

Anything is Possible with Books!

2011 READERS' CHOICES FOR ADULTS • WINDHAM COUNTY READS

Compiled and annotated by Laura Casey

Ali, Ayaan Hirsi. *Infidel*. 2008. This memoir of Ali, a Somali refugee and member of Dutch parliament, recounts her genital mutilation and forced marriage and her escape to the Netherlands. An outspoken Muslim, Ali loudly protests the treatment of women in many areas of the Islamic world.

Barbery, Muriel. *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. 2008. Within a posh Parisian apartment building live Renee, the super-educated but understated concierge, and Paloma, a brilliant and observant girl who has decided to commit suicide on her thirteenth birthday because of deep philosophical complaints with the world. When the two meet each other, many things begin to shift and change.

Brown, Eleanor. *The Weird Sisters*. 2011. Sisters Rosalind, Bianca, and Cordelia grew up with a professor father who spoke to them in Shakespearean verse. As estranged adults, they all return to their hometown to be with their mother who is dying from breast cancer. One is pregnant without a partner, another is escaping from embezzlement charges, and the third is ever the caretaking martyr.

Chevalier, Tracy. *Girl With a Pearl Earring*. 2005. Chevalier creates a life for the model of Johannes Vermeer's famous painting. Griet, a young Dutch woman, goes to work in the painter's home, caring for his large Catholic family, peculiar mother-in-law, and ever-pregnant wife. When Vermeer asks Griet to model for him, she learns the inner workings of his private, contemplative, painstaking painting life.

Connelly, Michael. *Echo Park*. 2009. Book twelve in Connelly's series about LAPD detective Harry Bosch details his reinvolvement in an old case following new evidence--the disappearance and murder of young Marie Gesto.

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Magician's Elephant*. 2011. When ten-year-old orphan Peter Augustus Duchene visits the local fortuneteller, he learns that his dead sister is actually alive and he will find her by following an elephant. That very evening an elephant just happens to fall through a ceiling when a magician's trick goes terribly wrong.

Donaghue, Emma. *Room*. 2010. A literary masterpiece, this stark thriller takes you into the Room--an 11 x 11 space inhabited by a young woman who was kidnapped seven years earlier and her five-year-old son Jack, the child of her kidnapper and rapist. Jack tells the reader about the amazingly rich place his loving mother has made for him inside her prison.

Follett, Ken. *Pillars of the Earth*. 1990. This engrossing story follows the lives of several poor, rich and ambitious citizens of a twelfth-century village as they attempt to build a great cathedral. Ordinary citizens, lords and ladies, monks and bishops are all tied together as England's royalty vies for the throne. Filled with lust, violence, scandal and heartbreak, this novel has it all.

Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*. 1961. Journalist John Howard, a white man, had his skin surgically darkened so he could travel through the deep south in the 950s to experience firsthand the life of a black man in the south.

Harkness, Deborah. *A Discovery of Witches*. 2011. Reluctant witch and Yale historian Diana Bishop discovers an intriguing manuscript in Oxford's library. As a result of her investigation, she befriends a 1500-year-old vampire through whom she becomes acquainted with the magical world, including paranormal developments that threaten life as we humans know it.

Hillebrand, Laura. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. 2011. Hillebrand, author of *Seabiscuit*, tells the incredible true story of Louis Zamperini, from his origins as a tough kid to Olympic champion to army hero. When his army plane crashes into the Pacific Ocean during World War II an incredible three years as a POW follow.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Lacuna*. 2010. Harrison William Shepherd is the child of an American father and a Mexican mother. In Mexico he is part of the household of Diego Rivera and Frieda Kahlo during the years they harbored Leon Trotsky. In America, he finds himself before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Larsson, Stieg. *The Girl Who Played with Fire*. 2010. In an exciting sequel to *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, Lizbeth Salandar and Mikael Blomkvist again team up, this time to solve the murders of a couple who had been about to expose a major sex trafficking operation. The case becomes complicated when Lizbeth is implicated as a suspect.

Mayor, Archer. *Red Herring*. 2010. Mayor's hero, Joe Gunther, is back to solve a series of seemingly unrelated rural Vermont murders that are tied together by a single drop of blood on each of the victims--blood that does not belong to any of the victims or to their killer.

Martel, Yann. *The Life of Pi*. 2003. Sixteen-year-old Pi Patel, born in India and son of a zookeeper, travels by boat with his family as they immigrate (with their animals) to Canada. A horrifying shipwreck leaves him stranded at sea with only a Bengal tiger for company.

Martin, George R. R. *The Game of Thrones: A Song of Ice and Fire: Book 1*. 2011. In his newest fantastical world, Martin creates the Seven Kingdoms, a world with many similarities to England during the War of the Roses. Here, royalty, knights and ruffians vie for power during a short period preceding a winter that will last four decades. Magic, medieval warfare and intrigue pull readers into a world inhabited by dragons, vampires and direwolves.

Mosher, Howard Frank. *Walking to Gatlinburg*. 2010. Morgan Kinneson is a seventeen-year-old Vermont boy who travels south during the Civil War to search for his brother, an MIA Union soldier. Along the way, he becomes deeply involved in a series of events involving an escaped slave, a Rune stone, a blood feud and a slave breeder.

Picoult, Jodi. *House Rules*. 2010. As a boy with Asperger's syndrome, Jacob Hunt's personal obsession is forensic science. He loves crime scenes and solving crimes, but after one crime, the police become suspicious of Jacob himself. His mother Emma has devoted her life to Jacob and is determined to clear his name.

Roth, Geneen. *Women, Food, and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything*. 2011. Roth has written for decades about women and compulsive eating. In this new book, she delves into the spiritual dimensions of eating, centering on the notion that the way one eats reflects one's deepest values and beliefs about life.

Schiff, Stacy. *Cleopatra*. 2010. Leap into the world of ancient Mesopotamia with a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer. Schiff masterfully separates popular fiction and historical fact in her revealing portrait of an intelligent and shrewd queen born into one of the ancient world's most powerful.

Smith, Roland. *Elephant Run*. 2009. In this young adult novel, thirteen-year-old Nick is sent to his family's timber plantation in Burma to escape the London air raids during World War II. Shortly after his arrival, the Japanese invade and take Nick's father prisoner, leaving Nick to fend for himself in an unfamiliar and war-torn world.

Stamm, Pat Upton. *Twelve Kids, One Bathroom, and a Milk Bottle*. 2009. Upton's memoir of life as the third of twelve children chronicles the trials and triumphs of her struggling parents during the 40s, 50s and 60s.

Stuart, Julia. *The Tower, The Zoo, and The Tortoise*. 2010. Quirky, fun and somber, this short novel tells the story of the current residents of the infamous Tower of London and their eccentricities. Meet the Beefeaters, their families, their pets, and the tower ghosts as the London Zoo is relocated back to its original home--the Tower of London!

Vergheze, Abraham. *Cutting for Stone*. 2010. This engrossing and exceptionally well-written novel by a medical doctor centers on the dramatic birth of twin boys to a nun. From India to Ethiopia to inner city New York, this book traverses diverse landscapes and explores intriguing medical situations and moral questions.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. 2007. Nine years old and still illiterate, Liesel joins a foster family in World War II Germany when her communist mother fears for her safety. Slowly realizing that her mother is not coming back, Liesel learns to live in the tough part of town with her new parents, her rowdy friends, and a Jew they have taken into hiding in their basement. This highly original book is narrated by Death.