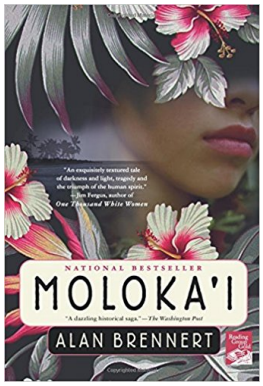
## 2021 Summer Reading List: Rising English 11 & AP Lang Students

As the English 11 teaching team, we have developed a summer reading assignment that prioritizes student choice and engagement. Below, we have listed the central themes we will explore in our American Literature classes throughout the school year, along with suggested books that connect to these themes. Every English 11 student should read 1-4 books connected to the course themes this summer and prepare to participate in class discussions and activities based upon those books. The suggested list represents a wide range of genres, styles, and reading levels. In fact, many of these books are prize-winners and best-sellers that might appeal to parents or other family members as well. We hope that this list will spark shared reading experiences within your families this summer.

While we have selected these books because of their literary merit and thematic connections, we also invite you to expand beyond this list if you find a different book that connects well to one or more of these themes. We also encourage you to do some research before selecting the books you will read this summer. For more guidance and information on book selection, visit www.commonsensemedia.org, www.goodreads.com, or email the English Department Chair, Lisa Beskenis, at ltbeskenis@fcps.edu.

# The Individual in Society

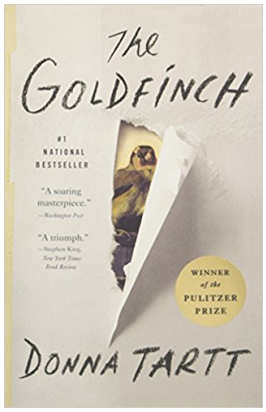



***Moloka'i* by Alan Brennert**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"This richly imagined novel, set in Hawai'i more than a century ago, is an extraordinary epic of a little-known time and place---and a deeply moving testament to the resiliency of the human spirit.
Rachel Kalama, a spirited seven-year-old Hawaiian girl, dreams of visiting far-off lands like her father, a merchant seaman. Then one day a rose-colored mark appears on her skin, and those dreams are stolen from her. Taken from her home and family, Rachel is sent to Kalaupapa, the quarantined leprosy settlement on the island of Moloka'i. Here her life is supposed to end---but instead she discovers it is only just beginning."

-Review by Goodreads




***The Goldfinch* by Donna Tart**

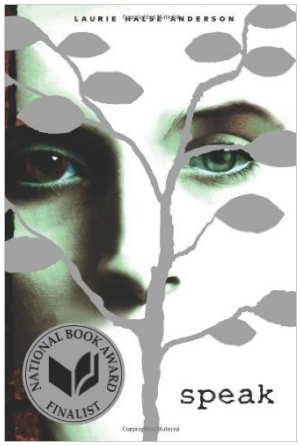
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"*The Goldfinch* is a rarity that comes along perhaps half a dozen times per decade, a smartly written literary novel that connects with the heart as well as the mind....Donna Tartt has delivered an extraordinary work of fiction."

-Review by Stephen King, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Theo Decker, a 13-year-old New Yorker, miraculously survives an accident that kills his mother. Abandoned by his father, Theo is taken in by the family of a wealthy friend. Bewildered by his strange new home on Park Avenue, disturbed by schoolmates who don't know how to talk to him, and tormented above all by his longing for his mother, he clings to the one thing that reminds him of her: a small, mysteriously captivating painting that ultimately draws Theo into the underworld of art.”

-Review by Amazon

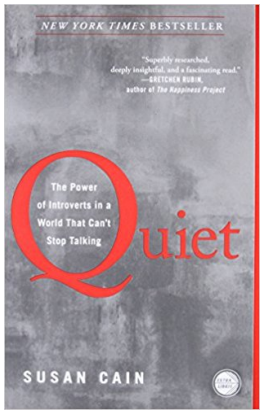



***Speak* by Laurie Anderson (Young Adult Fiction)***

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

“‘Speak up for yourself—we want to know what you have to say.’ From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless, outcast, because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. As time passes, she becomes increasingly isolated and practically stops talking altogether. Only her art class offers any solace, and it is through her work on an art project that she is finally able to face what really happened at that terrible party: she was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her. Her healing process has just begun when she has another violent encounter with him. But this time Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication. In Laurie Halse Anderson's powerful novel, an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself.”

