

Just Voices Book List

Young Adult

Soldier's Heart by Gary Paulsen—This book is part fiction, part historical fact. Though not every event happened just as told, the basic events of the Civil War are recounted as they occurred, and the primary character was a real person. He lied about his age in order to enlist in the first Minnesota Volunteers at the age of 15, fought most of the war, and survived it. He died shortly after this experience, at the age of 23, from stress. He had what has come to known as “soldier’s heart.”

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry – This books is set in 1943 Copenhagen and the Jews of Denmark are being “relocated,” so Annemarie Johansen’s best friend, Ellen, moves in with the Johansens and pretends to be part of the family. When Annemarie is asked to go on a dangerous mission, she must find the courage to save her friend’s life.

The Wall by John Hersey—This is a novel of Jewish life and revolt in the murderous Warsaw Ghetto during World War II.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor - 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.

Julia Singing Bear by Jewel Grutman—this fictional journal was created in consultation with Lakota Sioux tribal member and Lakota Studies professor Arthur Amoitte. Julia’s journal tells of her early life with her people, notably her grandparents, and her later efforts (after her parents are killed) to bridge the gap between white and Native American cultures at the Carlisle Indian School. Gorgeous, authentic illustrations.

Once on This River by Sharon Wyeth—Eleven-year-old Monday de Groot knows little of the horrors of slavery when she embarks on a journey with her mother from Madagascar to New York in the mid 1700’s. Monday’s mother, however, has numerous secrets to be uncovered, including an intimate knowledge of slavery and passionate desire to free her own enslaved brother. Her journey is a quest. It is both dangerous and fascination. An excellent read.

Only Earth and Sky Last Forever by Nathaniel Benchley—Dark Elk, a Cheyenne boy who has been adopted by the Sioux, longs for a chance to prove himself a warrior and an opportunity to win the love of Lashuka by outwitting his rival. Benchley has defined the nobility of the Indian warrior who will die for his people. This moving narrative presents western history from the Indian point of view.

When the Legends Die by Hal Borland—a compelling story of a young Native American boy who is “Americanized” by the government.

I Always Wanted to be Somebody by Althea Gibson—As she paved the way for other black athletes in the 1950s and 1960s, tennis champion Althea Gibson made the long journey from the streets of Harlem to the center court at Wimbledon, England.

Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane—A strikingly telling account of the author’s childhood growing up in South Africa under Apartheid.

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki and James Houston - Evacuees begin to arrive at Manzanar, the first camp in Owens Valley on March 25, 1942, thus separating these Japanese-Americans from their homes and communities for the duration of WWII.

Indian School: Teaching the White Man’s Way by Michael Cooper—this young adult novel presents a concise history of 84 Sioux boys and girls who were uprooted from their culture and transported, body and soul, to the Carlisle Indian School and the world of the whites.

Sold by Patricia McCormick – McCormick, a journalist by training, uses poetic vignettes in the voice of Lakshmi, a 13-year-old girl living in rural Nepal, who is sold to a brothel in Calcutta by her stepfather. Life is grueling there for women young and old. “A girl is like a goat,” a local saying goes. “Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it’s time to make a stew.”

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson - "Speak up for yourself - we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows that this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless, outcast, because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. As time passes, she becomes increasingly isolated and practically stops talking altogether. Only her art class offers any solace, and it is through her work on an art project that she is finally able to face what really happened at that terrible party: she was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her. Her healing process has just begun when she has another violent encounter with him. But this time Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication. In this powerful novel, an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself.

I know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou – A phenomenal #1 bestseller that has appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list for nearly three years, this memoir traces Maya Angelou's childhood in a small, rural community during the 1930s. Filled with images and recollections that point to the dignity and courage of black men and women, Angelou paints a sometimes disquieting, but always affecting picture of the people--and the times--that touched her life.

After the War by Alice Adams - Reviving the cast of her acclaimed novel *A Southern Exposure*, Alice Adams brings the American South to vivid life through the residents of the small town of Pinehill. When they moved here from the North, Cynthia and Harry Baird sought a simpler place

in which to raise their daughter, Abigail. Now, with World War II raging, Harry off fighting it, and Cynthia's string of affairs showing no signs of abatement, Abigail is bound for college where she'll have to face the complexities of life head-on. And as Cynthia grows aware of the bigotry and anti-Semitism around her, Pinehill suddenly seems less the idyllic Southern town and more a reflection of the growing pains of the nation at large.

