

# THE LAWRENCEVILLE SCHOOL

## Reading Lists • Summer 2009

The following are lists of required books that all students must read by the start of classes in September 2009. This list includes selecting one of three “school texts” that all students and faculty will read over the summer as well as reading required books for your history and English classes. Members of the English department have also provided short descriptions of some of their favorite books and the department requires that you read one of the recommended books over the summer in addition to the required text for your form. You are expected to have read the texts closely; this would entail underlining, making annotations in the margin of the text, writing down questions prompted by your reading and taking reading notes.

In the first week of school, teachers will administer quizzes or in-class writing assignments on the required readings associated with particular history or English classes. Therefore, it is imperative that the reading be completed prior to the start of school – you may choose any edition of the texts save when a certain edition is specified. We have included links to the [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) website for your convenience.

Whatever you plan to do this summer, you must find time to read. If you’re not an enthusiastic reader, these summer months give you the chance to develop the habit of reading for pleasure. If you already love to read, you know that you need to read the way you need to eat or breathe, just to sustain yourself and keep your soul beating. Keep a book on your bedside table. Carry a book with you as you travel. In addition to making your mind a more interesting place to live, reading for pleasure will make you a better student in every discipline. All the above texts should be available online from Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble. If you have any questions regarding the reading lists, please contact the Academic Dean’s office at (609) 895-2057.

You will also find a list of suggested texts to read for pleasure on the Bunn Library homepage at: [http://www.lawrenceville.org/on\\_campus/library/](http://www.lawrenceville.org/on_campus/library/)

### All School Text

**Requirements:** Each student (Second – Fifth Former) will **select one** of the three books listed below.

The Lawrenceville School will celebrate its bicentennial anniversary this coming school year. Such a milestone encourages us to think about the School’s mission which is “to inspire and educate promising young people from diverse backgrounds for responsible leadership, personal fulfillment and enthusiastic participation in the world...we help students to develop high standards of character and scholarship, a passion for learning, an appreciation for diversity, a global perspective, and strong commitments to personal, community and environmental responsibility.” The following three books inspire us all to think about how we might become responsible leaders and help make the kinds of meaningful change described in these books. Whether building an orphanage in Ethiopia, establishing basic medical facilities in Haiti, or constructing schools in Pakistan, each book imagines a slightly better world for those living there than would otherwise exist without the efforts of these three change agents: Haregewoin Teferra, Paul Farmer, and Greg Mortensen.

Greene, Melissa Faye

[\*There Is No Me Without You: One Woman’s Odyssey to Rescue Her Country’s Children\*](#)

Kidder, Tracy

[\*Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Could Cure The World\*](#)

Mortensen, G. & Relin, D.

[\*Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Journey to Change the World...One Child At A Time\*](#)

## HISTORY TEXTS

The following are the required texts for history summer reading according to course:

### European History

Unsworth, Barry                      [Morality Play](#)                      ISBN-10:0393315606

In what kind of society does Morality Play take place? Specifically, think about the following:

- 1) What role does religion seem to play in people's lives?
- 2) What are the sources of authority in this society (who holds the power)?
- 3) How many classes do there seem to be? What differentiates one class from another?
- 4) What role do women appear to have in this society?
- 5) What evidence is there in the novel that this is a society experiencing crisis and change?

### Honors European History

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Remarque, Erich Maria                      [All Quiet on the Western Front](#)                      ISBN - 1441482652

### United States History

Wood, Gordon                      [The Americanization of Ben Franklin](#)                      ISBN-10: 159420019X

What factors led to Franklin's final break with the British in the 1760s?

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### Honors Government

Your assigned reading is to carefully read an essay found on-line at [http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication\\_details&id=4030](http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=4030) (available in both Word and PDF formats).

James Caesar, a professor of Government at the University of Virginia, has written a compelling political science essay. This essay deals with the so-called "Red State" vs. "Blue State" phenomenon—the recent division of the American electorate into two contending ideological groups (the "Red States" of the South and MidWest tend to be more culturally and politically conservative, whereas the "Blue States" of the Northeast and West Coast tend to be more culturally and politically liberal). President Obama succeeded in moving a handful of formerly Red States (like Virginia) into the Democratic column during the 2008 presidential election—leading some to question whether the Red State / Blue State dichotomy makes sense in light of changing political realities. Nevertheless, while there may be a gradual blurring of these categories, most political scientists believe there remains a discernible ideological divide between different regions of the country.

