Afghanistan, but still he's not, like, all the way there yet. I think he doesn't want to be reminded of what he did and doesn't want to take him home now, but once his journey is over, ideally, he should take Hassan back. And he should have to look at him and deal with what he did, and he just kind of owes him.

Student 2: I agree, like, I don't want to sound too harsh, 'cause I did like the book. I think you are right. I think he was afraid of that reminder, but that is kind of weak. He saw what the orphanages were like, but if he couldn't look beyond himself in that extreme of a circumstance, then that's not that good of him. But, that said, I don't think the author was trying to make him an awful person. I think a lot of it was to keep things going.

Student 6: And also, he's only human too. It's so much easier for someone on the outside, and most of us will never be in that situation, hopefully. I think that just helped his character development, because at first you hate him because you know that he should take this boy back with him. And he doesn't. But I think it is important to remember that Amir is only human, and that's just something to keep in mind.

Student 8: I think Amir is portrayed pretty realistically in his selfishness and his fear of the unknown. Amir is really grappling with his past and his life.

Student 1: I think this book gets a lot of its effectiveness because Amir can't really be blamed for all his shortcomings. He's living an easy life, even though he's growing up in Afghanistan. For us that's, like, rough. But he's got this nice house, he's an only child, his father takes him on trips, he gets to escape to the U.S. even though that was kind of hard. I mean, you know, basically, even though he's had life probably a lot more rough than we've had, it's easier to understand him because, I mean, personally, I've had everything in life handed to me, like, on a silver platter. Like, I have everything. And I think Amir kind of has that same kind of thing going for him and that kind of is what makes him who he is. If we think about it, we can see a lot of ourselves in him.

I think maybe that is why I have so much scorn for him, because I see exactly what I hate, not hate, but what I don't like in myself, and what people maybe see in the mirror, and it just makes you think because there's always something worse, there's always somebody worse off. I think, reading the book we all kind of thought, just go into Afghanistan, even if you die it's worth it. But, like everybody says, if *you* are faced with that decision, what are you going to do?

Teacher: But what do you do with the circumstances that you've heard? That's what you're talking about. Like, not to your credit or your fault that you are here and he is there? What do you think the book suggests about that?

Student 1: I don't think Amir shows what we should do, rather more what we should try to avoid. Not that he screwed up entirely. But, um, I think Amir did do some good things. I'm gonna follow my dream and be a writer. He didn't let his father make him do something he didn't want to do. And he did take advantage of his opportunities as far as, like, education goes. But I think he lost sight of a lot of things, and I think that is what happens to everybody.

Student 7: Amir was really just able to accept things without standing up for others. And you need to balance those two. You need to be able to stand up for yourself, but Amir was really stunted 'cause he wasn't able to stand up for others. So I think you need, like, both, in order to be the ideal person.

Student 5: But I think the book is saying there is no such thing as the ideal person. Because, the Hassan boy listens to everyone and obeys everyone, but he can't stand up for himself. And Amir can't stand up for others. And at the end he realizes that Baba made mistakes too. So he talked all about this human nature stuff, everyone makes mistakes, so that is really an inherent theme in this book.

Student 6: I think this book isn't about courage but is about regular people who have human flaws, and they all make mistakes and I think this book is about how they try to deal with these mistakes.

Student 1: Then, what's it really telling us to do? You know, Amir is really just trying to forget about it and leave, but it keeps coming back to bite him. So how do I compensate for all the chances and luck that I've been given? Like, what am I supposed to do?

Student 6: You have to just do to the best of your human nature. You can't always do what the ideal person reading the book of your life would do. But, like, you just have to try, 'cause once you do something it's done, you can't go back and change that.

Student 1: Still, at the time you could change it. That's what kind of irks me. I've always thought you can have your past and you can make mistakes but you have to get over them. So in that respect, I'm Amir, you know I was just trying to like, okay I screwed up, I was 12, trying to get over that, but in that respect, I am stuck.

Student 8: I think what you were saying about what do I do to compensate for all the things I have in my life... I am now just thinking about when you make a mistake, no matter how much good you do afterward, it doesn't necessarily make the mistake you made any easier to deal with or more justified.

Book Club/Literature Circle Suggestions from Carol Jago

cjago@caroljago.com

Fall

Choose 5 books to read from the following list.

