



TWENTY-FIVE WONDERFUL BOOKS FOR THOUGHTFUL TEENS

Every book guaranteed to expand your horizons.

With appreciations to Patricia Ross, Jesse Tijerina, Janet Rhodes, & Harrison Topp

Alvarez, Julia. **How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents.**

Forced to leave their family home in the Dominican Republic and flee to America, the four Garcia girls work hard to become “American.” They change their hair, forget their Spanish, and, horror of horrors, meet boys un-chaperoned. But no matter how hard they try, they cannot let the “old” ways go. A provocative look at the sometimes painful and sometimes very funny pitfalls of assimilation, this novel, in the end is a celebration of spirit, culture, and finding one’s own way in life.

Anaya, Rudolfo. **Bless Me, Ultima.**

Regarded as the godfather of Chicano literature, Rudolfo Anaya introduces an authenticity of character, time, and place in what is now considered a cornerstone of multicultural literature. Taking place in the midst of World War II, the six-year-old Antonio Marez sets out on a rite of passage in which lessons of life, death, and belief are learned. The novel sings in a voice that embraces a people, a land, and a culture. “Let me begin at the beginning. I do not mean the beginning that was in my dreams and the stories they whispered to me about my birth, and the people of my father and mother, and my three brothers,” writes Anaya. “But the beginning that came with Ultima.” And what a beginning, middle and ending it is.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **The Mists Of Avalon.**

The legend of King Arthur has been told and retold in countless variations, but Marion Zimmer Bradley has envisioned the legend as it might have been experienced by its heroines: by Queen Guinevere, Arthur’s wife; by Igraine, his mother; by Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, High Priestess of Avalon and, most importantly, by Arthur’s sister, Morgana le Fay. It’s long, it’s sweeping, it’s wonderful.

Carter, Forrest. **The Education Of Little Tree.**

In this fictionalized memoir by Forrest Carter, a young boy is raised by his Cherokee grandparents in the Tennessee Mountains in the 1930s. Through the gentle guidance of word and deed, “Little Tree” is initiated into the ways of the Cherokee and the prejudice of the surrounding society. It would be nearly impossible not to fall in love with this book. I read this one aloud to my family during a road trip and I was only permitted ten-minute breaks.

Cisneros, Sandra. **The House On Mango Street.**

This piece of fiction is deceptively simple in its rendering but profound in what it has to say about the power of being able to invent yourself. Told in a series of vignettes, this book is about a young girl named Esperanza who lives in the Latino section of Chicago. She faces harsh realities yet finds beauty in her surroundings. Esperanza doesn’t want to belong — not to her rundown neighborhood and definitely not to the low expectations the world has for her. She finds a way to come into her power and be the person she wants to be.

Daumal, Rene. **Mount Analogue.**

Rene Daumal was a member of the French Surrealist movement and his classic novel, **Mount Analogue**, is one of the most impelling books of the 20th century. Based only on a conjecture that Mount Analogue exists, eight intrepid philosopher/explorers set out to find the mysterious mountain that can only be seen at certain angles. It’s equal parts philosophy and spirituality and 100% fun.

Gaines, Ernest J. **A Lesson Before Dying.**

In the 1940s in a rural Louisiana community, a young black man is wrongly accused of the murder of a white liquor store owner. With no chance of acquittal, a young black teacher from the plantation school is encouraged by the accused boy's godmother and his own aunt to visit the boy in prison. His mission is to teach him how to die with dignity. A masterwork of African-American literature.

Giono, Jean. **The Man Who Planted Trees.**

A shepherd, after the loss of his son and wife, lives a solitary life in the barren hills around Provence, France just prior to World War I. The shepherd believes that the land is dying due to the lack of trees. He spends each evening sorting acorns, setting aside those of the very best quality. Each day he plants one hundred of these precious seeds. During the time between the wars his tireless work transforms the landscape and brings life back into the local communities. A loving parable about the transformative power of one person armed only with their passion. Read it... you will be transformed.

Greene, Graham. **The Power And The Glory.**

In a barren Mexican state, where religion has been outlawed, a singular priest continues to tend his flock in secret. Relentlessly pursued by an implacable Lieutenant, he trudges from village to village until his final and inevitable confrontation with what he views as his own cowardice, and in so doing, finds God. Written in a powerful literary style and worthy of any reader.

Heller, Joseph. **Catch-22.**

Catch-22 is without a doubt, one of the greatest war novels ever written. In the waning days of World War II, a bombardier named Yossarian has become obsessed with the thousands of people who are trying to kill him. With a cast of characters that would rival M*A*S*H, **Catch-22** makes you cry, makes you laugh and lets you peer, just for a moment, into a reality beyond the imagining.

Hilton, James. **Lost Horizons.**

After a plane crash on a Himalayan mountaintop, four survivors are rescued and brought to a Buddhist monastery in a remote valley. In this Shangri-la, curiously devoid of crime and want, where people seem ageless, they begin, each in their own way, spiritual journeys. A classic, which is as fascinating and relevant today as it was when it was published in 1933.

Kerouac, Jack. **The Dharma Bums.**

In Jack Kerouac's unique voice, Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder take to the country's roads and rails in search of adventure and a little bit of meaning. **Dharma Bums** brings to its readers the colorful and thoughtful experiences of Smith (Kerouac) as he takes his first steps into the world of Buddhism. A later work than Kerouac's **On the Road**, this novel touches on some truly inspiring and thought provoking ideas of country vs. city, aloneness, and passion.

