

11th Grade Independent Reading List

Witch-Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials, by Marc Aronson and Stephanie Anderson

Examining the events in the Massachusetts of 1692, and immediately discounting much of what readers may already know about the trials, the authors answer some of the questions regarding this historical event. Issues in this book will be discussed throughout the American Literature course.

Go Tell it on the Mountain by James Baldwin

First published in 1953 when James Baldwin was nearly 30, Go Tell It on the Mountain is a young man's novel. It's not a long book, and its action spans but a single day--yet the author packs in enough emotion, detail, and intimate revelation to make his story feel like a mid-20th-century epic. Using as a frame the spiritual and moral awakening of 14-year-old John Grimes during a Saturday night service in a Harlem storefront church, Baldwin lays bare the secrets of a tormented black family during the depression.

Jake Reinvented by Gordon Korman

When Rick comes home from summer camp, he discovers that there is a new "it" guy in his high school--one who dresses straight out of J. Crew; is a great football player; and throws the parties. Korman's reworking of *The Great Gatsby* places the action in a modern framework, which makes it more recognizable for today's readers and may lead them to the classic.

The Gospel According to Larry by Janet Tashjian

Highly intelligent 17-year-old Josh Swensen wants to save the world and hopefully seduce Beth, the best friend for whom he pines. Josh's self-deprecating, humorous tone carries readers swiftly along on which he rants against consumer culture and its obsession with celebrities.

A Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving

Owen Meany is a dwarfish boy with a strange voice who accidentally kills his best friend's mom with a baseball and believes--accurately--that he is an instrument of God, to be redeemed by martyrdom.

Finding Fish by Antwone Fisher

Thank goodness Antwone Fisher's story has a happy ending--otherwise, his searing memoir would be nearly unbearable to read. His father was killed by a gunshot blast shortly before he was born in 1959; his 17-year-old mother gave him up for foster care. However, the reader will find a great deal of inspiration as the author overcomes his conflicts.

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

The Poisonwood Bible is arguably Barbara Kingsolver's most ambitious work, and it reveals both her great strengths and her weaknesses. As Nathan Price's wife and daughters tell their stories in alternating chapters, Kingsolver does a good job of differentiating the voices.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

NICK CARAWAY, A YOUNG MAN from Minnesota, moves to New York in the summer of 1922 to learn about the bond business. He rents a house in the West Egg district of Long Island, a wealthy but unfashionable area populated by the new rich, a group who have made their fortunes too recently to have established social connections and who are prone to garish displays of wealth. Nick's next-door neighbor in West Egg is a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby, who lives in a gigantic Gothic mansion and throws extravagant parties every Saturday night.

Inherit the Wind by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee

"Inherit the Wind," the play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, premiered on Broadway during the 1955-56 theater season. But the play's genesis (no pun intended) lies in the events of 1925. In that year, a high school teacher named John Scopes was put on trial in Tennessee for violating a law that forbade the teaching of Darwinian evolution.

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut's absurdist classic *Slaughterhouse-Five* introduces us to Billy Pilgrim, a man who becomes unstuck in time after he is abducted by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. In a plot-scrambling display of virtuosity, we follow Pilgrim simultaneously through all phases of his life, concentrating on his (and Vonnegut's) shattering experience as an American prisoner of war who witnesses the firebombing of Dresden.

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, who also coauthored the classic "Inherit the Wind." "Night" is inspired by the life and writings of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), naturalist, political radical and seminal American intellectual figure. The play was first performed in 1970. "Night" takes place during a night when Thoreau was jailed for an act of civil disobedience: he refused to pay a tax in defiance of the Polk administration's Mexican War.

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

Story set in 1940's in a small town in Louisiana. Young black man (Jefferson) happens to be an innocent bystander at a liquor store when two men attempt a robbery and gun shots break out. Jefferson is charged with the crime - he is unable to prove his innocence in a town where a black man is guilty before proven innocent - and he is sentenced to death.

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

Guy Montag is a book-burning fireman undergoing a crisis of faith. His wife spends all day with her television "family," imploring Montag to work harder so that they can afford a fourth TV wall. Their dull, empty life sharply contrasts with that of his next-door neighbor Clarisse, a young girl thrilled by the ideas in books, and more interested in what she can see in the world around her than in the mindless chatter of the tube.

Cider House Rules by John Irving

You can't evaluate "The Cider House Rules" on the basis of the plot: to say that the book is about an orphan who grows up in an orphanage run by an abortionist, meets a young couple (there for an abortion), leaves with them, and falls in love with the woman, is to miss about 90 percent of what makes the book special.