

Historical Fiction Independent Reading List

January/February 2013 ~ Humanities 6

* indicates book is available in the PJA library

Descriptions are a compilation of information taken from Amazon.com and personal recommendations.

ADVENTURE

Durbin, William. *Broken Blade*

In 1800, 13-year-old Pierre La Page never imagined he'd be leaving Montreal to paddle 2,400 miles. It was something older men, like his father, did. But when Pierre's father has an accident, Pierre quits school to become a voyageur for the North West Company, so his family can survive the winter.

Wolf, Allan. *New Found Land

This amazing work presents in powerful, lyrical language, the adventure of Lewis and Clark through the eyes of its participants. The book's unique narrative will resonate with the reader long after the book is closed.

AMERICAN HISTORY (pre-20th century)

Anderson, Laurie Halse *Chains

In the spring of 1776, Isabel, a teenage slave, and her sister, Ruth, are sold to ruthless, wealthy loyalists in New York. She has hopes of finding a way to freedom by becoming a spy, but soon realizes that it is difficult to trust anyone. The novel shed light on issues surrounding the Revolutionary War and the fight for the nation's freedom even though 20 percent of its people were in chains.

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Fever 1793

Based on an actual epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia that wiped out 5,000 people--or 10 percent of the city's population--in three months, this story is 16-year-old Mattie Cook whose comfortable and interesting life is shattered by the epidemic.

Fletcher, Susan. *Walk Across the Sea

Eliza Jane McCully lives with her parents in a lighthouse off the coast of California. When a young Chinese boy named Wah Chung saves Eliza and her pet goat from being swept into the sea, the community's strong anti-Chinese attitudes are questioned. This eye-opening novel is set during the late 1880s when Chinese immigrant workers were expelled from Crescent City, California.

Holm, Jennifer. *Our Only May Amelia

It isn't easy being a pioneer in the state of Washington in 1899, but it's particularly hard when you are the only girl ever born in the new settlement. Inspired by the diaries of her great-aunt, the real May Amelia, novelist Jennifer Holm gives us a beautifully crafted tale of one young girl whose unique spirit captures the American pioneer experience.

Lester, Julius. *Days of Tears*

On March 2 and 3, 1859, the largest auction of slaves in American history took place in Savannah, Georgia. More than 400 slaves were sold. Using the multiple voices of enslaved Africans *and* their owners, Julius Lester has taken a little-known, all-true event in American history and transformed it into a heartbreaking and powerfully dramatic epic on slavery.

Patterson, Katherine. *Lyddie*

In 1843, three years after her father abandons his failing Vermont farm, 10-year-old Lyddie and her younger brother Charles are hired out as servants. Patterson clearly depicts the effects of poverty during the 19th century, focusing on the plight of factory workers enslaved by their dismal jobs.

Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*

Forced to leave her sunny Caribbean home for the bleak Connecticut Colony, Kit Tyler is Unprepared for the religious intolerance and rigidity of the Puritan community. When a deathly sickness strikes the village, first Kit's friend Hannah and then Kit herself are accused of being witches.

AMERICAN HISTORY (pre-20th century) continued...

Wright, Barbara. *Crow

The summer of 1898 is filled with ups and downs for 11-year-old Moses. His grandmother is sharing her stories of slavery and his father and his friends are finally getting the respect and positions of power they've earned in their North Carolina community. But not everyone is happy with the political changes at play as a violent plot against the government brew.

AMERICAN HISTORY (early 20th century)

Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust

This gripping story, written in sparse first-person, free-verse poems, is the compelling tale of Billie Jo's struggle to survive during the dust bowl years of the Depression. The 1998 Newbery Medal winner.

Hopkinson, Deborah. *Into the Firestorm

Nicholas Dray, almost twelve, is on his own for the first time, moving to that Queen of Cities: San Francisco. He eventually finds comfort in his friendship with store owner Pat Patterson. But the year is 1906, the month is April, and early one morning the walls begin to shake in this suspenseful and carefully researched novel of the Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.

Hudson, Jan. *Sweetgrass*

In is the 1830's and Sweetgrass, a 15-year-old Blackfoot Indian girl, longs to be married like the other girls her age, but her father feels she is too young. But over a difficult year for their tribe, which include natural disasters, encounters with white settlers, fights with other tribes, and a smallpox epidemic, she proves her courage, intelligence, and maturity.