Kidd, Sue Monk. **The Secret Life Of Bees.**

In rural South Carolina, young Lily Owens flees her abusive father. Driven by a vague memory of the day her father killed her mother and the name of a town on the back of an old photo, she sets out to color in her mother's memory. Taken in by three strong black sisters who raise bees, she discovers the true meaning of family. This is a book of rare wisdom about inner strength, mothers and daughters, human yearning and renewal. Definitely not for women only.

Magorian, Michelle. **Goodnight Mr. Tom.**

This was originally recommended to me by a fifth grade teacher as a read-aloud. It immediately became an all-family favorite. In World War II England, during the Battle of Britain, young Willie Beech is evacuated to the countryside during the Nazi bombardments. Assigned to the home of the reclusive and ill-tempered, Old Tom Oakley, neither Willie nor Tom like their new circumstance. But as Mr. Tom realizes that Willie has been horribly abused, his attitude softens opening the door to a bond of love badly needed by both of them. When Willie is returned to his abusive mother, the action comes to a head when Mr. Tom heads to London to reclaim his "son." Books just don't get better than this.

Maugham, William Somerset. **The Razor's Edge.**

Impelled by what he has seen in war, Larry Darrell, renounces his fiancée and worldly position and sets out on a spiritual journey which culminates in India where he attains the experience of the Absolute. Although the plot may sound a bit trite, from the pen of Maugham it rises to the exquisite and remains one of Maugham's most appealing works.

Morrison, Toni. **Paradise.**

Three women, broken down by life, converge in an abandoned school run by what may be a witch. Just up the highway in the middle of nowhere Oklahoma is an African-American-only town, founded because the town's ancestors had founded their own black-only town but were run out by pro-slavery whites. This novel follows the interactions of the two groups and plays out the idea put forth in the Arabian Nights, that without new stories, we die. Explore the power of story in this lesser-known Morrison novel.

O'Brien, Tim. **The Things They Carried.**

In this series of short stories, Tim O'Brien brings to life the soul and spirit of war in a way that few writers can achieve. Using a beautifully lyrical style he creates unforgettable images of his tour in Vietnam.

Paton, Alan. **Cry The Beloved Country**

Reading almost like a parable, Alan Paton's **Cry the Beloved Country** takes place in a pre-apartheid South Africa. A rural black minister travels to Johannesburg to find his son, only to discover that he has murdered the son of a white rancher. The evolving relation between the minister and the murdered boy's father becomes a metaphor for the complexities of race relations during a crucial time in South African history. **Cry the Beloved Country** continues to be one of the most well-known and best loved books in South African literature.

Picoult, Jodi. **My Sister's Keeper.**

Anna is not sick, but she might as well be. By age 13, she has undergone countless surgeries, transfusions, and shots so that her older sister, Kate, can somehow fight the leukemia that has plagued her since childhood. Like most teenagers, Anna is beginning to question who she truly is. But unlike most teenagers, Anna has always been defined in terms of her sister. Can a parent love one child at the expense of the other? A gripping story of family dynamics and ethical conflicts.

Quinn, Daniel. **Ishmael.**

Ishmael has achieved the status of a cult classic, which in some ways belies the power of its subject matter. A philosophical discussion with a gorilla? You bet, it works and works well. In the course of the book nearly every aspect of humanity is covered. And the gorilla... well you certainly grow to love his wisdom. A must read for any teen who loves the world of ideas.

Smith, Alexander McCall. **The No. 1, Lady's Detective Agency.**

Precious Remotswe is the first woman to ever become a private detective in Botswana. Precious approaches her new profession with courage, strength and humor and through her eyes we are introduced to the beauty and cultural traditions of Botswana along with the inhabitant's sense of pride in their land. This one will charm the socks off you.

Van der Post, Laurens. **A Story Like The Wind.**

Francois Joubert, a teenager living on his father's farm in South Africa, is torn between his white culture and the Bantu culture he comes to love. His Bantu friend, Xhabbo, teaches him how desperately the living spirit of everyone needs a story for its survival and renewal. Simply a magnificent book that both of my teenage boys loved.

Vargas Llosa, Mario. **The Storyteller.**

A Peruvian Jew, Saul Zuratas, becomes obsessed with the survival of the pre-modern peoples of the Amazon. Some time after his mysterious disappearance, an old friend of Zuratas' happens on a photo in a small gallery in Florence in which the storyteller seated in the middle of a circle of Machiguenga Indians looks eerily like his old friend Saul. This is a powerful novel dealing with the clash of the ancient with the modern and the natural with the material. A personal favorite.

Yolen, Jane. **Briar Rose**.

When twenty-three-year-old Rebecca Berlin realizes there is no record of her grandmother Gemma's life before her arrival in the United States shortly after World War II, she embarks on a voyage of discovery that eventually leads her to Hungary during the Holocaust and the near fatal experience of her grandmother in the death camps. This is, without hesitation, one of the best books you will ever read.

Zusak, Markus. **The Book Thief**.

In war torn Germany, young Liesel Meminger lives with foster parents who teach her to read. Woven among the horrors of war are threads of reading and words and how they bind us to others in sometimes unexpected ways. In a sad, and not anticipated ending, Liesel loses her family and best friend in a bombing raid, leaving her one of only a few characters to live out a long life. One of the stand-out elements of **The Book Thief**, is the narrator, Death. The Reaper is not only philosophical but surprisingly sentimental and at times shows what can only be taken as affection for Liesel. This is one of the most exceptional and thought provoking books I have read. A double must read!