



PEDDIE SCHOOL

English Department Senior Seminars: Summer Reading 2017

Students enrolled in Senior Seminars (Reckless Libertines; The Undiscovered Country; Piece of Work is Man) for the academic year of 2017, including post-graduates, are invited to complete the summer reading prior to the start of classes in September.

Each of these books has been carefully chosen; we think these texts will be exciting and interesting to read, and will also be fruitful books to explore in your Senior Thesis.

We recommend reading **at least two** of the books below, both for your own intellectual growth and to prepare for your Senior Seminar in English.

My Brilliant Friend, by Elena Ferrante (Europa Editions; ISBN-10: [1609450787](#))

The first in a series of four riveting novels, *My Brilliant Friend* tells the story of a friendship, a neighborhood, and a series of entrepreneurial and romantic encounters. Issues of class, gender, and economics are artfully blended into the fascinating storytelling, and this bestseller features a remarkable view of mid-20th Century Naples, Italy. Once you've finished this modern phenomenon, you'll want to read the next books in the series: *The Story of a New Name*; *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*; and *The Story of the Lost Child*.

Just Mercy, by Bryan Stevenson (Spiegel & Grau; ISBN-10: [081298496X](#))

A nonfictional account of the criminal justice system in the American South, *Just Mercy* features gripping storytelling and real-life legal dramas. It also explores and explains a problematic, racist, and corrupt judicial process, and examines the people and places that suffer as a result. Stevenson has been compared to Dr. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela for his legal work and activism, but he is also a gifted writer whose stories leap off the page. This is a must-read.

Citizen, by Claudia Rankine (Graywolf Press ISBN-10: [1555976905](#))

This award-winning book is a searing and lyrical compendium of the way racism infiltrates and defines American social dynamics, athletic viewing opinions, professional expectations, and interactions among strangers. *Citizen* is precise and unsparing, and highly readable—though each page prompts the reader to pause and consider the wisdom and insights it contains. Rankine, who spoke at Peddie in 2017, is an active participant in the current American cultural conversation—and so is *Citizen*.

But What If We're Wrong?, by Chuck Klosterman (Blue Rider Press, ISBN-10: [0399184139](#))

Klosterman, a master of hypotheticals and contrarian thinking, brings his accessible writing style and deep insights to this ambitious and deeply philosophical nonfiction text. Klosterman interviews experts from various fields, questioning modern American society's core assumptions about issues as diverse as gravity, literature, music, and sports. The book is a delightful and fresh look at the ways in which our beliefs might radically shift in the future, but it is also a sharp examination of our American present.

The Namesake, by Jhumpa Lahiri (Mariner Books, ISBN-10: 0618485228)

This beautifully-written debut novel examines relationships and family dynamics through the life of Gogol, an American man whose parents have emigrated from India. The novel explores the intersection of American and Bengali cultural norms, and examines identity, society, sex, and death with gorgeous prose and striking characters.



PEDDIE SCHOOL

What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank (Stories), by Nathan Englander (Vintage, ISBN-10: [0307949605](#))

Englander's stories are, by turns, hilarious, powerful, and deep. He examines Jewish American culture, and also ventures into Israel to reflect on the political and social issues in the Middle East. Englander is a witty and trenchant observer of humanity, and he approaches situations with an eye for justice and ambiguity. This collection has a brilliant and fascinating combination of characters and stories.

Blood Meridian: or The Evening Redness in the West, by Cormac McCarthy (Vintage, ISBN-10: [0679728759](#))

A ruthless and bloody story of the American West, McCarthy's novel offers a vision of Westward expansion not found in history textbooks. Laden with criminal behavior, violence, and a cold, calculating vision of the world, this epic novel is Biblical in language and fascinating in content. It questions and explores the meaning of America, and features one of the most compelling villains in all of literature: The Judge.

A Good Man is Hard to Find, by Flannery O'Connor (Harcourt Brace, ISBN-10: [0156364654](#))

This classic collection of Southern Gothic short stories considers issues of religion, race, gender, and violence in the American South. O'Connor is a master storyteller, combining an unflinching eye for human darkness with airtight prose and tense plots. Consider pairing your reading of O'Connor with the podcast, *S-Town* (2017).

Lolita, by Vladimir Nabokov (Vintage, ISBN-10: [0679723161](#))

In one of the greatest novels of the 20th Century, Vladimir Nabokov's masterpiece combines peerless prose with unsettling scenes. This Modernist classic is told from an abusive criminal's point of view, and features breathtaking descriptions of the American countryside and suburbia. Complex, psychologically troubling, and artistically ambitious, this novel is for advanced and ambitious readers.