-Review by Barnes & Noble




***Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking* by Susan Cain (nonfiction)**

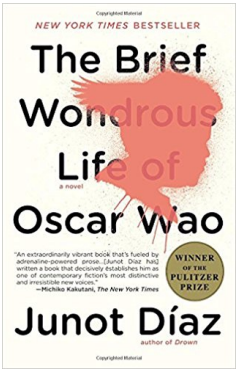
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

“At least one-third of the people we know are introverts. They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking; who innovate and create but dislike self-promotion; who favor working on their own over working in teams. It is to introverts—Rosa Parks, Chopin, Dr. Seuss, Steve Wozniak—that we owe many of the great contributions to society.

In *Quiet,* Susan Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so. She charts the rise of the Extrovert Ideal throughout the twentieth century and explores how deeply it has come to permeate our culture. She also introduces us to successful introverts—from a witty, high-octane public speaker who recharges in solitude after his talks, to a record-breaking salesman who quietly taps into the power of questions. Passionately argued, superbly researched, and filled with indelible stories of real people, *Quiet* has the power to permanently change how we see introverts and, equally important, how they see themselves.”

-Review by Amazon

# Culture & Identity in America



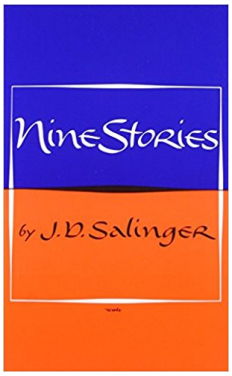

***The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Things have never been easy for Oscar, a sweet but disastrously overweight, lovesick Dominican ghetto nerd. From his home in New Jersey, where he lives with his old-world mother and rebellious sister, Oscar dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien and, most of all, of finding love. But he may never get what he wants, thanks to the Fukœ-the curse that has haunted the Oscar's family for generations, dooming them to prison, torture, tragic accidents, and, above all, ill-starred love. Oscar, still waiting for his first kiss, is just its most recent victim.

Diaz immerses us in the tumultuous life of Oscar and the history of the family at large, rendering with genuine warmth and dazzling energy, humor, and insight the Dominican-American experience, and, ultimately, the endless human capacity to persevere in the face of heartbreak and loss. A true literary triumph, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao confirms Junot Diaz as one of the best and most exciting voices of our time."

-Review by Goodreads

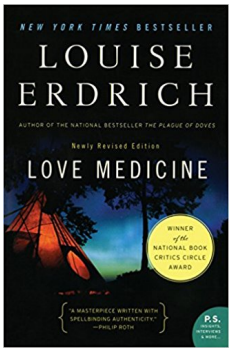



***Nine Stories* by JD Salinger**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"This is a collection of nine short stories that reveal American life in the 1950s. Although each story is a separate vignette, they are all centered around the Glass family. Salinger investigates the inner workings of an American family and is at once deeply poignant and moving, while at the same time funny and offers a commentary on the nuances of American society. Although many associate Salinger with *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Nine Stories* is one of his most influential works that has stayed with me for years."

-Review by Ms. Emmons (English 11/Honors)

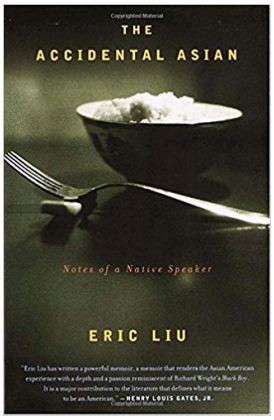



***Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich**

- ➔ No Ebook available

"The stunning first novel in Louise Erdrich's Native American series, **Love Medicine** tells the story of two families -- the Kashpaws and the Lamartines. Written in Erdrich's uniquely poetic, powerful style, it is a multigenerational portrait of strong men and women caught in an unforgettable drama of anger, desire, and the healing power that is love medicine."

-Review by Amazon



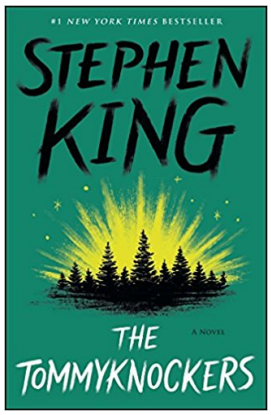

***The Accidental Asian*** **by Eric Liu (nonfiction)**

➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"Beyond black and white, native and alien, lies a vast and fertile field of human experience. It is here that Eric Liu, former speechwriter for President Clinton and noted political commentator, invites us to explore.
In these compellingly candid essays, Liu reflects on his life as a second-generation Chinese American and reveals the shifting frames of ethnic identity. Finding himself unable to read a Chinese memorial book about his father's life, he looks critically at the cost of his own assimilation. But he casts an equally questioning eye on the effort to sustain vast racial categories like "Asian American." And as he surveys the rising anxiety about China's influence, Liu illuminates the space that Asians have always occupied in the American imagination. Reminiscent of the work of James Baldwin and its unwavering honesty, *The Accidental Asian* introduces a powerful and elegant voice into the discussion of what it means to be an American."

