



Summer Reading List for Staff - 2011

Created by Library Media Specialists from the Howard County Public School System and Librarians from Howard County Library



Biography



Schiff, Stacy. *Cleopatra*. (2010) "In one of the busiest afterlives in history she has gone on to become an asteroid, a video game, a cliché, a cigarette, a slot machine, a strip club, a synonym for Elizabeth Taylor." Thus, with typical rollicking exuberance, does author Stacy Schiff characterize Cleopatra. Ruler, wife, mother, lover, high priestess, warrior queen - she was all that, and more. Ancient history hasn't been this much fun since "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum!" *Roberta Rood*

Fiction



Bradley, Alan. *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*. (2009) Eleven-year-old Flavia is one of three precocious and extremely literate daughters being raised by English widower Colonel de Luce in 1950. Flavia is able to pursue her passion for chemistry (especially poisons) in the fully equipped Victorian laboratory in Buckshaw, the English mansion where the de Luce family lives. When Colonel de Luce is arrested for murder, it's up to Flavia to solve the mystery. *Judy Coon for Booklist*

Chevalier, Tracy. *Remarkable Creatures*. (2010) The discoveries of fossils on the beaches of Lyme Regis, England, in the 19th century opened the minds of scientists to the planet's unimaginable age and the extinction of species. The first remarkable finds were made by the poor working-class Anning family—and their young daughter, Mary. Chevalier wraps the history with a tale of the friendship between Mary and Elizabeth Philpot, also fascinated by the creatures of stone, in a time when women were thought to be ill-suited to the work or incapable of understanding the scope of their finds. *Publishers Weekly*

Devens, Toby. *My Favorite Midlife Crisis (yet)*. (2006) Three women of a certain age are at a crossroads. OB/GYN Gwyneth discovers her husband's love for Brad, her interior decorator. Widow Kat, with a young boyfriend, discovers cancer in her breast. Never-married Fleur discovers a need to find a husband. Their travails lead them through Baltimore and Columbia, Maryland, on heartfelt adventures, both lusty and amusing. *Sandy Gaffigan*

Donoghue, Emma. *Room: A Novel*. (2010) In many ways, Jack is a typical 5-year-old. But he is different in a big way—he has lived his entire life in a single room, sharing the tiny space with only his mother and an unnerving nighttime visitor known as Old Nick. For Jack, Room is the only world he knows, but for Ma, it is a prison in which she has tried to craft a normal life for her son. Despite its profoundly disturbing premise, *Room* is rife with moments of hope and beauty, and the dogged determination to live, even in the most desolate circumstances. *Amazon.com*

Gruenwald, Lisa. *The Irresistible Henry House*. (2010) Martha Gaines ran the practice house - a program for teaching young women how to be mothers - at Wilton College. Many babies passed through the house, but only Henry captured Martha's heart, and she decided to keep Henry to raise as her own. When he is 10, Henry finds out who his real mother is, and his life takes a turn from which he can't recover. Henry begins planning his escape from the practice house and ultimately from Martha. What follows is a fascinating chronicle of his wandering life. He returns back home to Wilton College, where he can make peace with what Martha did to him so many years ago. *Booklist*

Hoffman, Beth. *Saving Ceecee Honeycutt*. (2010) Momma always told CeeCee that "being in the North isn't living—it's absolute hell." Of course, having to live with Momma, Vidalia Onion Queen, 1951—doesn't make it any more heavenly, especially when Momma starts standing in the front yard blowing kisses to passersby. It is no surprise when a Happy Cow Ice Cream Truck ends this practice and

12-year-old CeeCee is sent off to Savannah to live with her elderly great aunt, Tallulah Caldwell, and her wise cook, Oletta. All the characters are relentlessly eccentric, upbeat, sweet as molasses, and living "in a breezy, flower-scented fairy tale... a strange, perfumed world that... seemed to be run entirely by women." *Booklist*