This essay connects a current political debate (How Do People In Different Regions of the Country Tend to Vote / Form Their Political Values?) with more fundamental questions about American political culture. Questions such as: What's the basic difference between a liberal and a conservative? How did the two major political parties (Democrat and Republican) develop their respective ideologies? And how is all this connected to philosophical debates about the very nature of American democracy itself and the ideas on which our system of government rests (note that the subtitle of the essay is "The Ideas That Move American Politics"—the author is therefore making a

claim about the importance of ideas in political life –a theme that will figure prominently in this course next year).

Please think about these questions while reading this essay:

1. How would you characterize a person from a "Red State"? A person from a "Blue State"? Are these political categories? Cultural categories? Or both?
2. Do you think America is politically "polarized" between conservatives and liberals? Are we a deeply divided nation? Or do you think the Red State vs. Blue State thesis exaggerates the amount of ideological conflict in the country? This essay gives two different perspectives on these questions . . . which view do you think is correct? Fiorina's view? Or Wilson's view?
3. The essay argues that "liberalism" and "conservatism" are not simple, one-dimensional ideologies. Each ideology (and the political party to which it is attached) is actually a composite of several different factions and sub-groups. These factions are often at cross-purposes—and often disagree fundamentally about what it means to be a "liberal" or a "conservative."

As you are reading, think about how you would have defined "liberalism" and "conservatism" before you read the essay (based on your prior knowledge of elections and current events).

Finally, after you've read the essay, try to come up with a more complex, nuanced definition of what it means to be a "liberal" (or someone supports the Democratic Party)? Now do the same for "conservatives" who support the Republican Party. You may find that the tensions and conflicts WITHIN the political parties are as profound as the conflicts BETWEEN the parties.

**Euro-Am History I**

Davis, Natalie

[The Return of Martin Guerre](#)

ISBN-10: 0674766911

**Euro-Am History II**

T. J. Stiles

[The First Tycoon : The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt](#)

ISBN-13: 9780375415425

**Honors Economics**

Frank, Robert

[The Economic Naturalist: In Search of Explanations for Everyday Enigmas](#)

ISBN-13: 9780465003570

## ENGLISH TEXTS

**Requirements:** The Second, Third, and Fourth Forms will read **one** required Form-wide book, which will be discussed and examined during the first week of classes in the fall. Each Fifth Form elective has its own required summer reading. In addition, all students are required to select and read **at least one other book** from the list of recommended books below. When you return to school, you should bring your edition of the form or course designated required book (for Fifth Formers), with your margin notes, to use as part of a first assignment in your English class.

Entering Second Formers should read J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Entering Third Formers should read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*

Entering Fourth Formers should read Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (recommended edition Penguin). In the fall, sections of EN401F read either Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, or Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*. We encourage, but do not require, rising Fourth Form students to read one of these novels over the summer. Students planning to take an English AP at the end of the year should read more than one.

Entering Fifth Formers should consult the list, which follows, and read the particular book required for the elective course in which they are enrolled.

**Fifth Form Required reading for 500-level courses is specific to each course.**

Mr. Atlee's /Mr. Eldridge's **West of Everything**, I and II: [Lonesome Dove](#) by Larry McMurtry (required)

Mr. Cantlay's **West and the Rest**: [Things Fall Apart](#) by Chinua Achebe (required) [East, West: Stories](#) by Salman Rushdie (suggested)

Mr. Cantlay's **Southern Literature**: [Wise Blood](#) by Flannery O'Connor (required) [The Killer Angels](#) by Michael Shaara (suggested)

Dr. Cunningham's **Modern Thought and Literature**: [The Kill](#). By Emile Zola (required) Trans. Goldhammer. Modern Library Classics. Also suggested: any book from the under form reading lists that you haven't already read

Mr. Greenberg's **Writing Seminar** (for PGs): [In the Loyal Mountains](#) by Rick Bass (required)

Mr. Greenberg's **Nature Writing**: [In the Loyal Mountains](#) by Rick Bass (required)

Mr. Hedberg's **From Freud to the Void**: [On the Road](#) by Jack Kerouac (required) and [Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas](#) by Hunter S. Thompson (suggested)