-Review by Amazon

# Groupthink & Conformity




***The Tommyknockers*** **by Stephen King**

➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library

"On a beautiful June day, while walking deep in the woods on her property in Haven, Maine, Bobbi Anderson quite literally stumbles over her own destiny and that of the entire town. For the dull gray metal protrusion she discovers in the ground is part of a mysterious and massive metal object, one that may have been buried there for millennia. Bobbi can't help but become obsessed and try to dig it out…the consequences of which will affect and transmute every citizen of Haven, young and old. It means unleashing extraordinary powers beyond those of mere mortals—and certain death for any and all outsiders. An alien hell has now invaded this small New England town…an aggressive and violent malignancy devoid of any mercy or sanity…"

-Review by Amazon

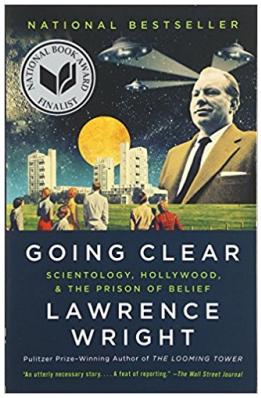
***Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*** **by Jon Krakauer (nonfiction)**

➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Jon Krakauer's literary reputation rests on insightful chronicles of lives conducted at the outer limits. In *Under The Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*, he shifts his focus from extremes of physical adventure to extremes of religious belief within our own borders. At the core of his book is an appalling

double murder committed by two Mormon Fundamentalist brothers, Ron and Dan Lafferty, who insist they received a revelation from God commanding them to kill their blameless victims. Beginning with a meticulously researched account of this "divinely inspired" crime, Krakauer constructs a multilayered, bone-chilling narrative of messianic delusion, savage violence, polygamy, and unyielding faith. Along the way, he uncovers a shadowy offshoot of America's fastest-growing religion, and raises provocative questions about the nature of religious belief."

-Review by Goodreads



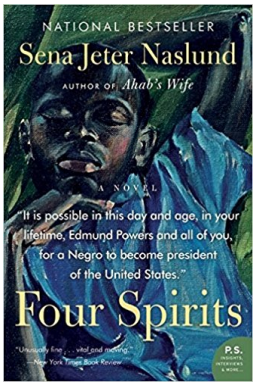

***Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*** **by Lawrence Wright (nonfiction)**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Based on more than two hundred personal interviews with both current and former Scientologists--both famous and less well known--and years of archival research, Lawrence Wright uses his extraordinary investigative skills to uncover for us the inner workings of the Church of Scientology: its origins in the imagination of science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard; its struggles to find acceptance as a legitimate (and legally acknowledged) religion; its vast, secret campaign to infiltrate the U.S. government; and its dramatic efforts to grow and prevail after the death of Hubbard."

-Review by Goodreads

## Race in America

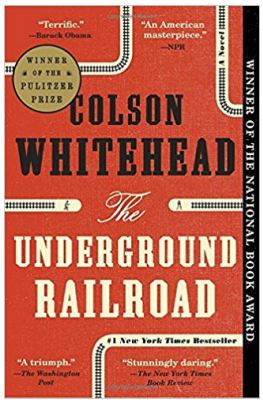



***Four Spirits*** **by Sena Jeter Naslund**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"Weaving together the lives of blacks and whites, racists and civil rights advocates, and the events of peaceful protest and violent repression, Sena Jeter Naslund creates a tapestry of American social transformation at once intimate and epic. In Birmingham, Alabama, twenty-year-old Stella Silver, an idealistic white college student, is sent reeling off her measured path by events of 1963. Combining political activism with single parenting and night-school teaching, African American Christine Taylor discovers she must heal her own bruised heart to actualize meaningful social change. Inspired by the courage and commitment of the civil rights movement, the child Edmund Powers embodies hope for future change. In this novel of maturation and growth, Naslund makes vital the intersection of spiritual, political, and moral forces that have redefined America."