Lippi, Rosina. *The Pajama Girls of Lambert Square*. (2008) Meet John Dodge, a restless man who keeps his mind occupied by moving around the country, flipping struggling businesses for a profit. When he lands in the small town of Lamb's Corner, S.C., Dodge meets Julia Darrow, the owner of a fine linens store who, for some reason, is always in pajamas and exhibits a quieter type of restlessness. Julia is secretive and mysterious, but Dodge cannot ignore his attraction to her. Lippi makes a great story out of how a hardcore wanderer and an agoraphobic come together and offers excellent observations of complicated family relationships and southern hospitality. *Publishers Weekly*

Picoult, Jodi. *House Rules*. (2010) Jacob Hunt is a teenage boy with Asperger's syndrome. He has a special focus on one subject, forensic analysis. He's always showing up at crime scenes and telling the cops what they need to do...and he's usually right. But then his town is rocked by a terrible murder and, for a change, the police come to Jacob with questions. All of the hallmark behaviors of Asperger's—not looking someone in the eye, stimulatory tics and twitches, flat affect—can look a lot like guilt to law enforcement personnel. Suddenly, Jacob and his family, who only want to fit in, feel the spotlight shining directly on them. *Amazon.com*

Simonson, Helen. *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*. (2009) Major Pettigrew, a widower, lives in the pristine village of Edgecombe St. Mary in East Sussex. Lately, a potential new love has entered his life. But while his relationship with Mrs. Ali moves cautiously forward, the Major finds himself in conflict with his son Roger, a big city striver in the financial sector. Roger and his father see eye to eye on virtually nothing, and their confrontations range from frustrating, to outrageous, to just plain hilarious. Blessed with a felicitous mode of expression and great sense of humor, writer Helen Simonson can be warmhearted, even tender, without becoming mawkish. *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, a remarkable achievement for a first time novelist, is an absolute joy. *Roberta Rood*

Sittenfeld, Curtis. *American Wife*. (2009) Middle class, bookish, small town good girl Alice Lindgren is involved in a tragic accident at seventeen. Years later she is swept off her feet by the son of a powerful political family. What follows is the chronicle of a life long love affair as her husband becomes governor, then president. A realistic and compassionate look behind the facade of high profile public life. Fiction, loosely based on the life of Laura Bush. *Sandy Gaffigan*

Tremain, Rose. *The Road Home*. (2009) Since jobs are all but nonexistent in his native country, Lev, a widower, travels by bus from Eastern Europe to the UK in search of work and leaves his little daughter Maya behind, in the care of her grandmother. Lev finds a job washing dishes in an upscale restaurant. He proves such a quick study and so eager to learn that he is soon promoted to doing "veg prep" for the chefs. You will find yourself rooting for the decent, goodhearted Lev as he struggles to make a go of it, all the time yearning to be reunited with Maya and all the rest of his family and friends back home. *Roberta Rood*

Tyler, Anne. *Ladder of Years: A Novel*. (1996) This novel peers intimately into a seemingly ordinary family life. The family here is the Grinsteeds, more particularly restless 40-

year-old wife and mom Celia Grinstead. Feeling unappreciated and unnoticed by her husband and increasingly unnecessary in the lives of her nearly grown children, Celia wanders off during a family beach vacation and starts a new life in a small town. She's sad and uncertain about her break with her previous life but oddly determined. Poignant, warm, and quirky. *Library Journal*

Verghese, Abraham. *Cutting for Stone*. (2010) This is a riveting saga of twin brothers, Marion and Shiva Stone, born of a tragic union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa. Orphaned by their mother's death in childbirth and their father's disappearance, and bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution. *www.abrahamverghese.com*

von Arnim, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. (1898) In this diary, published in 1898, an aristocratic matron wittily describes her successes and failures trying to create an English garden at her country estate in frigid northern Germany. This blunt portrayal of women's restrictions in the rigid society of the day is written with a mocking tongue. Elizabeth is a hoot. In the public domain, downloadable from Gutenberg. *Sandy Gaffigan*