Nothing but the Truth by Avi – Harrison, NH -- Ninth-grade student Philip Malloy was suspended from school for singing along to *The Star-Spangled Banner* in his homeroom, causing what his teacher, Margaret Narwin, called "a disturbance." But was he standing up for his patriotic ideals, only to be squelched by the school system? Was Ms. Narwin simply trying to be a good teacher? Or could it all be just a misunderstanding gone bad -- very bad? What is the truth here? Can it ever be known? Heroism, hoax, or mistake, what happened at Harrison High changes everything for everyone in ways no one -- least of all Philip -- could have ever predicted.

Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence by Marion Dane Bauer – about teen suicide Each of these stories is original, each is by a noted author for young adults, and each honestly portrays its subject and theme--growing up gay or lesbian, or with gay or lesbian parents or friends.

Blubber by Judy Blume – *Blubber is a good name for her*, the note from Wendy says about Linda. Jill crumples it up and leaves it on the corner of her desk. She doesn't want to think about Linda or her dumb report on the whale just now. Jill wants to think about Halloween. But Robby grabs the note, and before Linda stops talking it has gone halfway around the room. That's where it all starts. There's something about Linda that makes a lot of kids in her fifth-grade class want to see how far they can go -- but nobody, least of all Jill, expects the fun to end where it does. A *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year

Tiger Eyes by Judy Blume – Davey has never felt so alone in her life. Her father is dead—shot in a holdup—and now her mother is moving the family to New Mexico to try to recover. Climbing in Lost Alamos Canyons, Davey meets mysterious Wolf, who seems to understand the rage and fear she feels. Slowly, with Wolf's help, Davey realizes that she must get on with her life. But when will she be ready to leave the past behind? Will she ever stop hurting?

Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Burns - If the preacher's wife's petticoat showed, the ladies would make the talk last a week. But on July 5, 1906, things took a scandalous turn. That was the day E. Rucker Blakeslee, proprietor of the general store and barely three weeks a widower, eloped with Miss Love Simpson -- a woman half his age and, worse yet, a Yankee! On that day, fourteen-year-old Will Tweedy's adventures began and an unimpeachably pious, deliciously irreverent town came to life. Not since *To Kill a Mockingbird* has a novel so deftly captured the subtle crosscurrents of small-town Southern life. Olive Ann Burns classic bestseller brings to vivid life an era that will never exist again, exploring timeless issues of love, death, coming of age, and the ties that bind families and generations.

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros – Told in a series of vignettes stunning for their eloquence, **The House on Mango Street** is Sandra Cisneros's greatly admired novel of a young girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago. Acclaimed by critics, beloved by children, their

parents and grandparents, taught everywhere from inner-city grade schools to universities across the country, and translated all over the world, it has entered the canon of coming-of-age classics. Sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous, **The House on Mango Street** tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, whose neighborhood is one of harsh realities and harsh beauty. Esperanza doesn't want to belong--not to her rundown neighborhood, and not to the low expectations the world has for her. Esperanza's story is that of a young girl coming into her power, and inventing for herself what she will become.

Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech – As Sal entertains her grandparents with Phoebe's outrageous story, her own story begins to unfold -- the story of a thirteen-year-old girl whose only wish is to be reunited with her missing mother. In her own award-winning style, Sharon Creech intricately weaves together two tales, one funny, one bittersweet, to create a heartwarming, compelling, and utterly moving story of love, loss, and the complexity of human emotion.

Children of the River by Linda Crew - Sundara fled Cambodia with her aunt's family to escape the Khmer Rouge army when she was thirteen, leaving behind her parents, her brother and sister, and the boy she had loved since she was a child. Now, four years later, she struggles to fit in at her Oregon high school and to be "a good Cambodian girl" at home. A good Cambodian girl never dates; she waits for her family to arrange her marriage to a Cambodian boy. Yet Sundara and Jonathan, an extraordinary American boy, are powerfully drawn to each other. Haunted by grief for her lost family and for the life left behind, Sundara longs to be with him. At the same time she wonders, are her hopes for happiness and new life in America disloyal to her past and her people?

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes by Chris Crutcher - Sarah Byrnes and Eric have been friends for years. When they were children, his fat and her terrible scars made them both outcasts. Later, although swimming slimmed Eric, she stayed his closest friend. Now Sarah Byrnes -- the smartest, toughest person Eric has ever known -- sits silent in a hospital. Eric must uncover the terrible secret she's hiding, before its dark currents pull them both under.