-Review by Amazon

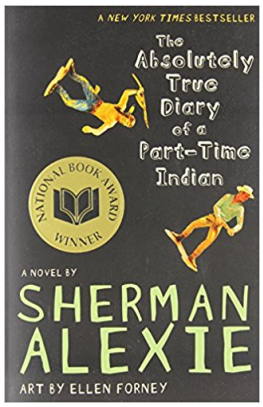



***The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead**

➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"According the the Pulitzer Prize website, Whitehead's most recent novel won the 2017 prize for fiction because of its 'smart melding of realism and allegory that combines the violence of slavery and the drama of escape in a myth that speaks to contemporary America.' The blend of historical realism and fantastical storytelling is also what makes this novel my favorite of the past few years. Cora, a slave on a plantation in Georgia, makes her escape on the Underground Railroad, which is imagined by Whitehead as a literal railroad that transports runaway slaves through tunnels that run beneath the landscape of the American South. Each stop on Cora's journey toward freedom explores different elements of African American history and experience and contributes to Cora's powerful coming-of-age tale."

-Review by Ms. Beskenis (English 11/AP Lang)



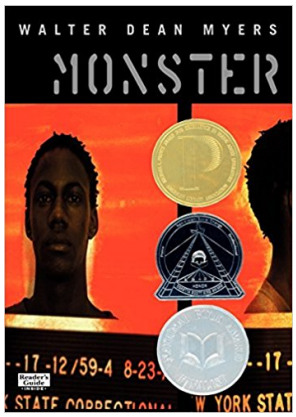

***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (Young Adult Fiction)***

➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"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."

-Review by Amazon



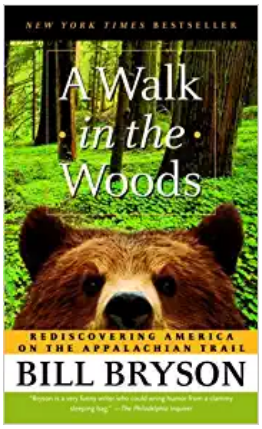

***Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (Young Adult Fiction)***

➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"This *New York Times* bestselling novel from acclaimed author Walter Dean Myers tells the story of Steve Harmon, a teenage boy in juvenile detention and on trial. Presented as a screenplay of Steve's own imagination, and peppered with journal entries, the book shows how one single decision can change our whole lives."

-Review by Amazon

# The Individual in Nature

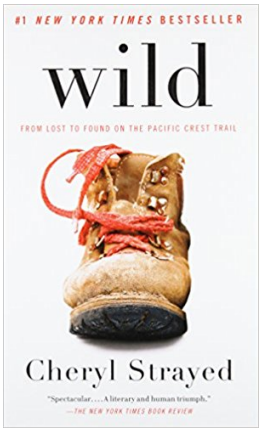



***A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* by Bill Bryson (nonfiction)**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

The Appalachian Trail stretches from Georgia to Maine and covers some of the most breathtaking terrain in America–majestic mountains, silent forests, sparking lakes. If you're going to take a hike, it's probably the place to go. And Bill Bryson is surely the most entertaining guide you'll find. He introduces us to the history and ecology of the trail and to some of the other hardy (or just foolhardy) folks he meets along the way–and a couple of bears. Already a classic, *A Walk in the Woods* will make you long for the great outdoors (or at least a comfortable chair to sit and read in).

-Review by Goodreads




***Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Strayed (nonfiction)**

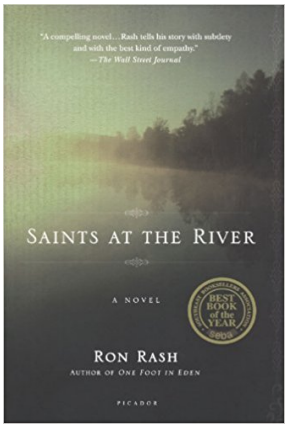
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Captivating true story of the author's journey to finding herself after experiencing the loss of her mother and the end of her marriage. Strayed's experience is at once inspiring, harrowing, and ultimately healing, as she connects with nature and finds peace with herself away from society."

-Review by Ms. Emmons (English 11/Honors)

"*Wild* is also one of my favorites. I especially appreciate Strayed's dark humor as she attempts to navigate both a daunting solo hike of the Pacific Crest Trail and the grief and guilt that plague her. When I read this a few summers ago, I couldn't put it down."

