

**INDEPENDENT READING LIST
ARDSLEY HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
2009 - 2010**

Your independent reading selections must be made from the list below, unless you receive approval directly from your teacher. Feel free to select other titles by the authors listed.

For the list below, the accompanying numbers indicate the relative complexity of language and maturity of content.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3
Most accessible Most Challenging

Historical Account/Memoir/Biography/Autobiography

Ambrose, Stephen. Band of Brothers and other titles (3): A war-time memoir of Major Dick Winters, who assumed command of Easy Company, known as the "Band of Brothers," when they parachuted into France on D-Day, and describes their trek across Europe, the Battle of the Bulge, liberation of concentration camps, and capture of Hitler's alpine retreat.

Angelou, Maya. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1): Famous poet's autobiography of her harrowing childhood as an African-American in the south.

Anonymous. Go Ask Alice (1): Based on the diary of a fifteen-year-old drug user chronicling her struggle to escape the pull of the drug world.

Armstrong, Jennifer. Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance (2): The harrowing survival story of English explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton and his crew as they attempt to cross the frozen Antarctic continent from one side to the other. Remarkably, every crew member survived this incredible journey.

Beah, Ishmael. A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (2): Beah, now twenty-five years old, tells a riveting story: how at the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army and Beah found that he was capable of truly terrible acts.

Bradley, James. Flags of our Fathers (2): Presents an account of the Marines who came together during the battle of Iwo Jima to raise the American flag in a moment that has been immortalized in one of the most famous photographs of World War II.

Brown, Tom. Grandfather (1): Part of a series of memoirs by a man whose spiritual guide, a Native American, teaches him survival techniques and a lasting respect for nature.

Bryson, Bill. A Walk in the Woods (1): The writer's humorous personal account of his attempt to walk the Appalachian Trail.

Burroughs, Augusten. Running with Scissors (3): The author chronicles his life from age twelve to sixteen, living in the bizarre home of his mother's psychiatrist, where he was sexually abused by the doctor's thirty-three-year-old adopted son.

Dry (3): When he was 13, Augusten Burroughs' mother gave him away to her lunatic psychiatrist, who adopted him. Now he has established a life for himself as a high-paid advertising hotshot in Manhattan where he hides from his haunting past.

Chang, Jung. Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China (3): Memoir of three Chinese women, Jung Chang, her mother, and her grandmother in twentieth-century China.

Dylan, Bob. Chronicles Volume 1 (3): Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan tells his life story, reflecting on his Minnesota roots, his time in Greenwich Village, his family life, world events, and the ups and downs in his career.

Eggers, David. A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (3): In this comic memoir, whose title captures its content, an orphaned 21-year-old raises his 8-year-old brother in 1990s San Francisco.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. Nickel and Dimed: On (not) Getting by in America (2): Ehrenreich relates her experiences from 1998 to 2000, during which time she joined the ranks of the working poor to see for herself how America's unskilled workers are able to survive on only \$6 or \$7 an hour.

Esmeralda, Santiago. When I was Puerto Rican (2): Memoirs of the author's childhood and youth in Puerto Rico and New York City.

Grogan, John. Marley & Me: Life and Love With the World's Worst Dog (2): Follows the life story of an exuberant Labrador retriever who gets into perpetual trouble and experiences a range of inspiring adventures, from shutting down an entire beach to guarding a seventeen-year-old neighbor after a stabbing attack.

Gruwell, Erin. Freedom Writers Diaries (2): Tells the story of how young English teacher Erin Gruwell confronted the problem of racial and ethnic intolerance in her classroom, and features excerpts from the diaries of her students, now known as The Freedom Writers.

Hersey, John. Hiroshima (2): The story of six people who lived through the explosion of the atomic bomb in 1945 in Hiroshima.

Hickam, Homer. Rocket Boys (2): Homer Hickam, a NASA engineer, recounts his childhood in Coalwood, a West Virginia mining town, and discusses his dreams of launching rockets into outer space, and how he made those dreams come true.

Hillenbrand, Laura. Seabiscuit (2): Tells the story of how owner Charles Howard, trainer Tom Smith, and jockey Red Pollard turned Seabiscuit into a horse racing legend, and presents nearly 150 rare photos.

Horwitz, Tony. Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War (2): Why would a grown man spend a frosty Saturday night huddling together with his mates on a 140-year-old battlefield? Why would anyone want to pretend he is a civil war soldier? The author takes a road trip south to investigate the lingering presence of the "war between the states." Meet some interesting, colorful characters as the journey evolves.

Idle, Eric. The Greedy Bastard Tour (2): This hilarious memoir by ex-Python Idle covers his 2004 US tour—for fans only.

Isaacson, Walter. Einsten (2): A biography based on newly released personal letters.

Kerouac, Jack. On the Road (3): Presents a thinly fictionalized autobiography of Jack Kerouac's cross-country

adventure across North America on a quest for self-knowledge as experienced by his alter-ego, Sal Paradise and Sal's friend Dean Moriarty.

Klein, Robert. The Amorous Busboy of Decatur Avenue (3): In this memoir, the comedian reminisces about growing up in the Bronx, entering college upstate and beginning in show business.

Krakauer, Jon. Under the Banner of Heaven (2): When a murder occurs in a Mormon town, the author is compelled to explore the culture of the geographical area and background of Mormonism.

Into Thin Air (1): A riveting first-hand account of a catastrophic expedition up Mount Everest that occurred in 1996. It is a story of the ill-fated adventure and an analysis of the factors leading up to its tragic end.