Peck, Richard. *A Year Down Yonder

In this Newbery Honor book, Chicago-bred Mary Alice has been sentenced to a year-long stay in rural Illinois with her irrepressible, rough and gruff grandmother during The Great Depression. Soon, however, she becomes Grandma's partner in crime, helping to carry out madcap schemes to benefit friends and avenge enemies.

Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

This Newbery Medal-winning novel tells the story of one African American family, fighting to stay together and strong in the face of brutal racist attacks, illness, poverty, and betrayal in the Deep South of the 1930s.

AMERICAN HISTORY (post World War II)

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham

This alternately hilarious and deeply moving novel, winner of the Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Honor, blends the fictional account of an African American family with the factual events of the violent summer of 1963.

Holm, Jennifer. *Penny from Heaven

Inspired by the author's own Italian American family, this novel is a shining story about the everyday and the extraordinary, about a time in America's history (specifically 1953), not all that long ago, when being Italian meant that you were the enemy.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *One Crazy Summer

Set during a pivotal moment in African American history and one of the most tumultuous years in recent American history, this novel is the heartbreaking, funny tale of three girls who travel to Oakland, California, in 1968 in search of the mother who abandoned them.

BRITISH HISTORY

Branford, Henrietta. *Fire, Bed, and Bone*

Even readers with little knowledge of (or interest in) British feudal systems and peasant revolts may find themselves engrossed in this unique fictional tale set in 1381 and told from a hunting dog's point of view.

BRITISH HISTORY continued...

Cheaney, J.B. *The Playmaker*

The year is 1597. Elizabeth is queen and Shakespeare's actors are packing in London's Globe Theater. One 14-year-old boy should arouse no one's interest, but within a week of his arrival, Richard Malory is robbed, beaten, and threatened at knifepoint. Someone wants him to leave London. There's only one place he'll be safe: as an actor on the stage.

Cole, Sheila. *The Dragon in the Cliff: A Novel Based on the Life of Mary Anning*

What Mary Anning found in the coastal cliffs of Britain in 1811, when she was 13, was the first complete fossil of an ichthyosaur, a marine dinosaur. She hunted and sold fossils to save her family from poverty after her father died when she was 11 years old. Cole does a wonderful job of describing the English town in which she lived and Anning's struggles to overcome the biases of the times.

Cushman, Karen. *Catherine Called Birdy

This superb historical fiction provides an insider's look at the life of Birdy, 14, the daughter of a minor English nobleman. The year is 1290 and the vehicle for storytelling is the girl's witty, irreverent diary.

Meyer, Carolyn. *Mary, Bloody Mary

This riveting slice of fictional royal history paints a sympathetic portrait of Henry VIII's oldest daughter, before she earns the title Bloody Mary. The novel begins in 1527 when 11-year-old Mary learns that she is expected to marry the middle-aged king of France.

Sutcliff, Rosemary. *The Witch's Brat*

The knowledge of herbs and healing that once prompted the villagers to stone him out of town eventually becomes the salvation for a crippled boy in twelfth-century England.

IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Hesse, Karen. *Letters from Rifka

Rifka knows nothing about America when she flees from Russia with her family in 1919. But she dreams she will at last be safe from the Russian soldiers and their harsh treatment of the Jews in the new country. Hesse's vivacious tale colorfully and convincingly refreshes the immigrant experience.

Hobbs, Will. *Crossing the Wire*

When falling crop prices threaten his family with starvation, fifteen-year-old Victor Flores heads north in a desperate attempt to "cross the wire" from Mexico into the United States so he can find work and send money home. Victor's journey is fraught with danger, as he faces freezing cold, scorching heat, hunger, and dead ends.

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising

This compelling story of immigration and assimilation is set against the labor-organizing era of the Great Depression when a sudden tragedy forces Esperanza and her mother to flee to California and to settle in a camp for Mexican farm workers.

Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings

Offering insights into the lives of Chinese-Americans in early 20th century California, the story begins as eight-year-old Moon Shadow journeys across the Pacific to join his father at the family-owned laundry in San Francisco. The two have never met, but together they pursue a wonderful dream while enduring prejudice poverty, and the destruction caused by the Great Earthquake.

WORLD EXPERIENCES OF THE DISTANT PAST

Eboch, Chris. *The Well of Sacrifice*

Set in a large Mayan city during the ninth century, this story follows Eveningstar Macaw, the youngest daughter of a well-to-do merchant family. The adventures of this tenacious twelve-year-old heroine are suspenseful and entertaining. Readers are provided with an exciting story and a realistic feel for everyday life in and ceremonial practices of the ancient Mayan culture.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Nory Ryan's Song

Life is hard for poor Irish potato farmers, but 12-year-old Nory Ryan and her family have always scraped by... until one morning. The tragic period of the Great Hunger of 1845 to 1852 in Ireland is revealed as heroic Nory scrambles to find food for her family.