-Review by Ms. Beskenis (English 11/AP Lang)



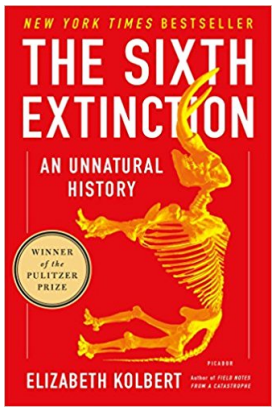

***Saints at the River* by Ron Rash**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library

"When a twelve-year-old girl drowns in the Tamassee River and her body is trapped in a deep eddy, the people of the small South Carolina town that bears the river's name are thrown into the national spotlight. The girl's parents want to attempt a rescue of the body; environmentalists are convinced the rescue operation will cause permanent damage to the river and set a dangerous precedent. Torn between the two sides is Maggie Glenn, a twenty-eight year-old newspaper photographer who grew up in the town and has been sent to document the incident. Since leaving home almost ten years ago, Maggie has

done her best to avoid her father, but now, as the town's conflict opens old wounds, she finds herself revisiting the past she's fought so hard to leave behind."

-Review by Goodreads



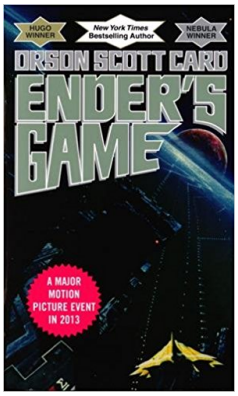

***The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert (nonfiction)**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Over the last half a billion years, there have been five mass extinctions, when the diversity of life on earth suddenly and dramatically contracted. Scientists around the world are currently monitoring the sixth extinction, predicted to be the most devastating extinction event since the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs. This time around, the cataclysm is us. In *The Sixth Extinction*, two-time winner of the National Magazine Award and *New Yorker* writer Elizabeth Kolbert draws on the work of scores of researchers in half a dozen disciplines, accompanying many of them into the field: geologists who study deep ocean cores, botanists who follow the tree line as it climbs up the Andes, marine biologists who dive off the Great Barrier Reef. She introduces us to a dozen species, some already gone, others facing extinction, including the Panamian golden frog, staghorn coral, the great auk, and the Sumatran rhino. Through these stories, Kolbert provides a moving account of the disappearances occurring all around us and traces the evolution of extinction as concept, from its first articulation by Georges Cuvier in revolutionary Paris up through the present day. The sixth extinction is likely to be mankind's most lasting legacy; as Kolbert observes, it compels us to rethink the fundamental question of what it means to be human."

-Review by Amazon

## Fantasy, Horror & Imaginative Fiction



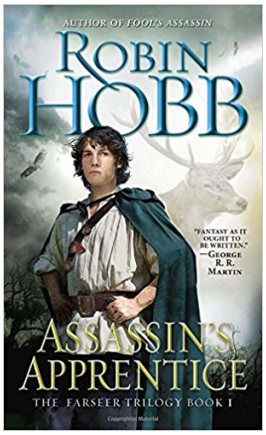

***Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card (Young Adult Fiction)***

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Ender's Game is a 1985 military science fiction novel by American author Orson Scott Card. Set in Earth's future, the novel presents an imperiled mankind after two conflicts with the 'buggers', an insectoid alien species. In preparation for an anticipated third invasion, children, including the novel's protagonist, Ender Wiggin,

are trained from a very young age through increasingly difficult games including some in zero gravity, where Ender's tactical genius is revealed."

-Review by Goodreads




***The Farseer Trilogy* by Robin Hobb**

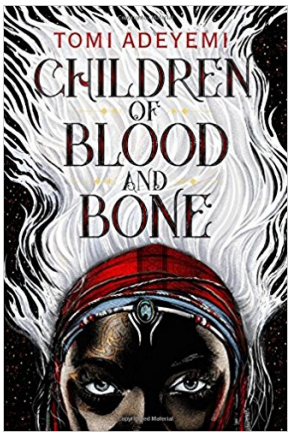
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"If you're a fantasy fan like I am, you will definitely enjoy Robin Hobb's story of Fitz Farseer. Start with *Assassin's Apprentice* and go from there."

-Review by Ms. Beskenis (English 11/AP Lang)

"Fantasy as it ought to be written"-Review by George R. R. Martin

"A gleaming debut in the crowded field of epic fantasies . . . a delightful take on the powers and politics behind the throne."-Review by *Publishers Weekly,* on *Assassin's Apprentice*




***Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi (Young Adult Fiction)**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from the McLean High School Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library

"One of the biggest young adult fiction debut book deals of the year. Aside from a compelling plot and a strong-willed heroine as the protagonist, the book deals with larger themes, like race and power, that are being discussed in real time."

