

Book Descriptions Prospective Grade 10 Students

Choose one of the following books from Social Studies, one from English – Non Fiction and one from English – Fiction (three total)

Social Studies

The Count of Monte Cristo— Alexander Dumas

A handsome Edmond Dantès escapes from Chateau d'If after being imprisoned for 14 years. With knowledge he gained in prison, he locates an immense treasure, recreates himself as a count, and vows to reward those who were kind to him and to punish the enemies who conspired to imprison him. (Lexile: 930)

Burmese Days— George Orwell

George Orwell, in this presumably semi-autobiographical story, recounts his experiences in Imperial Burma through the eyes of John Flory, a British expatriate with a disfiguring facial birthmark who oversees timber camps in remote Kyauktada, Burma. Flory is a weak and lonely man who retreats to the European Club for the questionable companionship of the other expatriates who share his outpost. Flory befriends a native doctor, Veriswami, who is vying with the novel's villain, U Po Kyin, for admission to the Club. When British debutante Elizabeth Lackersteen arrives in Kyauktada, Flory falls instantly in love with her, creating a weakness for U Po Kyin to exploit. (Lexile: 930)

A Thousand Splendid Suns – Kahled Hosseini

A Thousand Splendid Suns recounts the experiences and emotions of two Afghani women, Mariam and Laila, whose lives become entangled with the history of recent wars in their country. Mostly bleak and heart-rending, their story offers the promise of hope and happiness in a land ravaged by warfare, gender conflicts, and poverty. (Lexile: 830)

Leviathan – Scott Westerfeld

This is the first book in a fiction trilogy set in an alternate history of World War I, wherein the Central Powers (Clankers) are characterized by their use of mechanized war machines, while the Entente Powers (Darwinists) are characterized by their use of living creatures evolved specifically for war. Their Leviathan is a whale airship, part of the British fleet. Aleksandar Ferdinand, Prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is on the run, fleeing Serb assassins, who killed his parents. Deryn Sharp is a commoner, a girl disguised as a boy in the British Air Service. She is a brilliant airman, but her secret is in constant danger of being discovered. With the Great War brewing, Alek's and Deryn's paths cross in the most unexpected way, taking them both aboard the Leviathan on a fantastical, around-the-world adventure, one that will change both their lives forever. (Lexile: 790)

The Photographer – Emmanuel Guibert

This graphic novel/photo-journal is a record of one reporter's arduous and dangerous journey through Afghanistan as it is being torn apart by the Soviet Union in 1986. Didier Lefevre's photography, paired with the art of Emmanuel Guibert, tells the powerful story of Doctors Without Borders whose mission it is to employ dedicated men and women who seek to mend the wounds of war. (No Lexile)

Maus (Volume I or II) – Art Spiegelman

The Holocaust hardly seems to fit comic-strip narration, but Art Spiegelman, the son of Holocaust survivors and a gifted artist-writer, proved otherwise in 1986 when he created a new and distinctive form of Holocaust literature by publishing Maus I and then its sequel Maus II. Determined to take responsibility for transmitting his parents' experience, Spiegelman is himself a troubled character in Maus. The sketches and speeches in Spiegelman's graphic novels neither trivialize nor sentimentalize the Holocaust. Depicting history—personal and global—with unstinting accuracy, his unconventional approach makes its impact. (No Lexile)

Book Descriptions Prospective Grade 10 Students

Social Studies Continued

A Long Way Gone – Ishmael Beah

Ishmael Beah's memoir A Long Way Gone documents Beah's time spent as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. The memoir begins in 1998 in New York City and flashes back to Beah's life in his village, Mogbwemo. There, he and his friends Junior, Mohamed, and Talloi memorize hip-hop lyrics by the Sugar Hill Gang and dance to the beats of the music. While the boys are on their way to participate in a friend's talent show, the rebel army attacks their village, scattering the villagers in all directions. The boys cross the river and are out of immediate harm's way, but the rebel army continually threatens to catch up with them. Beah and his friends eventually find their way into a village controlled by the government army, and in exchange for food and shelter, the boys must become child soldiers for the army. Killing becomes an everyday event. (Lexile: 920)

Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood – Ibtisam Barakat

In this memoir, Ibtisam Barakat provides a framework for sharing her powerful and emotional story. She had always lived by her mother's motto that it is better to forget the past—to forget the atrocities, the fear and the nightmares. But our narrator has come to a time and place in her life where she wants and needs to remember how as a young girl her world is turned completely upside down one day when their father brings home news of the six day war. After a few panicked hours in a water trench in their garden, the family decides to flee their home and join the throngs of rushing refugees that are trying to reach Jordan. The story covers the war, the year or so spent as a refugee in Jordan, their return to Ramallah and the rebuilding of their homes, the continuing fear of living in an "occupied" region, and the knowledge that set a young girl free: the power to read and write. (Lexile: 870)

Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce – Stanley Weintraub

In the early months of World War I, on Christmas Eve, men on both sides of the trenches laid down their arms and joined in a spontaneous celebration. Despite orders to continue shooting, the unofficial truce spread across the front lines. Even the participants found what they were doing incredible: Germans placed candlelit Christmas trees on trench parapets, warring soldiers sang carols, and men on both sides shared food parcels from home. They climbed from the trenches to meet in "No Man's Land" where they buried the dead, exchanged gifts, ate and drank together, and even played soccer. Throughout his narrative, Stanley Weintraub uses the stories of the men who were there, as well as their letters and diaries, to illuminate the fragile truce and bring to life this extraordinary moment in time. (No Lexile)

Persepolis (Volume I or II) – Marjane Satrapi

Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi's wise, funny, and heartbreaking memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white graphic novel format, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country. Persepolis paints an unforgettable portrait of daily life in Iran: of the bewildering contradictions between home life and public life and of the enormous toll repressive regimes exact on the individual spirit. Marjane's child's-eye-view of dethroned emperors, state-sanctioned whippings, and heroes of the revolution allows us to learn as she does the history of this fascinating country and of her own extraordinary family. (Lexile: 380)

Book Descriptions Prospective Grade 10 Students

English – Non Fiction

All But My Life – Gerda Weissmann Klein

Gerda Weissmann Klein's story begins on September 3, 1939, when she is fifteen. This day was the beginning of a tragedy that lasted six years. She is living in Bielitz, Poland, the town of her birth, and she reacts with horror as she watches her neighbors greet the invading Nazis with joy. Once their town is invaded, sanctions start being imposed on the Jews, and Jewish men are abducted by the Nazis. The title *All But My Life* refers to what the Nazis took from Gerda, and the book covers the physical and psychological journey that she barely survives. Throughout the ordeal, Gerda remains hopeful about both her family's fate and her own, and she emphasizes the positive attributes of those around her. Gerda's character is epitomized by her brave optimism and strength in the face of the Holocaust. (Lexile: 780)

The Bite of the Mango – Mariatu Kamara with Susan McClelland

As a child in a small rural village in Sierra Leone, Mariatu Kamara lived peacefully surrounded by family and friends. Rumors of rebel attacks were no more than a distant worry. But when 12-year-old Mariatu set out for a neighboring village, she never arrived. Heavily armed rebel soldiers, many no older than children themselves, attacked Mariatu and in a senseless act of violence they cut off both her hands. Stumbling through the countryside, Mariatu miraculously survived, but with no parents or living adult to support her, she turned to begging in the streets of Freetown. As told to her by Mariatu, journalist Susan McClelland has written the heartbreaking true story of the brutal attack, its aftermath and Mariatu's eventual arrival in Toronto where she began to pull together the pieces of her broken life with courage, astonishing resilience and hope. (Lexile: 800)

Counting Coup – Larry Colton

In Native American tradition, "counting coup" meant literally touching one's enemy in battle and living to tell about it. Now it means playing winning hoops and dominating one's opponent. Counting Coup is the story of the girls' varsity basketball team of Hardin High School in Crow, Montana. The team is comprised of both Crow Indian and White girls, and is led by Sharon Laforge, a moody, undisciplined, yet talented Native American who hopes to be the first female player from Hardin to earn a basketball scholarship to college. Larry Colton shows readers the hardscrabble existence of a rural small town beset by racism, alcoholism, and domestic violence, and in so doing produces a touching, heartfelt, and beautifully written true story that will leave readers cheering for the girls they have come to know. (Lexile: 960)

The Color of Water – James McBride

James McBride writes both his autobiography and a tribute to the life of his mother, Ruth McBride. He grew up one of twelve siblings in the all-black housing projects of Red Hook, Brooklyn, the son of a black minister and a woman who would not admit she was white. The object of McBride's constant embarrassment, and his continuous fear for her safety, his mother was an inspiring figure, who through sheer force of will saw her dozen children through college, and many through graduate school. McBride was an adult before he discovered the truth about his mother: the daughter of a failed itinerant Orthodox rabbi in rural Virginia, she had run away to Harlem, married a black man, and founded an all-black Baptist church in her living room in Red Hook. In this remarkable memoir, she tells in her own words the story of her past. Around her narrative, James McBride has written a powerful portrait of growing up, a meditation on race and identity, and a poignant, beautifully crafted hymn from a son to his mother. (Lexile: 1240)