WORLD EXPERIENCES OF THE DISTANT PAST continued...

Leeds, Constance. *The Unfortunate Son

Luc's life on land is treacherous, but he is happy at sea until he is taken captive by a band of merciless pirates and sold into slavery. Moving from 1485 to 1500, from France to Africa, this historical fiction will trace Luc's journey from humble beginnings to a noble future.

Haugaard, Erik. *The Boy and the Samurai*

In feudal Japan (1185-1603), orphan Saru lives by his wits in a city still threatened by the conflict of rival warlords. Offering a vivid look at an unusual place and time, Haugaard has created a character that will linger in the reader's memory.

McGraw, Eloise Jarvis. *Mara, Daughter of the Nile*

Mara is a proud and beautiful slave girl in ancient Egypt who yearns for freedom. In order to gain it, she finds herself playing the dangerous role of double spy for two arch enemies - each of whom supports a contender for the throne.

Park, Linda Sue. *A Single Shard

Park's Newbery Award-winning story is about Tree-ear, an orphan who finds his future through his interest in rich pottery tradition of 12th century Korea. The author molds a moving tribute to perseverance and creativity as readers follow Tree-ear's transformation from apprentice to artist, including his long, solitary journey on foot to present his teacher's work to the royal court.

Stolz, Joelle (translated by Catherine Temerson). *Shadows of Ghadames*

In the Libyan city of Ghadames at the end of the nineteenth century, Malika is dreading her twelfth birthday. That is the time when, according to her family's Berber customs, she will be close to marriageable age and confined to the world of women. Then one night a stranger enters her home . . . someone who disrupts the traditional order of things.

Whitesel, Cheryl Aylard. *Blue Fingers: A Ninja's Tale*

An adventure set in 16th-century Japan. Twelve-year-old Koji's life is transformed when he is captured in a forest and forced to attend a mysterious ninja training camp high in the mountains near his home. At first he mistrusts and is mistrusted, but soon he becomes a fully trained "blade of grass" and takes part in dangerous raids against a corrupt lord.

WORLD EXPERIENCES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Banks, Lynne Reid. *One More River

Lesley lives in Canada and thinks life is just great. But then her father makes a fateful decision, the whole family is going to emigrate to Israel and lead a more fully Jewish life. A large part of the novel--set during the days before, during, and after the 1967 Six-Day War--chronicles Lesley's gradual, difficult adjustment, and her growing friendship from afar with Mustapha, an Arab boy.

Park, Linda Sue. *A Long Walk to Water

Two stories are told in alternating sections, one about a girl in Sudan in 2008 and one about a boy in Sudan in 1985. The girl, Nya, is fetching water from a pond that is two hours' walk from her home: she makes two trips to the pond every day. The boy, Salva, becomes one of the "lost boys" of Sudan, refugees who cover the African continent on foot as they search for their families and for a safe place to stay.

Park, Linda Sue. *When My Name was Keiko*

A brother and sister alternate as narrators in this well-constructed novel, which takes place from 1940-1945 in Japanese-occupied Korea. They relate their family's troubles under the strict fascist regime as the Kim family is stripped of their cultural symbols, only permitted to learn Japanese history and language, and forced to convert their names to Japanese.

Whelen, Gloria. *Angel on the Square

A young girl joins Russian Tsar Nikolai II and his family when her mother becomes one of the empress's ladies-in-waiting. Katya Ivanova, as companion to the Romanov children, has an insider's view of the crumbling of tsarist Russia from 1913 to 1918. Young readers couldn't ask for a better introduction to the Russian Revolution, a terrifying, earthshaking epoch in history.

Whelen, Gloria. *Listening for Lions*

This richly historical coming-of-age adventure takes place in 1918 when young Rachel Sheridan is made to leave her beloved Africa for England, where she must pose as the deceased daughter of a nefarious couple in an effort to gain them an enormous inheritance. Her irrepressible spirit and extraordinary wit turn her from victim to heroine in this surprising and empowering tale.

WORLD WAR II

Bruchac, Joseph. *Code Talker

After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay and other Navajo men are recruited by the Marines to become Code Talkers, sending messages during World War II in their native tongue.