Mr. Kane' **Literature of the National Pastime**: [Ring Around the Bases](#) by Ring Lardner (required)

Mrs. Larson's **Ex Nihilo**: Existential Literature: [Fight Club](#) by Chuck Palahniuk (required)

Mrs. Larson's **Russian Literature**: [Omon Ra](#) by Viktor Pelevin (required)

Ms. Lee-Adler's **Gender and Literature**: [Herland](#) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (required)

Ms. McKay's **Fiction Seminar**: [The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test](#) by Tom Wolfe (required)

Ms. O'Malley's **Shakespeare's Comedies: Masks We Wear**: [As You Like It](#) by William Shakespeare (required)

Ms. Perry's **To Speak the Unspeakable, Trauma and the Literary Imagination**: [A Prayer for the Dying](#) by Stewart O'Nan (required)

Ms. Perry's **Style and Expression in Creative Writing**: [American Childhood](#) by Annie Dillard (required)

Mrs. Rabin's **Literary Journalism:** [\*Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control\*](#) by Fred W. Friendly  
(required) (must purchased as a used book)

Mrs. Rabin's **Critical Writing:** [\*White Noise\*](#) by Don DeLillo (required)

Mr. Tredway's **Irish Literature:** [\*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man\*](#) by James Joyce (required)

Dr. Williams' **Moby Dick:** [\*Typee\*](#) by Herman Melville (required) and [\*Billy Budd\*](#) (suggested)

Dr. Williams' **African American Literature:** [\*Invisible Man\*](#) by Ralph Ellison (required) and [\*Beloved\*](#) by Toni Morrison (suggested)

**English Department Recommendations for Summer Reading (Reminder—Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Form students must select one of these books).**

### **Champ Atlee**

*White Noise* by Don DeLillo. DeLillo's satire of campus life and of the ecological perils that have replaced the world of the bomb. A very funny and instructive portrait.

*A Very Long Engagement* by Sebastien Japrisot. A lovely story set in post World War I France in which a crippled young woman sets out to discover the truth behind her fiancé's execution for desertion.

*Cities of the Plain* by Cormac McCarthy. The final book of the Border Trilogy that includes *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*, this novel brings together the protagonists from the previous narratives in an often hilarious but ultimately tragic dialogue about the disappearing values of the west.

### **David Cantlay**

*Regeneration* by Pat Barker. The first of a trilogy by Barker about World War I and psychotherapy ("the talking cure") and the great soldier-poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and.... So much! A psychologically brilliant, compulsively readable book. Warning: if you read one, you may not be able to stop till you've read 'em all.

*An Artist of the Floating World* by Kazuo Ishiguro. Japan right after the war...and before the war too, in flashbacks--a quietly moving (and disturbing) account of wrenching change and the struggle to accept responsibility. The INNER things in collision here make the overt violence or dislocation of the war itself seem almost paltry.

*True Grit* by Charles Portis. A great "Western," yes, but so much more. It's the 1870's, in and near the Indian Territory of what's now eastern Oklahoma. The aged spinster Mattie Ross is one of the great narrative voices in American lit; and she makes that time, that place, live--really live--in all its complexity, ugliness, and glory--as she tells us how she refused, as a young girl, to let her father's murder go unavenged.

*The Driftless Area* by Tom Drury. Eerie and deadpan both--Iowa as she might well be, perhaps as she should be. As we might wish every place to be. Drury's novels, as one critic put it, are "an entrancing form of midwestern paranormal noir," and nowhere is the noir more entrancing (and more para, less normal, for that matter) than in this novel.

### **Miranda Christoffersen**

*The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler (1939). Hard-boiled detective fiction set in 1930s Los Angeles, this novel introduces Chandler's iconically chivalrous, tough-guy private eye Philip Marlowe.

*The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver (1998). A big fat novel about cross-cultural mis-encounter and disaster set in the Belgian Congo in the 1950s. The pages go fast, partly because five members of the Price family take turns narrating the doomed events that follow after their father, a Baptist preacher, moves his family to Africa and tries to convert the population to Christianity.

### **Christopher Cunningham**

*Dune* by Frank Herbert. Frank Herbert's *Dune* is to science fiction what J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is to fantasy: a far future that is rich, compelling, fully imagined; a large cast of interesting, complicated characters, including one of the most memorable bad guys of modern literature; a complex plot that includes great battles, political intrigue, love, and religion.

*Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. Ender is one of a group of child prodigies taken from their families, thrown together, and trained to be brilliant, deadly fighting machines in a war with distant, incomprehensible aliens. The novel is insightful about the challenges of giftedness and asks provocative questions about the social, personal, and moral consequences of war. Science fiction may be the best genre for combining big, interesting ideas and engaging plots—both of these books do this well.

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells the epic story of the rise and fall of the Aureliano family and the rise and fall of their small town—and small country—over the course of, yes, one hundred years. The story is funny and strange and sad—any story about people and the passage of time is sad—and Marquez's prose is poetic and haunting. This is a challenging book (think Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner) but very beautiful—one of my top ten favorites.

And three more for good measure: *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, and *Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri.

### **Blake Eldridge**

*The Iliad* by Homer. No self-pity here. No pity of any kind, only rage and courage (and lot of eloquent speeches in the midst of battle). Learn from Hector what it means to be a hero. Learn from Priam what it means to be a parent.

*The Black Flower* by Howard Bahr. Bahr gives us an experience of the emotionally desolate Confederacy nearing the end of the Civil War. The protagonists, a wounded Confederate soldier and a nurse, try to make sense of grief, loyalty to a lost cause, and whether love is worth the risk. Bahr's prose and research are superb.

### **Nicole Furlonge**

*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi (Iran, 2004). If you are interested in texts that blend narrative, autobiography, and comic book images, this is the book for you. It is an autobiography/comic about an Islamic childhood. Satrapi uses similar narrative techniques to Spiegelman's *Maus*.

*Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin (U.S., 1953). I would not be the reader, teacher, and scholar I am without James Baldwin's writing. Baldwin's first novel was one of the first novels by an African American I read in college (along with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*). After reading Baldwin, I knew I had to study these works more, that my education was lacking if I did not grapple with them alongside the very classical and also wonderful writers I studied in high school. The more I read this novel, the more I wanted to read. The novel is probing, painful, and illuminating. It dramatizes struggles with sexuality, religion, and racial identity, contains rich biblical allusions, and is psychologically very provocative.

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* by Michael Ondaatje (Canada/Sri Lanka, 1996). Le Thuy (author of *Gangster We Are All Looking For* -- another good summer read) mentioned Ondaatje as a major influence during her visit to Lawrenceville this spring. Ondaatje's writing blends prose, poetry, photographs, American history, and here revises the genre of westerns in ways that defy categorization. His writing voice is rich; he is a writer that recognizes that one's literary voice can be as diverse as the topics one chooses to write about, as the identities and places one carries within her/himself. He is another writer I find myself hooked on, and returning to continually.

### **Joel Greenberg**

*In The Time Of The Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez. This story serves as a challenging primer about courage. The narrative pace and method compels our emotional involvement.

*The Amazing Adventures Of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon. The energy in this prose is hypnotic. The story could not be more cleverly imagined.

*The Quiet American* by Graham Greene. This narrative masterpiece is unequalled in setting, dialogue and tone.

**Gus Hedberg**

*Decline and Fall* by Evelyn Waugh. Funny and literary. A great introduction to the English—and the Welsh.

*Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. A perfect adventure novel. If not now, you'll never read it.

*The Red and the Black* by Stendhal. A classic study of the intersection of honor and upward mobility

**Chris Hyson**

*Odd Man Out* by Matt McCarthy. A memoir of this Yale graduate's one year spent playing minor league professional baseball in Utah.

Fans of Detective novels and Boston will enjoy any one of the novels in the Robert Parker Spencer series.

*The Fall of Frost* by Brian Hall. A fascinating novel about the art and life of Robert Frost.

**Ron Kane**

*Trinity* by Leon Uris. A gripping novel that re-creates Ireland's struggle for independence. The story of young Catholic rebel who departs a small village in Donegal and enters the dangers of divided Belfast. A story of love, faith and money.

*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle.- The story of a 10 year-old working class boy in 1960's Dublin. A novel that captures the charm, playfulness and cruelty of boyhood. A book that sits comfortably with *Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

*The Legend of Bagger Vance* by Steven Pressfield. A philosophical fantasy which uses the sport of golf to explore the inner spirit. Fog, storms, howling winds - inside and out

**Pier Kooistra**

*The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (the Pevear-Volokhonsky translation--only the P-V, for its music!): If you're going to stay up all night reading, yet again, or thinking about what you've read, it's best not to have class in the morning.