The Radioactive Boy Scout – Ken Silverstein

On June 26, 1995, officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency descended on a shed behind a suburban house in a small Michigan town for an unusual job: They had to cart off the dangerously radioactive materials that teenager David Hahn had fashioned during his extended experiments with nuclear technology. Inspired by his Boy Scout merit badge in atomic energy, Hahn had attempted to build a primitive nuclear reactor. (Lexile: 1300)

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English – Fiction

American Born Chinese – Matt Berman

Three parallel stories interlock in this graphic novel: In the first, the American-born Chinese boy of the title, Jin, moves with his family from San Francisco's Chinatown to a mostly white suburb. There he's exposed to racism, bullying, and taunts and is isolated until a Taiwanese boy, Wei-Chen Sun, moves in and they become friends. But Jin develops a crush on a white girl and longs to fit in. The second story is a retelling of the story of the *Monkey King*, a fabled Chinese character who develops extraordinary powers in his quest to be accepted as a god. The third concerns Danny, a popular Anglo boy who's visited by his cousin, Chin-Kee, a walking, talking example of the most pernicious Asian stereotypes. (Lexile: 530)

I am the Messenger – Markus Zusak

Ed Kennedy, 19, is a cab driver who gets no respect (and actually feels like he doesn't deserve any). He lives in a shack with a stinky, coffee-drinking seventeen-year-old dog named the Doorman. He's in love with his friend Audrey but she refuses to love anyone. Ed becomes a hero when he points a gun at the most incompetent bank robber the world has ever seen. Soon after, he receives his first message --- an Ace of Diamonds playing card with three addresses and times written on it. Ed realizes that this is more than an invitation; it's an assignment, and he feels compelled to respond. Ed knows he's been chosen, to care and to act. But how? And by whom? Ed transforms from a self-absorbed (although funny and likeable) lout into a genuine hero, reaching out in a beguiling, unsentimental way to the others he's directed to find on the cards he receives. Sometimes his successes are sweet and simple but others are sickeningly painful and incomplete. Always lurking beneath the riveting story is the mystery --- who sends Ed his "assignments" and why? (Lexile: 640)

Flygirl – Sherri L. Smith

Ida Mae loves to fly and dreams of being a licensed pilot. But she has two big obstacles living in the American south in the 1940's – she's a woman and she's black. When the US enters World War II and Ida Mae reads about the Women Air Force Service Pilots program, she decides to apply. Because she knows she has no chance to be admitted into the program as a black, she decides to try to pass as white which she can thanks to her light skin, even though her family is against it. (Lexile: 690)

The Good Thief – Hannah Tinti

Twelve year-old Ren is missing his left hand. How it was lost is a mystery that Ren has been trying to solve for his entire life, as well as who his parents are, and why he was abandoned as an infant at Saint Anthony's Orphanage for boys. He longs for a family to call his own and is terrified of the day he will be sent alone into the world. But then a young man named Benjamin Nab appears, claiming to be Ren's long-lost brother, and his convincing tale of how Ren lost his hand and his parents persuades the monks at the orphanage to release the boy and to give Ren some hope. But is Benjamin really who he says he is? Journeying through whaling towns and meadowed farmlands, Ren is introduced to a vibrant world of hardscrabble adventure filled with outrageous scam artists, grave robbers, and petty thieves. If he stays, Ren becomes one of them. If he goes, he's lost once again. As Ren begins to find clues to his hidden parentage he comes to suspect that Benjamin not only holds the key to his future, but to his past as well. (Lexile: 800)

The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon – Stephen King

Nine year old Trisha McFarland is out for a short hike on the Appalachian Trail with her divorced Mom and her brother, who are arguing so vociferously that they fail to notice when she stops to relieve herself. When Trisha tries to get back on the trail, she becomes disoriented and is quickly lost in the dense woods. In the ensuing days she will be forced to fend for herself, armed with little more than some junk food, a poncho, a Walkman and a surpassing love for the Red Sox closer, Tom Gordon. Battling bugs, bogs, hunger, malevolent woodland spirits and bears, she is sustained by listening to Red Sox games, by visitations from a spirit (Tom Gordon) and by "The Subaudible", as her father once described his impression of the divine in every day life. (Lexile: 1040)