A Lesson Before Dying, Ernest Gaines
All Quiet on the Western Front, Eric Maria Remarque
Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen
My Antonia, Willa Cather
The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger
The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath
The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde
Brave New World, Alduous Huxley
Childhood's End, Arthur C. Clarke
Wuthering Heights, Emily Bronte
The Stranger, Albert Camus
A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens
Bless Me, Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya

Please have one of the novels read by each of the following dates:

Novel #1 **September** ___
Novel #2 **October** ____
Novel #3 **November** ___
Novel #4 **December** ___
Novel #5 **January** ____

Spring

Theme: Man's Inhumanity to Man

The Road, Cormac McCarthy
One Day of Life, Manlio Argueto
Black Like Me, John Griffin
Kaffir Boy, Mark Mathebane
Imagining Argentina, Lawrence Thornton
Animal's People, Indra Sinha
Night and Dawn, Elie Wiesel

Compare and Contrast: Books and Film

Emma by Jane Austen and *Clueless*
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen and *Bride and Prejudice*
Being There by Jerzy Kosinski and *Forest Gump*
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and film by the same name
The Reader, Bernhard Schlink and film by same name
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep by Philip K. Dick and *Bladerunner*
Rocket Boys by Homer Hickam and *October Sky*

Contemporary Women's Literature

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri
The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan
The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood
Women of Brewster Place, Gloria Naylor
Obasan, Joy Kogawa
Digging to America, Anne Tyler

Theme: Coming of Age

Someone to Run With, David Grossman
Sold, Patricia McCormick
Donald Duk, Frank Chin
Bastard Out of Carolina, Dorothy Allison
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Mark Haddon
Out Stealing Horses, Per Petterson

Genre: nonfiction

Chew on This, Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson
Brother, I'm Dying, Edwidge Danticat
Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi
The Omnivore's Dilemma, Michael Pollan
The Secret Life of Lobsters, Trevor Corson
Nickel and Dimed, Barbara Ehrenreich
A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, Ishmael Beah

Books for YOU

Nonfiction

Soldier's Heart: Teaching Literature in Peace and War at West Point, Elizabeth Samet
Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain, Maryanne Wolf
A Three Dog Life, Abigail Thomas
The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion
Truth and Beauty, Ann Patchett
The Forever War, Dexter Filkins

Fiction

So Long a Letter, Mariama Ba
Snow, Orhan Pamuk
His Illegal Self, Peter Carey
A Woman in Jerusalem, A. B. Yehoshua
Exit Ghost, Philip Roth
Home, Marilyn Robinson
People of the Book, Geraldine Brooks
Telex from Cuba, Rachel Kushner
The Elegance of the Hedgehog, Muriel Barbery
Lost City Radio, Daniel Alarcon

Annotated Bibliography of Book Club Titles

Fuller, Alexandra. *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*. Random House, 2003. ISBN: 0375758992.

A classic is born in this tender, intensely moving and even delightful journey through a white African girl's childhood. Born in England and now living in Wyoming, Fuller was conceived and bred on African soil during the Rhodesian civil war (1971-1979), a world where children over five "learn[ed] how to load an FN rifle magazine, strip and clean all the guns in the house, and ultimately, shoot-to-kill." With a unique and subtle sensitivity to racial issues, Fuller describes the wartime relationships between blacks and whites through a child's watchful eyes. *Publishers Weekly

West, Stanley Gordon. *Until They Bring the Streetcars Back*. Lexington-Marshall Publishing, 1997. ISBN: 0965624765
Until They Bring The Streetcars Back serves up a nostalgic journey through the streets of post-war 1949 Saint Paul, those wistful days of ten-cent sodas, big band music, and burning leaves. Stanley West weaves rollicking humor, riveting suspense and a bittersweet love story into the fabric of those optimistic times. *www.amazon.com

Gruen, Sara. *Water for Elephants*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2006. ISBN: 1565124995.

With its spotlight on elephants, Gruen's romantic page-turner hinges on the human-animal bonds that drove her debut and its sequel (*Riding Lessons* and *Flying Changes*). The novel, told in flashback by nonagenarian Jacob Jankowski, recounts the wild and wonderful period he spent with the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth, a traveling circus he joined during the Great Depression. *Publishers Weekly

Yunus, Muhammad. *Banker to the Poor: Micro-Lending and the Battle Against World Poverty*. PublicAffairs, 2003. ISBN: 1586481983.

Bangladesh, a country the size of Florida with a population of over 120 million people, is the home of Grameen Bank, the inspiration of economist Yunus, Bangladesh-born and U.S.-trained. Instead of spending his life as a university economics professor, Yunus decided in the mid-1970s to develop a micro-lending program to help the poorest people of his country. Yunus based the program on his strong belief that the very poor do not need complicated training programs to improve their economic lot. *Library Journal

McGhee, Alison. *Falling Boy*. Picador, 2007. ISBN-10: 0312425929.