*Rough Crossings* by Simon Schama: The stories of Granville Sharp and John Clarkson remind us of the potential for individual acts of conscience to take on seemingly intractable horrors, and as if that weren't enough work for one book to do, the remarkable Prof. Schama also offers an examination of the American war for independence that challenges our assumption that the good guys are the ones wearing blue and the bad guys the fellas in red.

*At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien: A perfect summer read, frivolous, ridiculous, uproariously imaginative. Life just doesn't provide us with enough opportunities to encounter wild-west scenes on the streets of early-twentieth-century Dublin...or, for that matter, to build SAT vocab while having nothing but fun.

**Debra Larson**

*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. Dickens sets his magnificent tale of life, love, and sacrifice in the maelstrom of the French Revolution. Stylistically breathtaking, this novel will remind you how powerful and beautiful language can be when masterfully controlled. The tale ends with this line that speaks for Sydney Carton as well as for Dickens's literary achievement: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."

*The Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac. Published a year after Kerouac's seminal beat novel *On the Road*, this anthem to all the mad monk, Zen lunatic rucksack wanderers threatens to outshine its predecessor. It's actually my favorite text in the Kerouac canon. Thinly disguised as Ray Smith, Kerouac describes his adventures in the Pacific Northwest with Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder), and by doing so, offers a paean to nature and spirituality.

*Stand Before Your God* by Paul Watkins. Watkins, who formerly taught at The Lawrenceville School, writes autobiographically of his boarding-school experiences in attending The Dragon School and Eton. If you ever wonder about the power of tradition to uplift or degrade, if you ever think Lawrenceville might still be a “boys’ school,” this novel will give you plenty of experiences—both funny and sad—to consider.

**Caroline Lee**

*The Secret History* by Donna Tartt should be read because, to put it simply, it is just pleasurable, well-written fiction. It is psychological-satirical thriller about 5 students from a private school who are involved in a double-murder.

*Drown* by Junot Diaz is a collection of short stories. Diaz’s writing style is raw and exciting. His stories are provocative and edgy.

*Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* by David Sedaris is a collection of humorous essays. In his essays/stories he tends to focus on the experiences of his family.

**Deb McKay**

*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. Archetypal journey of a young man traveling with his friends across the country.

*Ariel* by Sylvia Plath. Passionate poetry that grabs you and won't let you go.

*A Coney Island of the Mind* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Irresistible poetry of a kindly revolutionary

**Katey O’Malley**

*The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafón. The novel concerns a young boy, Daniel, whose father takes him to the secret Cemetery of Forgotten Books to choose a book for his birthday. Daniel selects a book called *The Shadow of the Wind* and becomes immediately engrossed in the story. When he attempts to look for other books by the author, however, a mysterious figure confronts and threatens Daniel, wanting to take the book from him. Terrified, Daniel returns the book to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books but continues to seek for the elusive author. In doing so, Daniel becomes entangled in an age old conflict that involves love, betrayal, murder, and Daniel himself.

*Welcome to the Monkey House* by Kurt Vonnegut. A collection of very funny short stories, each making a strong statement/observation about the world in which we live. The stories range from war-time epics to futuristic thrillers, delivered with satire and Vonnegut's unique edge. Many of the tales are inter-twined and convey the same underlying messages on human nature and present society.

*The Lady in White* by Wilkie Collins. One of the first mystery novels ever written, the story tells the story of a poor art teacher, Walter, who falls in love with one of his students, Laura. Though she loves Walter, she is already engaged to another. They are parted and she marries, but she and her resourceful half-sister, Marian, are then caught up in her new husband's plot to steal her fortune and identity. Throughout the story they encounter a mysterious woman in white, whose own sad story seems entangled with those of Laura and her husband, and who plays a crucial role in the novel's main events.

**Lorry Perry**

In high school, I loved the only two fantasy novels I've ever liked: Mark Helprin's *A Winter's Tale*, and Joyce Carol Oates *Bellefleur*. Helprin's gorgeous novel is set in New York City in the 20th century as it nears Armageddon. This would be a great book for horse lovers, as a huge white horse looms large in this long tome. Oates' novel is the voluptuous and gothic tale of a wealthy and notorious clan that lives someplace very much like the Adirondacks. Even though I grew up in Utah and had never been to the Adirondacks when I read *Bellefleur*, this book made me feel homesick for upstate New York.

