

Division IV Read-In Week Book List

War Is: Soldiers, Survivors, and Storytellers Talk about War – Marc Aronson & Patty Campbell (eds.)

War is an unfortunate reality of our present and our past. Perhaps by “looking through the window” at war, we can eradicate it from our futures. The book jacket of this collection states, “Should it be obsolete? Or is it inevitable? Respected commentators Marc Aronson and Patty Campbell have commissioned and edited nearly twenty pieces of fiction and nonfiction – essays, a miliblog, stories, interviews – as varied and complex as war itself.” A fascinating multi-genre read.

The Cellist of Sarajevo – Steven Galloway

Canadian Galloway (*Ascension*) delivers a tense and haunting novel following four people trying to survive war-torn Sarajevo. After a mortar attack kills 22 people waiting in line to buy bread, an unnamed cellist vows to play at the point of impact for 22 days. Meanwhile, Arrow, a young woman sniper, picks off soldiers; Kenan makes a dangerous trek to get water for his family; and Dragan, who sent his wife and son out of the city at the start of the war, works at a bakery and trades bread in exchange for shelter. Arrow's assigned to protect the cellist, but when she's eventually ordered to commit a different kind of killing, she must decide who she is and why she kills. Dragan believes he can protect himself through isolation, but that changes when he runs into a friend of his wife's attempting to cross a street targeted by snipers. Kenan is repeatedly challenged by his fear and a cantankerous neighbor. All the while, the cellist continues to play. With wonderfully drawn characters and a stripped-down narrative, Galloway brings to life a distant conflict.

Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia – Joe Sacco

The story of the Muslim people of Gorzade, this graphic novel is a tribute to people who found hope even in the midst of unbelievable tragedy. Thoughtfully executed, the story and drawings make an indelible impression on the mind of the reader, offering a view into a world both foreign and far too familiar.

The New York Times Book Review states, “Sacco has produced a work that improbably manages to combine rare insight into what the war in Bosnia felt like on the ground with a mature and nuanced political and historical understanding of the conflict... Of the myriad of books that have appeared about Bosnia, few have told the truth more bravely than Sacco.” *Time's* reviewer said, “Like Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Sacco’s book juxtaposes the pop style of comics with human tragedy, making the brutality of war all the more jarring.”

Finding Nouf – Zoe Ferraris

A finely detailed literary mystery set in contemporary Saudi Arabia, Ferraris's debut centers on Nouf ash-Shrawi, a 16-year-old girl who disappeared into the desert three days before her marriage and has been found dead, several weeks pregnant. Palestinian Nayir al-Sharqi ,who lives in Jeddah and works occasionally for the rich Shrawi family, is asked by them to investigate Nouf's death discreetly. Nayir, a conservative Muslim and an outsider because of his nationality, his class and his large stature, is wary of traversing the wide gulf between Saudi men's and women's worlds, and is encouraged by his friend Othman, an adopted son of the Shrawis, to seek out the help of Katya Hijazi, Othman's fiancée. Katya has a Ph.D. and is employed in the women's section of the state medical examiner's office. As Nayir and

Katya's investigation progresses, it becomes clear that at least one of the Shrawis has something to hide. Ferraris, who has lived in Saudi Arabia, gets deep inside Nayir's and Katya's very different perspectives, giving a fascinating glimpse into the workings and assumptions of Saudi society. As a mystery, it's fairly well-turned, but it's the characters and setting that sparkle.