His legs recently paralyzed in an accident, 16-year-old, wheelchair-bound Joseph works in a Minneapolis bakery with Zap, a boy of 17, and is pelted with questions by Enzo, a girl of nine whom no one seems to be looking after. After the accident, Joseph left upstate New York and his troubled mother to live with a father he barely knows. Enzo, who desperately wants Joseph to be a superhero hurt performing a feat of derring-do, persists in trying to unravel the accident's mystery. *Publishers Weekly

Fforde, Jasper. *The Big Over Easy: a Nursery Crime*. Viking Adult, 2005. ISBN: 0670034231

Detective Jack Spratt, the dedicated but underappreciated investigator in the Reading, England, Nursery Crimes Division, is depressed because the court finds the three little pigs "not guilty of all charges relating to the first-degree murder of Mr. Wolff." Fforde crafts a police procedural out of this bizarre alternative universe that prizes literacy (detectives, for example, garner recognition less for solving crimes than by writing articles about cases for the likes of *Amazing Crime Stories* or *Sleuth Illustrated*). *Publishers Weekly

Shreve, Susan Richards. *A Student of Living Things*. Viking Adult, 2006. ISBN: 0670037583.

One April morning in a near-future Washington, D.C., Claire Frayn and her brother, Steven, leave for George Washington University, where she is a biology Ph.D. student (and mother of three-month-old Asa), Steven is a law student with a penchant for writing op-eds and their father is a professor of medicine. They leave their parents and extended family arguing over Steven's latest piece: this one bashes the DOJ's enforcement of the Freedom for Democracy Act. It is a salvo in the "civil war" (as Claire describes it) that churns as U.S. homeland security tightens, and paranoia reigns. *Publishers Weekly

Jeanette Walls. *The Glass Castle*. Scribner, 2005. ISBN: 0743247531.

Jeanette Walls' father always called her "Mountain Goat" and there's perhaps no more apt nickname for a girl who navigated a sheer and towering cliff of childhood both daily and stoically. In *The Glass Castle*, Walls chronicles her upbringing at the hands of eccentric, nomadic parents--Rose Mary, her frustrated-artist mother, and Rex, her brilliant, alcoholic father. *www.amazon.com

Cox, Lynne. *Grayson*. Knopf, 2006. ISBN: 0307264548

On a clear California morning when Cox (*Swimming to Antarctica*) was 17 years old, she had an unusual experience that stayed with her for 30 years, creating a spiritual foundation for her personal and professional success. In this slim and crisp memoir, Cox details a morning swim off the coast of California that took an unexpected turn: returning to shore, she

discovered that she was being followed by a baby gray whale that had been separated from its mother. Cox expertly weaves fine details together, from the whale's mushroomlike skin to how other fish react to such a large creature. *Publishers Weekly

Mezrich, Ben. *Bringing Down the House*. Free Press, 2002. ISBN: 0743225708

Mezrich hits the jackpot when M.I.T. student Kevin Lewis steps onto the floor of the Mirage. The book stays on a roll as it describes how the young gambler and his card-counting cohorts employ simple math and complex disguises to win nearly \$4 million at the blackjack tables. Bouncing from huge scores to frightening banishments, the M.I.T. team fights a winning battle against the law of averages--until they're forced to flee south. *Booklist

Maguire, Gregory. *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. Harper Paperbacks, 1996. ISBN: 0060987103

Born with green skin and huge teeth, like a dragon, the free-spirited Elphaba grows up to be an anti-totalitarian agitator, an animal-rights activist, a nun, then a nurse who tends the dying, and, ultimately, the headstrong Wicked Witch of the West in the land of Oz. Maguire's strange and imaginative postmodernist fable uses L. Frank Baum's Wonderful Wizard of Oz as a springboard to create a tense realm inhabited by humans, talking animals (a rhino librarian, a goat physician), Munchkinlanders, dwarves and various tribes. *Publishers Weekly

Larson, Erik. *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, Madness at the Fair that Changed America*. Vintage, 2004. ISBN-10: 0375725601

Their fates were linked by the magical Chicago World's Fair of 1893, nicknamed the "White City" for its majestic beauty. Architect Daniel Burnham built it; serial killer Dr. H. H. Holmes used it to lure victims to his World's Fair Hotel, designed for murder. Both men left behind them a powerful legacy, one of brilliance and energy, the other of sorrow and darkness. *www.randomhouse.com

Chao, Evelina. *Yeh Yeh's House: A Memoir*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2006. ISBN: 0312330782