Into the Wild (2): The story of what happened to a young man who disappeared into the Alaskan interior; his body was found 4 months later.

Larson, Erik. The Devil in the White City (3): Not long after Jack the Ripper haunted the ill-lit streets of 1888 London, H.H. Holmes dispatched somewhere between 27 and 200 people, mostly single young women, in the churning new metropolis of Chicago. Larson's breathtaking new history is a novelistic yet wholly factual account of the fair and the mass murderer who lurked within it.

Luttrell, Marcus. Lone Survivor (3). The only survivor of a Navy Seals operation in Afghanistan describes the battle, his comrades and his escape.

Massie, Robert K. Nicholas and Alexandra (3): The mysterious true story of Rasputin's alleged hold over the doomed Romanov royal family.

Min, Anchee Becoming Madame Mao (3): This is the story of a young girl coming of age in Mao's China. She recounts her story as a member of the communist party and as a political prisoner on a labor farm.

McBride, James. The Color of Water (2): James McBride gives us a wonderful memoir of himself and his mother, a Polish immigrant and Orthodox Jew, a daughter of a tyrannical rabbi father and timid, crippled mother, who dared to ask for something more of this life. His mother crossed an uncrossable barrier by marrying not one, but two, black men, converting to Christianity along the way and isolating herself from her Jewish family, whites, and, to a lesser extent, blacks.

McCourt, Frank. Angela's Ashes (2): Born in Brooklyn in 1930 to recent Irish immigrants Malachy and Angela McCourt, Frank grew up in Limerick after his parents returned to Ireland because of poor prospects in America. This is the memoir of Frank who has a difficult childhood (his father is a nearly unemployable alcoholic) yet is able to make us laugh at times.

Moore, Christopher. Lamb (Dude, Where's My Country?) (3): A coming-of-age story of "the highest order." Lamb is a funny, lighthearted satire of the life of Christ--from his childhood days up to his crucifixion.

Nazario, Sonia. Enrique's Journey (2): Originally written as a newspaper series for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Enrique's Journey* tells the true story of a Honduran boy's journey to find his mother in America.

Nikkah, John. Our Boys Speak: Adolescent Boys Write About Their Inner Lives (1): Presents the writings of twentieth-century American boys age twelve through eighteen, including essays, poems, diary entries, and stories on topics such as friendship, family struggles, first love, violence, sexuality, and other concerns.

- Paretsky, Sara. Bleeding Kansas (2):** The story of the Schapens and the Grelliers, two farm families whose histories have been entwined since the 1850s, when their ancestors settled the valley as antislavery emigrants.
- Pelzer, David. A Child Called "It" (2):** David Pelzer, victim of one of the worst child abuse cases in the history of California, tells the story of how he survived his mother's brutality and triumphed over his past.
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. In the Heart of the Sea, the Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex (2):** A chilling tale of the Essex, a whaling ship that was sunk in the middle of the Pacific by an 80-foot sperm whale in 1820. Moby Dick was based on certain key elements of this tragedy!
- Sedaris, David. Naked, Me Talk Pretty One Day (2):** David Sedaris describes the struggles he has had in life due to his voice problems, discussing how his voice has affected his personal relationships, his career, and his family life.
- Schaap, Jeremy. Cinderella Man: Braddock James and Max Bear and the greatest upset in boxer history (2):** Contains a look at the life and career of Depression era heavyweight boxer James Braddock, describing his experiences as a fighter and a longshoreman, and includes a chronicle of his auspicious bout with champion boxer Max Baer.
- Sheff, David. Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction (2):** Sheff chronicles his son's downward spiral into addiction and the impact on him and his family.
- Sheff, Nic. Tweak (2):** Nic Sheff's powerful memoir of drug abuse and alcohol addiction is written in a brutally honest style that makes it difficult for anyone else to narrate. Happily, narrator Paul Michael Garcia delivers a strong and commanding reading that perfectly expresses the rawness of Sheff's most personal recollections.
- Sijie, Dai. Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress (3):** Two boys, moved to the country for "re-education" as part of Mao's Cultural Revolution, find little to amuse them, but things change when they discover a stash of Western classics in Chinese translation and use the stories of Balzac to capture the attention of the beautiful daughter of the local tailor.
- Spitz, Bob. The Beatles, the Biography (3):** An acclaimed recent biography of the influential and wildly popular band.
- Suskind, Ron. A Hope In The Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City o the Ivy League (2):** Follows gifted African-American student Cedric Jennings from his crime-infested high school in Washington D.C. to his junior year at Brown University, discussing the problems he encountered along the road out of the ghetto.
- Walls, Jeanette. The Glass Castle (1):** Walls chronicles her upbringing at the hands of eccentric, nomadic parents—Rose Mary, her frustrated-artist mother, and Rex, her brilliant, alcoholic father. As Rose Mary and Rex, motivated by whims and paranoia, uprooted their kids time and again, the youngsters (Walls, her brother and two sisters) were left largely to their own devices.
- Winchester, Simon. The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of The Oxford English Dictionary (3):** The compilation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 70 years in the making, was an intellectually heroic feat with a twist worthy of the greatest mystery fiction: one of its most valuable contributors was a criminally insane American physician, locked up in an English asylum for murder.
- Wolfe, Tobias. This Boy's Life (2):** Teenaged Wolff moves with his divorced mother from Florida to Utah to

Washington State to escape her violent boyfriend. Somber though this tale of family strife is, it is also darkly funny and so artistically satisfying that most readers come away exhilarated rather than depressed.

Wright, Richard. Black Boy (2): Narrative of one young man's journey from innocence to experience in the Jim Crow South.