Global Summer Reading: World View Staff Picks

July 2009

We hope you are enjoying the summer! Each year the staff at World View reflect back on the international books that they have read and each chooses one or two to recommend as good choices for summer reading. Here are the recommendations for Summer 2009.

Brianne recommends . . .

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The Middle of Everywhere: The World’s Refugees Come to Our Town

by Mary Pipher. Harcourt, 2002.

After meeting several refugees in Lincoln, Nebraska, author Mary Pipher becomes friend and “cultural broker” to numerous resettled families in her community. Through vignettes of families fleeing persecution in Vietnam, Kosovo, and Sierra Leone, Pipher shares engaging stories of perseverance and hope. The book relays the challenges of cross-cultural communication and global politics through warm personal accounts suitable for a summer read.

Carina recommends . . .

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Seedfolks

by Paul Fleischman. HarperTeen, 2004.

Seedfolks is simple text with a powerful message for all ages. The story focuses on a vacant inner city lot which the neighborhood residents have ignored. One day, a young girl decides to clear a small space to plant a seed. The local residents begin to take notice of this new growth and new promise of community. The tale weaves in and out of several residents' lives and the voices and cultures they bring to transform this vacant lot into a community garden.

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Esperanza Rising

by Pam Munoz Ryan. Blue Sky Press, 2002.

Esperanza Rising follows the life of young Esperanza Ortega as she encounters a dramatic and critical change in her life. As a result of a family tragedy, Esperanza, heir to a prosperous estate in 1920's Mexico, must flee from everything she knows to a harsh farm labor camp in California. Though young, Esperanza must confront her new challenges head-on and find strength in her family and heritage.

Julie recommends . . .

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Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood

by Alexandra Fuller. Random House, 2003.

Based on a true story, this novel chronicles the life of the author who was raised in Africa during troubling times, both for the countries she lived in and for her family. The story leads readers to experience what it would have been like growing up as a young white child who tried to make sense of her parents' racism, seemingly odd business and cultural practices, and deteriorating mental and physical health in the ever changing world around her. Bobo, as Fuller was nicknamed as a child, lived in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Zambia, and Malawi during civil wars, environmental and economic hardships, and the deaths of three siblings. Through it all readers delve into an extraordinary childhood and into an area of the world that the author still considers her true home.

Katharine recommends . . .

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The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures

by Anne Fadiman. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

This true story of three-month-old Lia, a Hmong child living in California, recounts the struggle, journey, and cultural conflicts that come to pass between her family and her doctors after she is diagnosed with a severe case of Epilepsy. This cross-cultural story presents the perspectives of Lia’s doctors, who are doing everything to treat her, and her parents, who conversely believe that the seizures represent the flight of her soul from her body and call her condition by its Hmong name, “the spirit catches you and you fall down.” This touching story explores the convergence of deeply rooted cultural differences and is a great read for anyone interested in culture, immigrant and refugee issues, or medical anthropology.

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Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books

by Azar Nafisi. Random House Trade, 2003.

This memoir recounts the experiences of Iranian author and professor Azar Nafisi as she struggles to provide female Iranian students with adequate and unbiased education. After her refusal to wear the veil during class results in her expulsion from the University of Tehran, she forms a women’s book club to discuss works of Western literature. The small group meets illegally to study books such as the controversial Lolita, all the while living in war-ridden Iran. This professor's quest to educate in the face of intolerance, anger, and fear will give educators a new perspective on teaching.

Lauren recommends . . .

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No Place Left to Bury the Dead: Denial, Despair and Hope in the African AIDS Pandemic

by Nicole Itano. Atria Books, 2007.

Author and journalist Nicole Itano describes her time spent in Africa learning about the AIDS epidemic from a journalist's perspective.  As she travels to Lesotho, South Africa, and Botswana, she stays with families and recounts their experiences of living and struggling daily with AIDS.  Going beyond the health terminology, this account provides an honest look at the emotions and experiences of the women she met, and affects the reader on a very personal level.