As a girl in Virginia in the 1950s, Chao corresponded with her grandfather, Yeh Yeh, a renowned poet and professor of English living in Beijing. He wrote, "You must always be yourself." But who was she? An American or the descendent of the distinguished Chinese family from which she inherited her artistic gifts? A viola player in the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Chao didn't visit her relatives in China until 1987, making the pilgrimage with her often uncommunicative mother. Writing with striking directness and lucidity, Chao chronicles both unexpectedly arduous adventures and life-altering revelations. *Booklist

Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Doubleday, 2003. ISBN: 0385512104

Christopher Boone, the autistic 15-year-old narrator of this revelatory novel, lacks the intuitive "theory of mind" by which most of us sense what's going on in other people's heads. When his neighbor's poodle is killed and Christopher is falsely accused of the crime, he decides that he will take a page from Sherlock Holmes (one of his favorite characters) and track down the killer. As the mystery leads him to the secrets of his parents' broken marriage and then into an odyssey to find his place in the world, he must fall back on deductive logic to navigate the emotional complexities of a social world that remains a closed book to him. *Publishers Weekly

Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All American Meal*. Harper Perennial, 2005. ISBN: 0060838582

Schlosser's incisive history of the development of American fast food indicts the industry for some shocking crimes against humanity, including systematically destroying the American diet and landscape, and undermining our values and our economy. The first part of the book details the postwar ascendance of fast food from Southern California, assessing the impact on people in the West in general. The second half looks at the product itself: where it is manufactured (in a handful of enormous factories), what goes into it (chemicals, feces) and who is responsible (monopolistic corporate executives). *Publishers Weekly

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Trade, 2004. ISBN: 1594480001

The Kite Runner follows the story of Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy businessman in Kabul, and Hassan, the son of Amir's father's servant. As children in the relatively stable Afghanistan of the early 1970s, the boys are inseparable until an unspeakable event changes the nature of their relationship forever, and eventually cements their bond in ways neither boy could have ever predicted. Even after Amir and his father flee to America, Amir remains haunted by his cowardly actions and disloyalty. In part, it is these demons that bring him back to his war-torn native land after it comes under Taliban rule. *www.amazon.com

Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2003. ISBN: 0375422307.

Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi's wise, funny, and heartbreaking memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. * www.randomhouse.com

Chin, Oliver. *9 of 1: A Window to the World*. Frog Books, 2003. ISBN: 1583940723.

Oliver Chin creates a compelling blend of fact and fiction where a high school class (based in the San Francisco Bay area) grapples with the aftershocks of the catastrophe of 9/11. But their 11th-grade US history teacher challenges his students to move forward. Can the next generation sort out a world, growing smaller by the day but yet more divided? Through the eyes of nine students come the disparate yet earnest voices of a multi-cultural world. *www.immedium.com

Armstrong, Lance. *It's Not About the Bike*. New York: Berkley Publishing, 2001. ISBN: 0425179613.

How five-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong overcame early career setbacks, injuries, and cancer to claim his spot at the top of the cycling world. This motivational autobiography details his training and racing, near fatal cancer, and personal struggles, all of which he conquered while becoming one of the most successful cyclists in history.

Blais, Madeleine. *In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle*. New York: Warner Books, 1995. ISBN: 0446672106.

The Lady Hurricanes, Amherst's high school women's basketball team, started their 1992-1993 season with determination and made it big. This nonfiction title traces the young women of the team through their growth and successes, while also looking at the enthusiasm of a town that, in the past, had reserved its energies for men's athletics.

Christopher, Nicholas. *A Trip to the Stars*. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 2001. ISBN: 0743203305.

A Trip to the Stars opens in 1965 as ten year old orphan Enzo is kidnapped while at the Manhattan Planetarium with his guardian aunt Mala. They are separated for the next 15 years while Enzo is raised by his kidnapper, a great-uncle, and Mala searches for him. Allusions to astronomy, philosophy, and history enrich the story and tie the experiences of Enzo and Mala together.

De Bernieres, Louis. *Corelli's Mandolin*. New York: Vintage International, 1994. ISBN: 067976397X.

The perfect love story to feed spring fever, *Corelli's Mandolin* takes place in Greece during World War II. The novel begins with Captain Corelli, the mandolin playing likable officer in command of the Italian Army, and follows the love that develops between him and Pelagia, a young woman living in the small Greek village that his troops occupy. *Corelli's Mandolin* explores issues of love, loyalty, home, and family in its wartime setting.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002.

Wal-Mart clerk, waitress, and hotel cleaning woman... these are just a few of the jobs author Barbara Ehrenreich took to write *Nickel and Dimed*. This title is a real life look at what it is like to live on a minimum wage salary in America today.

