

As Complete a Picture of Some of the Books I Love as I Can Reasonably Come Up With.

By Mitch Wertlieb, VPR Morning Edition Host



Last Last Chance by Fiona Maazel.

You wouldn't think a novel about the daughter of a scientist who kills himself after the super-virus he created is stolen and unleashed on the world, bringing about the collapse of society, would be so hilarious. But it is. Honestly. First novel by a young author with a flair for deadpan wit and insight into the modern American mindset



Sunnyside by Glen David Gold.

Historical fiction about turn-of-the-20th Century America and the advent of celebrity culture. Must-read for anyone who's a fan of Charlie Chaplin.



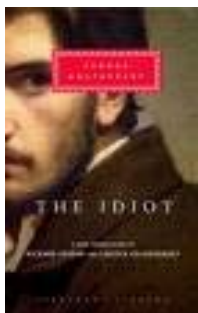
Gone Away World by Nick Harkaway.

Dizzying blend of action and science fiction with smarts and heart, and twists and turns that astonish throughout. Ancient Kung Fu orders do battle with modern-day armies, half-man, half-mutant monsters, creators of the ultimate doomsday weapon...and mimes. Serious fun.



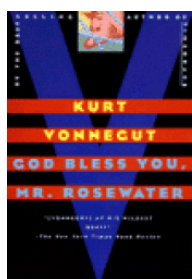
The Human Stain by Philip Roth.

Roth is one of my favorite authors and this is my favorite of his books. An emotional powerhouse treatise on love, lust, race, religion, politics, academics, and family. Contains the single greatest "twist" of surprise I've ever read, and one that occurs so subtly, a mere third of the way into the book, you have to go back and make sure you read what you thought you read. Masterpiece.



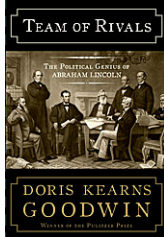
The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

I always wanted to read one of "the classics" of Russian literature. I was recuperating from surgery and had a lot of time on my hands to do nothing but read, and this book was perfect. What a sad, beautiful story about a man too kind and good to weather the cynicism of the world around him. The grace of Dostoevsky's prose is simply breathtaking.



God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater by Kurt Vonnegut.

How do you choose just ONE Vonnegut book? Another of my all-time favorite writers, this is his most compassionate book, and that's saying a lot for a writer whose heart was larger than the whole world. If I had one book to choose for everyone in the world to read, this would probably be it.



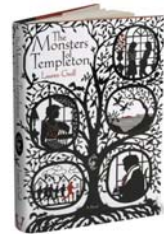
Team of Rivals by Doris Kearns Goodwin.

A history lesson that reads like a fast-paced novel. A great and true tale about the astonishing courage of America's greatest President.



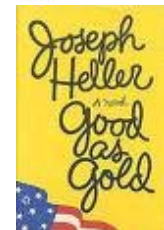
Zeitoun by Dave Eggers.

A much sadder true tale. A Syrian-born resident of New Orleans stays behind after Hurricane Katrina and floats through the streets of a ruined city, saving peoples' lives and caring for left-behind pets. His reward? Imprisonment. An incredible tale that's hard to take, but serves as a reminder that civil liberties are often most vulnerable in times of crisis.



The Monsters of Templeton by Lauren Groff.

First-time novelist creates a lovely story about the long reach of a family tree in a small town in upstate New York. Complete with a "Champ"-like lake monster and lots of gentle humor.



Good as Gold by Joseph Heller.

He'll always be remembered best for "Catch 22"--and for good reason--but this is my favorite of his books. It's almost too funny for words and holds up as great political satire even though it takes place in the 1970's. Does for politics what "Catch 22" did for war.



The Story of Edgar Sawtelle by David Wroblewski.

I had my doubts about a re-telling of "Hamlet" on a farm with a family that breeds and trains dogs, but I was quickly won over. Dog lovers especially will love this book.



World's End by T. Coraghessan Boyle.

TC Boyle is another of my favorite novelists so it was hard to pick just one of his books, but this one best exemplifies his electric prose and far-reaching imagination. A tragic tale of the power of family history reaching over four hundred years.



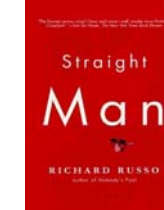
Everything Matters by Ron Currie, Jr.

Takes 2nd place in the one book I'd have everyone in the world read contest. The premise is: does anything you do matter if you are born embedded with the absolute certainty that the world will come to end on A specific date some 30 years after your birth? The journey toward "yes" is amazing.



The Brooklyn Follies by Paul Auster.

His most accessible book. Funny, warm, and as with all his novels--entertainingly philosophical.



Straight Man by Richard Russo.

Again, hard to choose one, but I went with his funniest. Great satire of academic foolishness at a small liberal arts college.