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The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini. Riverhead Trade, 2004.

Hosseini's debut novel, The Kite Runner, follows the tale of the main character's childhood experiences growing up in Afghanistan, of his immigration to the United States, and later of his return visit to his home country.  This is a beautifully written novel, both tragic and uplifting, lighthearted and serious.  Plot twists and heart-wrenching stories will keep readers engaged start to finish.  The Kite Runner is now a major motion picture, and in 2007 Hosseini released a second novel, A Thousand Splendid Suns.

Neil recommends . . .

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China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities

by C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman, Nicholas R. Lardy, Derek J. Mitchell. Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2008.

China’s astounding rise to a major global economic power has drawn worldwide attention. China is projected to become the largest economy in the world in the next 15 years and is assuming an ever-increasing role on the world stage. China’s Rise: Challenges and Opportunities helps us understand the dynamics underpinning China’s rise with an analysis of recent developments in China’s economy, foreign and domestic policy, and national security. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US National Security Advisor, "This is the best single book on China, and I use it to prepare for all my trips to that country."

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The Trouble with Islam Today

by Irshad Manji. Random House, Canada, 2003.

The Trouble with Islam Today: A Wake-up Call for Honesty and Change is a rare instance of criticism of Islam written by one within the faith. It is a frank examination of the way Islam is practiced and enforced in many places today, written by a lesbian Muslim woman who has managed to reconcile her identity with her faith by constantly questioning conventional beliefs. The book addresses many key issues: education, Antisemitism, desert tribalism, women’s rights and interpretations of the Quran. It is written in a lively personal style that is engaging and often humorous.

Robert recommends . . .

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A Home on the Field: How One Championship Soccer Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America

by  Paul Cuadros. Harper Collins, New York, 2006.

If you read only one book this summer, make that book A Home on the Field. The author, Paul Cuadros, is a member of UNC’s School of Journalism faculty, and he explores class and ethnic conflict through the story of a Siler City (Chatham County) high school soccer team. The Jordan-Matthews team is made up primarily of Latino students, almost all of whom are children of parents who had immigrated to work in Siler City poultry plants. Cuadros understood the struggles of these students because his parents had immigrated from Peru to Michigan where he grew up. With a grant to study the impact of newly arrived Latino poultry workers in the rural South, he moved to Pittsboro, N.C. Here he encountered a culture clash between longtime residents and the new Latino immigrants. Seeing an opportunity to support these students, he got a boy’s soccer program included as a high school sport. He later became its coach, and led them to the state soccer championship. This team success was transforming for many Siler City residents – white, black, and Hispanic. In a bitterly divided town over so many Latinos in their small rural community, the team became town heroes. This book should be required reading for educators who have Latino immigrant students, but all educators will learn much from this North Carolina based story. UNC required it for the 2009 Summer Reading Program for all entering freshman at Chapel Hill, and I recommend you read it and pass it on to a colleague.

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Young Adult Version

Three Cups of Tea

One Man’s Journey to Change the World,

One Child At A Time

By Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin,

Adapted By Sarah Thomson, Penguin, 2009.

The Young Reader’s Edition of the best seller Three Cups of Tea has been rewritten for young readers (middle school level). It tells the incredible story of Greg Mortenson who built schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan and required they include girls. The book includes a glossary, study questions, and an interview with Amira, 12-year-old daughter of Greg and Tara Mortenson.

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Children's Version

Listen to the Wind

The Story of Dr. Greg and Three Cups of Tea

By Greg Mortenson and Susan L. Roth, Penguin, 2009.

Listen to the Wind is the story of how Greg Mortenson helped Korphe, a small village in Afghanistan, build a school. Told in the voice of Korphe’s children, it is perfect for reading aloud. This story illuminates the humanity and culture of Pakistan in collage, while sharing a riveting example of how one person can change the lives of thousands. The book also includes an epilogue of real-life photographs, explains the work of Greg Mortenson and his Central Asia Institute, and includes information on how kids can help children around the world gain access to education.