

2019 Book Recommendations List

Rudolph Almasy, Professor Emeritus, recommends:

The Master Butchers Singing Club
by Louise Erdrich

Erdrich can be a great storyteller. Here it's about two immigrant families in harsh North Dakota between the two world wars—their joys and challenges, their friendships and love—their survival over thirty-six years. I think Erdrich is telling us that love makes some things bearable.

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Kathleen H. Blackburn, Physician, recommends:

The Correspondence
by J. D. Daniels

One hundred twenty-six pages of raw, funny, disturbingly sane self-exploration, a personal narrative so courageous in its lack of self-pity and bathos, it took my breath away. It is listed as nonfiction, but the inner territory mapped here is the stuff of all great literature!

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Michael D. Blackwood, Assistant Professor, recommends:

Superintelligence
by Nick Bostrom

Bostrom joins Elon Musk, Sam Harris, and others in sounding the alarm for the future concerns of A. I. and the inevitable singularity.

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Jacob Block, MFA Student, recommends:

What is Amazing
by Heather Christie

Largely punctuation-free, the smoggy little poems in this collection, Christie's third, are populated by light-up trees, angry fauns, and prankster anvils, along with the usual love, death, and awe. Christie's poetry is deceptive — funny, sad, odd, and conversational in equal measure, it couches its wisdom in plainspoken language: "and the world will go on lightly turning/with its millions of small adjustments/that make space for us/that let us get through." This book will decorate your heart in strange, new ways, and you'll thank it again and again.

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Laura Brady, Faculty, recommends:

An American Marriage
by Tayari Jones

Roy and Celestial, the successful young couple at the center of *An American Marriage*, are just establishing themselves, their careers, and their marriage when Roy is falsely accused and incarcerated for rape. "Nobody around here thought you did it," says one character late in the novel. "It was just the wrong race and the wrong time." In this compelling story of our troubled times, Tayari Jones uses multiple perspectives and a series of letters to convey themes of injustice and grief, love and loyalty, anger and forgiveness, compassion and strength.

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Bettjane Christopher Burger, Retired Teacher, recommends:

The Astronaut Wives Club
by Lily Koppel

Real chic lit – these wives in the '60s were thrust into the public eye and watched their husbands enter pioneering territory. We watched but didn't know their secrets.

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Ryan Claycomb, Faculty, recommends:

Exit West
by Mohsin Hamid

Hamid's much-acclaimed book revolves around a magical-realist conceit that secret doors open up as escapes from war-torn places into safer (but not safe) spaces around the world in the Mediterranean, London, San Francisco and elsewhere. His book helps us glimpse the sense of disorientation that refugees from around the world must endure when the fabric of their homelands — and their very homes — are ripped apart. The writing is spare and accessible, and there is hope and compassion to be found in the characters' lives.

Maureen F. Crockett, Retired Writer, recommends:

Fire and Fury
by Michael Wolff

Nobody in the Trump administration is a nice person, and their sins are vicious, making great reading.

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Anna Eifenbein, Faculty, recommends:

Silent Souls
by Caterina Albert
translated by Kathleen McNerney

Incomparable! *Silent Souls*, stories by Catalan author Caterina Albert (1869-1966) selected and translated by Kathleen McNerney for MLA Texts & Translations, 2018, serves up a feast for the senses. Luminous descriptions of nature and of people whose struggles matter, fill the stories to overflowing. From the dramatic verse of "The Infanticide" to the narrative prose of "Silent Souls," the stories voice universal human dilemmas. World-renowned specialist in Catalan literature, Professor Emeritus McNerney, highlights Albert's literary range and virtuosity and her human sympathy. McNerney's translation of dialogue sounds like true Catalans speaking and not like a WVU Professor of Spanish and Catalan.

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Lara Farina, Faculty, recommends:

The Seventh Day
by Yu Hua

This poignant 2013 novel, recently translated into English, offers a deeply felt meditation on the transforming cultural landscape of modern China. Yu Hua is a major figure in Chinese literature today, and this work of his is surreal, satiric, and humane all at once. In my last Non-Western World literature class, the novel was my students' favorite reading.

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Marilyn Francus, Faculty, recommends:

Being Mortal
by Atul Gawande

About aging and dying in America. A clear-eyed look at the health care system and what we can do so that people can live their final years with autonomy and dignity.