Enger, Leif. *Peace Like a River*. New York: Grove Press, 2001. ISBN: 0802139256.

Set in a small Minnesota town during the 1960's, *Peace Like a River* chronicles the story of the Land family after Davy, the eldest son, shoots and kills two town bullies who have threatened their family and skips town on horseback. Single father Jeremiah packs up Rueben and Swede who head out across North Dakota in search of their son and brother. Narrated by 11-year-old Rueben, *Peace Like a River* is the miraculous story of the Land's faith in God and their family.

Finney Boyland, James. *Getting In*. New York: Warner Books, 1998. ISBN: 0446674176.

A timely choice for high school students, *Getting In* is about four high school seniors who, along with their parents, embark on a Winnebago tour of Eastern colleges. In the process they make many, sometimes unnerving, discoveries about themselves and each other.

Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. New York: Penguin Publishing, 1983. ISBN: 0140067477.

The Tao of Pooh explores Taoism, an eastern philosophy, in terms of everyone's favorite bear, Winnie the Pooh. To do this, Hoff weaves in excerpts from traditional Pooh tales that exemplify Taoist beliefs. In addition, Pooh and his friends occasionally jump into the narration and comment on the principles of Taoism.

Irwin, William, Mart T. Conard, and Aeon J. Skobel, eds. *The Simpson's and Philosophy: The D'oh of Homer*. Chicago: Open Court, 2001. ISBN: 0812684333.

A compilation of 18 essays, *The Simpson's and Philosophy* examines how this TV show, which many love and many love to criticize, parallels the world's most studied philosophies. The authors are mostly professional philosophers who have clearly watched and enjoyed the show since its beginnings and make their comparisons comprehensible for readers of all kinds.

Lawson, Mary. *Crow Lake*. New York: Delta, 2002. ISBN 0385337639. Kate Morrison, her little sister, and her two brothers were orphaned when a car accident took the lives of their parents. Rather than splitting up, nineteen-year-old Luke takes responsibility for the family, sacrificing much of his own future to do so. Narrating the novel as young adult, Kate looks back on the sometimes terrible, sometimes touching years that shaped her family.

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 2003. ISBN: 0156027321.

Pi Patel is sixteen when his family decides to move from their native India to Canada. The family boards a ship with many of the zoo animals that they cared for as curators of the local zoo, but on the voyage the ship sinks, leaving Pi alone with a zebra, orangutan, hyena, and tiger aboard a lifeboat. This story delves into religion and philosophy, while Pi fights for his survival.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997. ISBN: 1573225789.

This memoir begins with McBride's first person account of growing up in New York City with his ten siblings. Alternating chapters tell the story of McBride's mother Ruth, a Jewish woman who grew up in the South and eventually escaped to New York where she made a home and a family with her black husband. In finding out about his mother's past, McBride is ultimately able to make sense of his own identity. This is an inspirational story of a mother who raised eleven highly successful children, as told by her son.

McLoughlin, Tim. *Heart of the Old County*. New York: Akashic Books, 2001. ISBN: 1888451157.

Nineteen year old Mike, a native of Brooklyn, is a tough guy who doesn't quite know what he wants. He is caught between his loyalties to his father who is a small time participant in organized crime, his high school sweetheart who is demanding an engagement ring, his down and out friend who ends up dead, and a real future at college which scares him more than anything. Mike's voice provides a funny, tragic, and realistic look into his neighborhood and the decisions that any young adult makes.

Na, An. *A Step from Heaven*. New York: Speak, 2001. ISBN: 0142500275.

The daughter of Korean immigrants to the United States, Young Ju is a small child when *A Step from Heaven* begins. Na tells the story of Young Ju and her family, whose expectations of living the American Dream are not fulfilled by their life in California. This young adult novel paints a picture of an immigrant family's experiences and a girl's journey from childhood to adulthood.

Sebold, Alice. *The Lovely Bones*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002. ISBN: 0316666343.

At the beginning of the novel, thirteen-year-old Susie Salmon is raped and murdered by a man living in her middle-class suburban neighborhood. In the months and years after her tragic death, Susie watches her friends and family cope with their loss and eventually learn to live without her. Susie's authentic voice is sometimes sad but often funny as she narrates her story from heaven and slowly lets go of her life on earth.

Sijie, Dai. *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001. ISBN: 0385722206.

Set during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is the story of two urban young men who are sent to the country to be reeducated. While there, they befriend a pretty seamstress and stumble upon a stash of banned Western literature. The books, which the three of them voraciously consume, take them to worlds they can only dream of and are food for survival in their intellectually dismal surroundings.