Weiner, Jennifer. *Fly Away Home*. (2010) Sylvie is stunned when her husband, Senator Richard Woodruff, is exposed by the press for having an affair with a staffer. Humiliated, Sylvie agrees to stand by Richard's side during his mea culpa press conference. As soon as it's over, she heads to Connecticut, not sure whether she wants to end her marriage. The Woodruffs' two daughters are at similar crossroads in their lives. Realizing she has always put Richard first before her children, Sylvie makes a bid to have her daughters join her out at the Connecticut house and is surprised to find their lives as tumultuous as hers has become. *Kristine Huntley in Booklist*

Zackheim, Michele. *Broken Colors*. (2007) This is a beautiful novel, sometimes comic and always wise. Visual artist Zackheim (Violette's Embrace) imbues the novel with her deep knowledge of the art world, from techniques to agents to the world of galleries. *Library Journal*

Mystery/Suspense



French, Tana. *Faithful Place*. (2010) Frank Mackey, head of the Garda's Dublin undercover unit, left home at 19. He and Rosie Daly, madly in love, had plans to adopt one of the only career paths available in Ireland in the 1980s: immigration. They planned to meet at midnight and take a ferry to England. But Rosie never showed up. Frank assumed that she'd left without him and joined the police. Twenty-five years later, Rosie's suitcase and remains are discovered, and Frank must return to the "bubbling cauldron of crazy" that is his family and his street. *Thomas Gaughan for Booklist*

Harris, Charlaune. *Dead until Dark* (First book of the series, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*). (2008) Sookie Stackhouse is a small-time cocktail waitress in small-town Louisiana, until the vampire of her dreams walks into her life, and one of her coworkers checks out. A fun, fast, funny, and wonderfully intriguing blend of vampire and mystery that's hard to put down, and should not be missed. *Publishers Weekly*

King, Laurie. *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*. (1994) At 15, Mary Russell is tall and gangling, bespectacled and bookish. In 1915, the orphaned heiress is living in her ancestral home with an embittered aunt. In order to escape the woman's generally malevolent disposition, she wanders

the Downs. On one such outing, she trips over a gaunt, elderly man sitting on the ground, "watching bees." This gentleman turns out to be Sherlock Holmes, and the resulting acquaintance evolves into a mentoring experience for the young woman. *School Library Journal*

Maitland, Barry. *Dark Mirror: A Brock and Kolla Mystery*. (2009) Ph.D. student Marion Summers collapses and dies in the London Library. When arsenic is discovered in Summers's system, Kolla takes charge of her first investigation. Summers had recently become obsessed with poisons, particularly arsenic. Her theories concerning its role in the lives of the Pre-Raphaelites had caused tensions among her academic peers. With Brock's help, Kolla digs deeper into the young woman's life and uncovers an unsettling past and numerous suspects. *Publishers Weekly*

Peters, Ellis. *A Morbid Taste for Bones*. (1997) In his first of 20 mysteries in the murderous medieval world of herbalist Brother Cadfael, a group of brothers travel to Wales to bring the bones of St. Winifred to their Abby. Medieval tourism needs sacred remains to attract the alms of pilgrims. The villagers are not happy giving their Welsh saint to an English Abbey. A murder takes place. A bit of herbal trickery solves the whodunit, leaving all parties with what they deserve. *Sandy Gaffigan*

Pickard, Nancy. *Scent of Rain and Lightning*. (2010) When she was three years old, Jody Linder lost both parents in one night, when her father, Hugh Jay, was killed and her mother, Laurie, vanished. Raised by grandparents, Jody spends years collecting human detritus around the area's towering Testament Rocks, where authorities once searched for clues to Laurie's disappearance. Jody's world is rocked 23 years later when Billy Crosby, the vicious drunk convicted of her father's murder on circumstantial evidence, is released for a new trial; his return to town brings events to a head. *Michele Leber for Booklist*

Walker, Martin. *The Dark Vineyard*. (2010) Bruno Courrages, Chief of Police in the village of Saint-Denis in the southwest of France, is called to investigate a fire at an agricultural research station. The research involves GMO's – genetically modified organisms from which genetically modified foods are derived. Was the fire deliberately set? It's an intriguing mystery, but where this novel really triumphs is in its depiction of a vibrant culture deep in the heart of France's Perigord region. As you might expect, wine making and wine tasting are central to that culture. *Roberta Rood*