The book that first made me think I could be an English teacher was Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Nabokov called it "a firebomb that I have just finished putting together," and it is that. You'll find it filthy, but if you don't also find it

tremendously funny, put it down and pick it up again in fifteen years. Get the annotated edition. And then watch both the Kubrick and the Lyne versions of *Lolita*. Both are excellent, though I prefer the Lyne (Nabokov probably would, too, as he wrote the screenplay for the Kubrick and didn't like the way the movie came together). Lyne's *Lolita* is the best film adaptation of a novel that I've ever seen. If you enjoy my favorite book ever, you might also try *House of Meetings* by Martin Amis, which draws explicitly on Nabokov's story.

*The Meadows* by Jim Galvin, one of my teachers at the University of Iowa. He's primarily a poet, and this is one of his two novels. It's my favorite book about the American West. It's the only book that has ever made my dad cry.

*Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn is the quiet, creeping horror of a story about a family of circus freaks. I loved this book as a high schooler and it's the book I most give as a gift.

### Bill Tredway

*Rule of the Bone* by Russell Banks. 14-year-old Chappie runs away from his home (house trailer, actually) in upstate New York and becomes a homeless mall rat. Chappie takes on the name Bone and is adopted by a gentle Jamaican Rastafarian named I-Man; the novel is in many ways an updating of Mark Twain's classic Huckleberry Finn.

*Stradivari's Genius* by Toby Faber. Non-fiction recounting of the lives of Antonio Stradivari, master luthier, and of six of his violins, widely considered to be the finest examples of this particular craft. More than dry facts, the book offers a fascinating history of these instruments, their making and their movements, from Cremona, Italy to New York City and esteemed artist to artist.

*In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* by Nathaniel Philbrick. In 1819, the Essex, a Nantucket whaleship carrying a crew of 20, began what all thought would be a normal, two-year voyage. Instead, after a year and a half of near-disasters, the ship was rammed by a sperm whale and sank in the Pacific. It's a fascinating narrative; buy and read it to find what happened to the whaleship's survivors!

### Wilburn Williams

*Cane* by Jean Toomer (USA, 1923). Before Hemingway became Hemingway, before Faulkner became Faulkner, Toomer was both. This deceptively short gem of a book transgresses genre expectations at every turn. *Cane* resists classification, much like its author. A crazy salad of racial legacies, the fair-skinned, multiracial Toomer could (and at times did) pass for white, yet he wrote his best work during a brief period when he passionately identified with America's despised African minority. Lyrical, violent, sensuous and deeply spiritual, *Cane* enchanted me long before I understood it.

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (Nigeria, 1958). Fifty years on, it is still one of the best books I have ever read. Camara Laye in *The Radiance of the King* (Republic of Guinea, English translation 1956) presents a richer, more complex Africa in many obvious ways, but Achebe is the master who forever changed, and decisively for the better, the world's perception of Africa.

*Slouching Towards Kalamazoo* by Peter de Vries (USA, 1983). The hero of this fall-on-the-floor-and-laugh-out-loud novel is a precocious reader of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot who has somehow managed to flunk the eighth-grade. His tutor is a latter-day Hester Prynne. Although chock-full of literary in-jokes, this novel will delight you even if you understand only a fraction of them.

Dr. Williams adds that he finds himself "reading more nonfiction these days, and three books that I've read over the last decade stand out for me: Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (USA, 1997) ranges over 13,000 years of world history and explains, among other things, why Spain conquered Mexico and not Mexico Spain. Diamond's argument is repetitive, but once you're past the introductory material, individual chapters are self-contained. Don't let the book's size put you off.

After its first five chapters, Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate : The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (USA, 2002) is another big book that comes in self-contained chapters that can be read out of order. Pinker writes with wit and verve to explain the biological roots of human behavior--the nature of human nature.

Charles Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (USA, 2005) made me throw out the window much of what I'd been taught--and many are still taught--about what the New World was like before

Columbus' arrival in 1492. You will learn why the domestication of corn must rank as one of the greatest feats of ingenuity in history, and you will marvel at provocative questions like this: Did the Amazon rainforest just grow, or was it *planted*?