Elliott, L.M. *Under a War Torn Sky*

It's packed with action, intrigue, and suspense, but this novel celebrates acts of kindness and heroism without glorifying war. American Henry Forester is a young flier with the RAF during World War II. On his thirteenth bombing mission, is shot down on his thirteenth bombing mission, having no idea where he has landed. His journey back through Nazi-occupied Europe and his involvement with members of the French resistance are depicted with chilling realism.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Lily's Crossing

Lily's blissful summer of 1944 comes to a rude halt when her father is drafted into the military. Left alone with her grandmother in the family's summer home in Rockaway, New York, Lily befriends Albert, a shy Hungarian refugee her own age. However, Lily and Albert have both told lies, and Lily has told a lie that may cost Albert his life in this novel set in America while WW II rages abroad.

Hughes, Dean. *Missing in Action*

Jay Thacker is used to being called names because his dad is half Navajo. But things are different after he and his mother move to a small town in Utah to stay with his grandparents during World War II. Jay makes friends and earns money, but he encounters a problem in Ken, a fellow worker who's from the nearby Japanese internment camp.

Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower*

Twelve-year-old Sumiko feels her life has been made up of two parts: before Pearl Harbor and after it. The good part and the bad part. When suspicions about Japanese Americans grow, Sumiko and her family find themselves being shipped to an internment camp in one of the hottest deserts in the United States. Sumiko soon discovers that the camp is on an Indian reservation and that the Japanese are as unwanted there as they'd been at home.

Klages, Ellen. *The Green Glass Sea*

Two girls spend a year in Los Alamos as their parents work on the secret gadget that will end World War II. After the atomic bomb test succeeds, ethical concerns intensify. The characters are exceptionally well drawn, and the compelling, unusual setting makes for a great read and a fascinating historical lesson.

Salisbury, Graham. *Under the Blood Red Sun

Tomi was born in Hawaii. His grandfather and parents were born in Japan, and came to America to escape poverty. World War II seems far away from Tomi and his friends. But then Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese, and the United States declares war on Japan. Japanese men are rounded up, and Tomi's father and grandfather are arrested.

Smith, Sherri. *Flygirl*

Readers first meet 18-year-old Ida Mae Jones, a Louisiana girl who longs to be a pilot, in December 1941. But as a young black woman, she knows the sky is off limits to her, until America enters World War II, and the Army forms the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots). Smith brings a gripping perspective to bear upon this lesser-known piece of America's past.

MATURE/ADVANCED READING

Gratz, Alan. *Samurai Shortstop*

Growing up in Tokyo in the 1890s, after the emperor outlawed the samurai tradition of his ancestors, fifteen year old Toyo was not trained in the old disciplines. He must find his own path between the old ways and the new ones, which are symbolized for Toyo by the sport he loves: baseball.

Moran, Katie, *Bloodlines*

In the wilds of seventh century Britain, Essa is abandoned by his father in a village trapped between two feuding kingdoms. The once-nomadic boy grows rooted in the life of the Wolf Folk. When King Penda of Mercia threatens to attack, Essa is thrust into the violent and cunning world of the tribal rulers.

MATURE/ADVANCED READING continued...

Morpurgo, Michael. *Private Peaceful

In this compelling World War I story, British teen Thomas lies about his age in order to follow his beloved older brother, Charlie, to fight in France. Now, nearly two years later, as Thomas sits waiting in the dark for the horror he knows will come at dawn, he remembers all that has happened in his short life.

Orlev, Uri (translated by Hillel Halkin). *The Lady with the Hat*

Yulek, 17, is alone in the world. His family was killed in the concentration camps during World War II, and now, two years later, he makes a trip from a Zionist training camp in Italy to his former home in Poland before embarking on a journey that will ultimately end in Palestine.

Peet, Mal. *Tamar: A Novel of Espionage, Passion, and Betrayal*

When her grandfather dies, Tamar inherits a box containing a series of clues and coded messages. Out of the past, another Tamar emerges, a man involved in the terrifying world of resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied Holland half a century before.

Sepetys, Ruta. *Between Shades of Gray*

Fifteen-year-old Lina is a Lithuanian girl living an ordinary life--until Soviet officers invade her home and tear her family apart. Separated from her father and forced onto a crowded train, Lina, her mother, and her young brother make their way to a Siberian work camp, where they are forced to fight for their lives.

Soto, Gary. *Jesse*

Set in Fresno, California, in the late 1960s, this coming-of-age tale is told from a Mexican American's point of view. Jesse, seventeen, is full of self-doubt amid the increasing tensions caused by the war in Vietnam and pressure from within his circle of friends to join the protests of Cesar Chavez who tirelessly advocated for the rights of farm workers.