Nonfiction



Flinn, Kathleen. *The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry*. (2008) Flinn's engaging account of her studies at famed French cooking school Le Cordon Bleu should strike a chord with anyone who has dreamed of leaving the rat race and following a passion for food. *Amazon.com*

Gorant, Jim. *Lost Dogs*. (2010) Expanding on his cover story on Michael Vick's dogs in *Sports Illustrated*, Gorant details the discovery of the Bad Newz kennel, the efforts of a USDA special agent and the Virginia deputy sheriff to bust it, official resistance to touching Vick, the efforts of BAD RAP pit bull rescuers to evaluate the dogs (which saved them from being destroyed), the plan for the dogs' reclamation, and the legal and moral ramifications of the case. All but a few of Vick's dogs have been rehabilitated—they're family pets and even therapy dogs whose stories are all here. *Publishers Weekly*

Hickam, Homer. *Rocket Boys*. (2000) In 1957, the national panic set off by Sputnik I reached into the hollows of Coalwood, West Virginia. Teenage Homer went bonkers about rockets, watching Sputnik I streak across the night sky and yearning to work for Wernher von Braun. So he formed a rocket club, whose adventures in launching the Auk series of rockets, from their first attempt that burned up Mom's

fence to the last that flew six miles up, form the frame of the memoir. *Gilbert Taylor for Booklist*

Koontz, Dean. *A Big Little Life: A Memoir of a Joyful Dog*. (2009) Dean Koontz, a successful novelist, had been married to his high school sweetheart, Gerda, since the age of twenty, and together they had made a happy life for themselves. Then along came Trixie. Dean had always wanted a dog, but not until Trixie was he truly open to the change that such a beautiful creature could bring about in him. Trixie had intelligence, a lack of vanity, and an uncanny knack for living in the present. In this big world, Trixie was a little thing, but in all the ways that mattered, she lived a big life. *Amazon*

McClure, Tori Murden. *A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean*. (2009) Two storm-wracked trips across the Atlantic Ocean become voyages of self-discovery for McClure. She details her attempts to become the first woman to row across the Atlantic, interspersed with reflections on challenges she has faced in the past. Her tiny vessel, the American Pearl, is battered by winds throughout the journey, forcing McClure to come to terms with her own vulnerability. *Booklist*

Perry, Douglas. *The Girls of Murder City*. (2010) In 1924, prim Maurine Watkins walked into a job as the *Chicago Tribune's* police reporter just in time to observe the freak run of homicidal wives and girlfriends that made up Chicago's Murderess's Row. Her disgust at a system, in which all-male juries let beautiful women literally get away with murder, caused her to work tirelessly for justice and to write a viciously satirical play, which morphed into the musical, *Chicago*. *Library Journal*

Puleo, Stephen. *Dark Tide: The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919*. (2003) Puleo sets out to determine whether the collapse of a molasses tank in 1919 that sent a tidal wave of 2.3 million gallons of the sticky liquid through Boston's North End and killed 21 people was the work of Italian anarchists or due to negligence by the tank's owner, United States Industrial Alcohol. *Library Journal*

Rose, Sarah. *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History*. (2010) Through the adventures of Robert Fortune, a 19th century plant hunter, the reader learns a delicious brew of information on the history of tea cultivation and consumption in the Western world. Rose reconstructs what she posits as the "greatest theft of trade secrets in the history of mankind." Tea was grown in China. Great Britain wanted tea. But trying to trade with the Celestial Empire was like pulling teeth. So the East India Company sent hunter Fortune undercover (dressed in mandarin robes) to penetrate the depths of China and surreptitiously gather—steal, in other words—seeds and young plants and send them to India, where they would flourish in soil that was part of the British Empire. *Booklist*