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Chapman Hood Frazier, Professor in Residence, recommends:

Something Rich and Strange
by Ron Rash

A dark-hearted collection of thirty-two short stories that mine the deep and twisted veins of Appalachia in the tensions between the traditional and the modern.

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Glenn Gallagher recommends:

The Surviving Siblings
by Glenn Gallagher

My tale is one-of-a-kind. Two teenage boys and a little girl must survive after the deaths of both parents in a twelve-month period. Fiction based on a little fact.

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Rosemary Hathaway, Faculty, recommends:

The Hate U Give
by Angie Thomas.

THUG, thirty-year-old Thomas' first novel, pulls zero punches in addressing the problems of police shootings and institutionalized racism but does so in a nuanced way with no simple answers. This is no "After-School Special" treatment of a complex issue. The story is told from the perspective of fifteen-year-old Starr, who witnesses her cousin Kahlil get shot during a traffic stop, and the reader follows Starr's struggle about whether to stay silent or not. I have never had students in my young-adult literature class react as strongly and positively to a book as this one. "Everyone should read this," several of them said when I first taught it in Spring 2018...and I agree.

Karla Hilliard, High School English Teacher,

recommends:

Sing, Unburied, Sing

by Jesmyn Ward

This beautiful, surprising book might be the heir apparent to Morrison's *Beloved* on a gut-wrenching road trip. We're challenged to return to the butt of systemic oppression and injustice. A moving work with unforgettable scenes.

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Robert Johnson, Educator/Mentor of ED Youth, recommends:

Belt Magazine & Belt Publishing

In the spirit of the many ODD kids I work with at PEP-Phoenix Day Treatment Center in the Cleveland burbs, I'm going to be difficult and recommend a publisher/online magazine rather than a single book: *Belt Magazine* and Belt Publishing, a regional independent operation doing literary & journalistic culture at its finest. Belt defines the Rust Belt region inclusively, seeking to connect rural, urban, and suburban culture and to speak to issues of local, national, and international interest. Their online, long-form journalism has been well received, and their non-fiction press does 6-10 book releases a year: city anthologies & neighborhood guidebooks; classic regional reprints, linguistics & literary criticism; environmental essays; and a just released work of Appalachian cultural studies ya'll have probably heard about: *What You are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*. Belt is doing right, I think.

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Maria E. Miller, Teacher; Law Student, recommends:

Ishmael

by Daniel Quinn

A surprisingly uplifting work of fiction in a time of social and environmental crisis. *Ishmael* asks and answers difficult questions about mankind's place in the natural world. This fable-like novel is quick and easy to read: it's perfect for a hopeful break for anyone struggling with existential angst in contemporary times.

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Melissa S. Riggleman, 11th Grade English Teacher, recommends:

Japanese Maple

by Tucker Riggleman

Tucker is an Appalachian writer who writes about the lives and times of WV people. His book of poems is relatable and mesmerizing. You can feel WV when reading his work. This is his debut volume.

Mary Ann Samyn, Faculty, recommends:

The Marble Faun

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Do you need a travel guide to Rome? Do you enjoy a good mystery? Are philosophical musings on the nature of art and love and sin your thing? *The Marble Faun* offers all this and more. Plus: Hawthorne: in case you've forgotten, the guy knows how to write.

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Keith W. Schlegel, Professor Emeritus, Frostburg State University, recommends:

Moonglow

by Michael Chabon

Many of my former colleagues are busy writing their memoirs. Chabon offers new ways to think about the genre, playfully exploring its boundaries in an important novel that also addresses American history.

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Ken Sullivan, Director – West Virginia Humanities Council, recommends:

Wendell Berry: Port William Novels & Stories

by Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry speaks in an old-fashioned way for conservation, both of the natural environment and of the human communities dependent upon it. Also formidable as poet and essayist, he is presented here as a writer of fiction. These interrelated novels and stories deal with several generations in the life of fictitious Port William, Kentucky, and this big collection brings them together for the first time in story-sequence order. I probably would have started with the essays rather than the fiction, but Berry is a pleasure to re-read however he comes to us. Publication by the Library of America brings him at least unofficially into the American literary canon, and it's satisfying to see him attain that status while still alive and active among us.

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Jessica Viola recommends:

Horns

by Joe Hill

Excellent work of fiction that explores identity, God/Devil relationship, loss, and redemption.