-Review by *Teen Vogue*

"Zélie Adebola remembers when the soil of Orïsha hummed with magic. Burners ignited flames, Tiders beckoned waves, and Zélie's Reaper mother summoned forth souls.

But everything changed the night magic disappeared. Under the orders of a ruthless king, maji were killed, leaving Zélie without a mother and her people without hope.

Now Zélie has one chance to bring back magic and strike against the monarchy. With the help of a rogue princess, Zélie must outwit and outrun the crown prince, who is hell-bent on eradicating magic for good. Danger lurks in Orïsha, where snow leoponaires prowl and vengeful spirits wait in the waters. Yet the greatest danger may be Zélie herself as she struggles to control her powers and her growing feelings for an enemy."

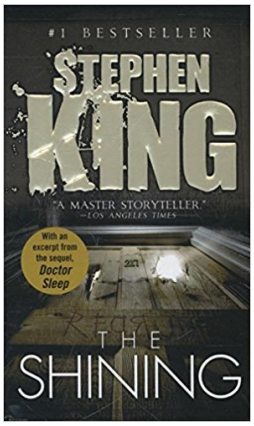
-Review by Barnes & Noble

***Misery* by Stephen King**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Novelist Paul Sheldon has plans to make the difficult transition from writing historical romances featuring heroine Misery Chastain to publishing literary fiction. Annie Wilkes, Sheldon's number one fan, rescues the author from the scene of a car accident. The former nurse takes care of him in her remote house, but becomes irate when she discovers that the author has killed Misery off in his latest book. Annie keeps Sheldon prisoner while forcing him to write a book that brings Misery back to life."

-Review by StephenKing.com



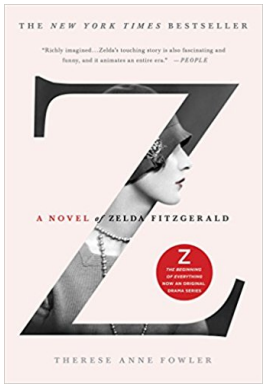

***The Shining* by Stephen King**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Jack Torrance's new job at the Overlook Hotel is the perfect chance for a fresh start. As the off-season caretaker at the atmospheric old hotel, he'll have plenty of time to spend reconnecting with his family and working on his writing. But as the harsh winter weather sets in, the idyllic location feels ever more remote . . . and more sinister. And the only one to notice the strange and terrible forces gathering around the Overlook is Danny Torrance, a uniquely gifted five-year-old."

-Review by Amazon

# Money & Class

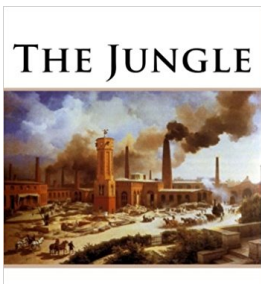



***Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* by Therese Anne Fowler**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Since we will all read F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel *The Great Gatsby* next year, this contemporary novel is a great choice for a summer read because it provides a compelling introduction to Fitzgerald's 1920s world of flappers, fame, and money. *Z* is told from the perspective of Zelda Fitzgerald, F. Scott's witty, talented, and, at times, troubled wife. With Zelda as narrator, *Z* also gives voice to a captivating literary/historical figure who is often overlooked and underestimated."

-Review by Ms. Beskenis (English 11/AP Lang)




***The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair**

- ➔ Ebook available for free from Fairfax County Public Library
- ➔ Ebook available for free from Arlington County Public Library

➔ Ebook available for free from Loudoun County Public Library

"Upton Sinclair's muckraking masterpiece *The Jungle* centers on Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant working in Chicago's infamous Packingtown. Instead of finding the American Dream, Rudkus and his family inhabit a brutal, soul-crushing urban jungle dominated by greedy bosses, pitiless con-men, and corrupt politicians. While Sinclair's main target was the industry's appalling labor conditions, the reading public was most outraged by the disgusting filth and contamination in American food that his novel exposed. As a result, President Theodore Roosevelt demanded an official investigation, which quickly led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug laws. For a work of fiction to have such an impact outside its literary context is extremely rare. (At the time of *The Jungle*'s publication in 1906, the only novel to have led to social change on a similar scale in America was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.) Today, *The Jungle* remains a relevant portrait of capitalism at its worst and an impassioned account of the human spirit facing nearly insurmountable challenges."

-Review by Barnes & Noble

**This is an excellent, engaging book that may also be appropriate for students who are looking for books at a more accessible reading level.*