Scottoline, Lisa. *Why My Third Husband Will Be A Dog: The Amazing Adventures of an Ordinary Woman*. (2009) Scottoline, author of several thrillers featuring women and writer of the weekly *Chick Wit* column in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, offers a collection of her published columns and additional commentary on life from a woman's perspective. Her columns feature the people in her life—mom, brother, daughter, friends, and her pets, including four dogs of long and faithful companionship, thus the title of the book. Scottoline takes the fodder of everyday life and offers witty reflections from a female perspective. *Booklist*

Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. (2010) Henrietta Lacks was a 31-year-old black mother of five in Baltimore when she died of cervical cancer in 1951. Without her knowledge, doctors treating her at Johns Hopkins took tissue samples from her cervix for research. They spawned the first viable, indeed miraculously productive, cell line—known as HeLa. These cells have aided in medical discoveries from the polio vaccine to AIDS

treatments. What Skloot so poignantly portrays is the devastating impact Henrietta's death and the eventual importance of her cells had on her husband and children. *Amazon.com*

Audio Books



Christie, Agatha (read by Hugh Fraser). *The Pale Horse*. (2003) Mark Easterbrook, an unworldly historian, stumbles upon what proves to be a murder for hire scheme. With the help of his friends Ginger Corrigan, Inspector LeJeune, and Mrs. Dane Calthrop, a vicar's wife, Mark takes up arms against this truly fiendish conspiracy. It will take more than talk to break its back. It will take action, and a willingness to put one's life on the line. *Roberta Rood*

O'Flynn, Catherine (read by John Lee). *The News Where You Are*. (2010) Frank Allcroft, anchor for a TV news show out of Birmingham, feels keenly the loss of any sense of community in his life. He experiences additional heartache as the buildings designed by his architect father are pulled down one by one, all over England. Frank's daughter Mo is one of the most appealing children to appear in fiction for some time. *Roberta Rood*

Smith, Alexander McCall (read by Davina Porter). *The Isabel Dalhousie Series*. What a wonderful creation is Isabel Dalhousie, a woman of intellect and passion, holder of a doctorate in philosophy from Cambridge, owner and editor of a prestigious professional journal, collector of fine art, lover of Jaime, and a first time mother at the age of 42. But she is vulnerable and insecure, prey to anxiety, especially where Jaime is concerned. He is, after all, fourteen years younger than she. Isabel's triumphs and tribulations are vividly realized by narrator Davina Porter, who captures perfectly the soft, distinctive accent of Isabel's beloved Edinburgh. *Roberta Rood*

Short Stories



King, Stephen. *Full Dark, No Stars*. (2010) Eerie twists of fate drive the four longish stories. In "1922", a farmer murders his wife to retain the family land she hopes to sell, then watches his life unravel hideously as the consequences of the killing suggest a near-supernatural revenge. "Big Driver" tells of an otherwise ordinary woman who discovers her extraordinary capacity for retribution after she is raped and left for dead. "A Good Marriage" explores the aftermath of a wife's discovery of her milquetoast husband's sinister secret life, while "Fair Extension," the book's most disturbing story, follows the relationship between a man and the best friend on whom he preternaturally shifts all his bad luck and misfortune. *Publishers Weekly*

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth*. (2008) Eight stories, eight spot-on glimpses into the human heart. Lahiri employs masterful prose to explore parent-child, sibling-on-sibling, and spousal relationships. Bengali immigrants leave India and settle in America. They and their American-born children struggle with the pull of tradition and the thrill of a new future. Characters grow, become whole and take on universality through the exquisite, seemingly effortless writing of a master storyteller. *Sandy Gaffigan*

Munro, Alice. *Too Much Happiness*. (2009) "She hated to hear the word 'escape' used about fiction. She might have argued, not just playfully, that it was real life that was the escape. But this was too important to argue about." Taken from a story called "Free Radicals," this line may be the best way to think about the lives unfolding in Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness*. Real life assaults her central characters rather brutally, but they respond with a poise and clarity of thought that's disarming—sometimes, even nonchalant—when you consider their circumstances. Her women move through life, wearing their scars but not so much wearied by them, profoundly intelligent, but also inordinately tender and thoughtful. *Amazon.com*