Gardens of Water – Alan Drew

Cultures clash as a teenaged Kurdish girl and an American boy fall in love over the objection of the girl's father, a Muslim Kurd living in Istanbul. Sinan, a shop owner, tries to keep his American upstairs neighbors, Marcus Hamm and his family, at arm's length. But this is impossible after an earthquake devastates Istanbul, and Sinan and his family end up living in a tent city provided by American missionaries. Marcus, the director of a missionary school, lost his wife in the earthquake; she was found dead, shielding Sinan's son, who was buried alive for three days before being rescued. Now, Sinan watches as his America-obsessed daughter, Irem, falls in love with Marcus's bipolar son, Dylan, and his impressionable younger son, Ismail, slowly becomes converted to Christianity at the camp. The story moves inexorably toward a climax in which Sinan's Muslim pride and Marcus's Christian proselytizing collide with predictably tragic results. Drew, who lived in Istanbul at the time of the Marmara earthquake, effortlessly transports readers to a wrecked Istanbul and finds shards of hope in the mountains of rubble.

The Story of Forgetting – Stefan Merrill Block

A complex and gripping novel, *The Story of Forgetting* is a window into the thoughts of two characters: Abel and Seth. Abel is an elderly man reminiscing about his past; Seth is a fifteen year old boy dealing with his mother's diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's. Between their two stories are interstitial fables of a land called Isidora, a land where there is no memory and no forgetting. This novel contains a strong scientific component; Seth is drawn to research the genetic mysteries of Alzheimer's disease. But equally forceful are the human mysteries behind the disease, and the reader is compelled to read to the novel's stunning conclusion.

Over and Under – Todd Tucker

In the summer of 1979, Andy and Tom are two fourteen-year-old boys - best friends, expert cave explorers and crack shots with their Springfield M-6 Scout rifles. In rural Southern Indiana, they are blissfully unaware of the local labour strife surrounding the Borden Casket Company - the fact that Andy's dad is a manager, and Tom's a Union labourer, has no bearing on their fun and adventure. But violence soon arises-including an explosion, a murder, and the escape of two fugitives- and the young boys can no longer ignore the fact that the world around them has forever changed. Through their secret observing of labour meetings, both boys feel the effect of the dissolution-and it tests their loyalty and friendship. It becomes a summer of growth and change; of adventure and misbehaviour. Reminiscent of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Over and Under* is the quintessential story of ruddy-faced, scheming, precocious young boys who explore the wilds of rural Indiana, discover what it means to be friends, and see the most amazing gunshot of their lives.

Wintergirls – Laurie Halse Anderson

From the book cover: Lia and Cassie were best friends, wintergirls frozen in matchstick bodies. But now Cassie is dead. Lia's mother is busy saving other people's lives. Her father is away on business. Her stepmother is clueless. And the voice inside Lia's head keeps telling her to *remain in control, stay strong, lose more, weigh less*. If she keeps going this way – thin, thinner, thinnest – maybe she'll disappear altogether. In her most emotionally wrenching, lyrically written book since the National Book Award finalist *Speak*, bestselling author Laurie Halse Anderson explores one girl's chilling descent into the all-consuming vortex of anorexia.

Mudbound – Hillary Jordan

The window to the past sometimes reveals both pain and shame. *Mudbound*, a riveting story set in 1946 Mississippi, explores race relations in rural communities. Juxtaposing various points of view highlights the confusion, the fear, and the complexity of the time period. Winner of the 2006 Bellwether Award for Social Change, high school students who enjoyed *To Kill A Mockingbird* will find *Mudbound* an enlightening companion novel.

Incognegro: A Graphic Mystery – Mat Johnson

The brows are furrowed and teeth mightily clenched in Pleece's noirish artwork for Johnson's pulpy tale of a black journalist who goes undercover in the 1930s South to investigate a possible trumped-up murder charge against his brother—a charge that could lead to a lynching. Zane Pinchback, who is so light-skinned he can pass for white with a little cosmetic help, writes the Incognegro column for a Harlem newspaper, and his beat (like that of many a brave black journalist at the time) is the bloody circus of lynchings still claiming lives in horrendous numbers. Johnson's tale is a smart and fast-paced one, particularly when dealing with Pinchback's reluctance to return to Mississippi (wisely preferring his comparatively sheltered Harlem life). Once he's back down South, the twists and turns of the story come fast and thick, goosed by the not particularly trustworthy explanations being given by Zane's moonshine-distilling brother, and the attention-drawing antics of Zane's playboy friend Carl, who invited himself along on a lark.

Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned – Judd Winick

In this powerful and captivating graphic novel, Winick, a professional cartoonist and cast member of MTV's *The Real World 3: San Francisco*, pays tribute to his *Real World* housemate and friend Pedro Zamora, an AIDS activist and educator who died of the disease in 1994. Striking just the right balance of cool and forthrightness sure to attract a broad cross section of teens, twenty-somethings and beyond, Winick describes the special bond he developed with Zamora and shares some of his own journey to enlightenment about AIDS awareness. From Winick's initial preconceptions about the disease to the ultimate moments of heartbreaking loss, the author bravely invites readers into a life-altering experience. The result is never mawkish: Winick speaks of his friend not with otherworldly awe, but with palpable love and warmth and profound admiration. Readers unfamiliar with the graphic novel genre would do well to start with this title. Winick imbues deceptively simple black-and-white comic-strip art with a full spectrum of emotion, and his approach is particularly adept at conveying Zamora's mind-set; for instance, a series of partial views of Zamora driving, just after he's received the news that he's HIV positive, communicates Zamora's anxiety and confusion. Throughout, Winick depicts Zamora as a vital force, a tireless teacher using frank language to relate facts about how people contract the virus that causes AIDS, how they can prevent it and how they can live with it. An innovative and accessible approach to a difficult subject.

The Eternal Smile: Three Stories – Gene Luen Yang & Derek Kirk Kim

A fantastical adventure through the worlds we live in and the worlds we create. From two masters of the graphic novel -- Gene Luen Yang (American Born Chinese) and Derek Kirk Kim (Same Difference and Other Stories) come three magical tales - The story of a prince who defeats his greatest enemy only to discover that maybe his world is not what it had seemed. The story of a frog who finds that just being a frog might be the way to go. The story of a woman who receives an e-mail from Prince Henry of Nigeria asking for a loan to help save his family - and gives it to him. With vivid artwork and moving writing, Derek Kirk Kim and Gene Luen Yang test the boundaries between fantasy and reality, exploring the ways that the world of the imagination can affect real life.

The Oxford Project – Steven J. Bloom & Peter Feldstein

This book is an interesting “window” into the lives of people in small-town America. The authors traveled to Oxford, Iowa. They photographed and interviewed every person in the town. Twenty years later, they returned to re-photograph and re-interview every resident. As the preface says, “Each narrative reminds us that the most compelling and unusual stories are always the truest.”

A reviewer from Neiman reports states, "What we have in this spellbinding and ambitious and eccentric volume is 'Our Town' and 'Spoon River Anthology' updated and revived. We also have journalism, in words and in images, at its heart-stopping best and its most poignant...by the final page you feel as if you have both read a novel and seen a movie simultaneously."

Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell

Why do some people succeed, living remarkably productive and impactful lives, while so many more never reach their potential? Challenging our cherished belief of the "self-made man," he makes the democratic assertion that superstars don't arise out of nowhere, propelled by genius and talent: "they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot." Examining the lives of outliers from Mozart to Bill Gates, he builds a convincing case for how successful people rise on a tide of advantages, "some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky."

Outliers can be enjoyed for its bits of trivia, like why most pro hockey players were born in January, how many hours of practice it takes to master a skill, why the descendants of Jewish immigrant garment workers became the most powerful lawyers in New York, how a pilots' culture impacts their crash record, how a centuries-old culture of rice farming helps Asian kids master math. But there's more to it than that. Throughout all of these examples--and in more that delve into the social benefits of lighter skin color, and the reasons for school achievement gaps--Gladwell invites conversations about the complex ways privilege manifests in our culture. He leaves us pondering the gifts of our own history, and how the world could benefit if more of our kids were granted the opportunities to fulfill their remarkable potential.