Steve Jobs, by Walter Isaacson (Simon and Schuster, ISBN-10: [1501127624](#))

A balanced and definitive biography of the co-founder and former CEO of Apple, this nonfiction text describes Jobs' life and career with depth, sophistication, and searing honesty. Jobs emerges as a brilliant but often unhinged leader, and the book's explorations of the development of Apple, Pixar, and all the gadgets therein is deeply enjoyable and interesting. A great book about business, character, and leadership.

An Untamed State by Roxane Gay (Black Cat, ISBN-10: [0802122515](#))

Gay's debut novel tells the story of a wealthy daughter being kidnapped from the driveway of her family home in Port-au-Prince. In addition to confronting the truth of economic disparity in Haiti, the novel grapples with issues of rebellion, power, race, and gender in a manner that will force you to question your own understanding of righteousness and equality. This novel is graphic in its description of events surrounding kidnap and torture. This novel could be considered with Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*.

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde (Barnes and Noble Books, ISBN-10: [1593080255](#))

Wilde challenges your relationship with art and humanity using lyrical prose and pungent cynicism. Questions of sexuality, morality and mortality rise while you follow the loose narrative of Dorian Gray and his dehumanization. This is an ambitious read that confronts the manner in which art imitates life, or vice versa.



PEDDIE SCHOOL

House of Leaves, by Mark Danielewski (Pantheon, ISBN: [0375703764](#))

House of Leaves is difficult to categorize. If one were to try, one might call it a metafictional horror romance mystery. But perhaps the plot better conveys the sense of the book: *House of Leaves* is, at its core, an academic paper written by Professor Zampano, who died shortly after writing the piece. This paper has been found by Johnny Truant, whose footnoted commentary adds as much to the book as the Zampano's writing itself. Zampano's piece (and, therefore, the book), deals with a documentary made by Will Navidson, who moves into a house that is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Oh, and also: this documentary and its subjects don't actually exist. If this bizarre synopsis intrigues you for some reason, *House of Leaves* might be the book for you.

Song of Achilles, by Madeline Miller (Ecco, ISBN: [0062060627](#))

Amazon.com blurb: "Madeline Miller's thrilling, profoundly moving, and utterly unique retelling of the legend of Achilles and the Trojan War. A tale of gods, kings, immortal fame, and the human heart, *The Song of Achilles* is a dazzling literary feat that brilliantly reimagines Homer's enduring masterwork, *The Iliad*. An action-packed adventure, an epic love story, a marvelously conceived and executed page-turner, Miller's monumental debut novel has already earned resounding acclaim from some of contemporary fiction's brightest lights—and fans of Mary Renault, Bernard Cornwell, Steven Pressfield, and Colleen McCullough's *Masters of Rome* series will delight in this unforgettable journey back to ancient Greece in the Age of Heroes."

The Power of One, by Bryce Courtenay (Ballantine Books, ISBN: [034541005X](#))

Amazon.com blurb: "In 1939, as Hitler casts his enormous, cruel shadow across the world, the seeds of apartheid take root in South Africa. There, a boy called Peekay is born. His childhood is marked by humiliation and abandonment, yet he vows to survive and conceives heroic dreams—which are nothing compared to what life actually has in store for him. He embarks on an epic journey through a land of tribal superstition and modern prejudice where he will learn the power of words, the power to transform lives, and the power of one."

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk (Ecco, ISBN: [9780060885595](#))

Amazon.com blurb: "A razor-sharp satire set in Texas during America's war in Iraq, it explores the gaping national disconnect between the war at home and the war abroad. Ben Fountain's remarkable debut novel follows the surviving members of the heroic Bravo Squad through one exhausting stop in their media-intensive 'Victory Tour' at Texas Stadium, football mecca of the Dallas Cowboys, their fans, promoters, and cheerleaders."

All The King's Men, by Robert Penn Warren (Harcourt Brace, ISBN: [0156004801](#))

Amazon.com blurb: "Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, this classic book is generally regarded as the finest novel ever written on American politics. It describes the career of Willie Stark, a back-country lawyer whose idealism is overcome by his lust for power."

Kindred, by Octavia Butler (Beacon Press, ISBN: [0807083690](#))

Amazon.com blurb: "Dana, a modern black woman, is celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday with her new husband when she is snatched abruptly from her home in California and transported to the antebellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, is drowning, and Dana has been summoned to save him. Dana is drawn back repeatedly through time to the slave quarters, and each time the stay grows longer, more arduous, and more dangerous until it is uncertain whether or not Dana's life will end, long before it has a chance to begin"