Morning Girl by Michael Dorris - Simple story, beautifully told, appeals to kids who like thoughtful character-based stories. This lyrical look at pre-Columbian Taino culture stresses the bonds of family, and behavioral changes involved in growing up, and raises the issue of culture differences in a powerful way.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café by Jannie Flagg - Folksy and fresh, endearing and affecting, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* is the now-classic novel of two women in the 1980s; of gray-headed Mrs. Threadgoode telling her life story to Evelyn, who is in the sad slump of middle age. The tale she tells is also of two women--of the irrepressibly daredevilish tomboy Idgie and her friend Ruth--who back in the thirties ran a little place in Whistle Stop, Alabama, a Southern kind of Cafe Wobegon offering good barbecue and good coffee and all kinds of love and laughter, even an occasional murder. And as the past unfolds, the present--for Evelyn and for us--will never be quite the same again...

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman - A vacant lot, rat-infested and filled with garbage, looked like no

place for a garden. Especially to a neighborhood of strangers where no one seems to care. Until one day, a young girl clears a small space and digs into the hard-packed soil to plant her precious bean seeds. Suddenly, the soil holds promise: To Curtis, who believes he can win back Lateesha's heart with a harvest of tomatoes; to Virgil's dad, who seems a fortune to be made from growing lettuce; and even to Mariclea, sixteen and pregnant, wishing she were dead. Thirteen very different voices--old, young, Haitian, Hispanic, tough, haunted, and hopeful tell one amazing story about a garden that transforms a neighborhood.

Whirligig by Paul Fleischman - Brent Bishop longs to have the popular Brianna strolling around school on his arm. But when she rejects him at a classmate's party, Brent's hopes for popularity are instantly shattered. Devastated, he tries to destroy himself in a car crash... but instead kills an innocent girl named Lea. Instead of sending him to jail, Lea's parents challenge Brent to create four whirligigs modeled on a picture of Lea and position them at the four corners of the United States. Lea's mother hopes that the whirligig that used to delight Lea will be a fitting memorial for her precious daughter. She sends Brent off with an unlimited bus ticket, a few pieces of wood, and the tools to memorialize Lea. On his mission to preserve his victim's memory, Brent ultimately rediscovers his own love of life.

I Never Promised You a Rose Garden by Hannah Greene - The story of a sixteen-year-old who retreats from reality into the bondage of a lushly imagined but threatening kingdom, and her slow and painful journey back to sanity.

The Year They Burned the Books by Nancy Garden - When Wilson High *Telegraph* editor Jamie Crawford writes an opinion piece in support of the new sex-ed curriculum, which includes making condoms available to high school students, she has no idea that a huge controversy is brewing. Lisa Buel, a school board member, is trying to get rid of the health program, which she considers morally flawed, from its textbooks to its recommendations for outside reading. The newspaper staff finds themselves in the center of the storm, and things are complicated by the fact that Jamie is in the process of coming to terms with being gay, and her best friend, Terry, also gay, has fallen in love with a boy whose parents are anti-homosexual. As Jamie's and Terry's sexual orientation becomes more obvious to other students, it looks as if the paper they're fighting to keep alive and honest is going to be taken away from them. Nancy Garden has depicted a contemporary battleground in a novel that probes deep into issues of censorship, prejudice, and ethics.

Slave Dancer by Paula Fox - Snatched from the docks of New Orleans, 13-year-old Jessie is thrown aboard a slave ship where he is sickened by the horrible practices of the slave business. But they are nothing compared to the one final horror that Jessie will witness. Can the cruelty be stopped before it's too late?

Keeper of the Night by Kimberly Willis Holt – Set in Guam, this story centers around one family's struggle to deal with their mother's suicide. The eldest daughter faces huge pressures to take over her mother's role, while struggling to understand why her mother could leave them. Written in lyrical prose and short poems, this is a beautifully written novel that captures many of the cultural and geographical beauties of Guam.

The Beast by Walter Dean Myers - The story of a teenage boy who earns a scholarship to a prestigious prep school; however, he continually worries about the loved ones he left behind in Harlem, especially his girlfriend who slowly is drawn into a world of drugs.

Under the Persimmon Tree by Suzanne Fisher Staples – Set in war torn Afghanistan, this is the story of a young girl who first loses her father to Taliban forces, then her mother and younger brother to bomb blasts. As she travels towards the city and what she hopes is safety, another tale is unfolding, that of an American teacher living in Afghanistan who is also suffering and waiting for news of her missing husband as she teaches local children under the shelter of her persimmon tree.

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind by Suzanne Fisher Staples – The story of a young, head strong girl in Pakistan who dreads her own arranged marriage as she fears she never will learn to obey. When tragedy strikes her family, she must learn the nature of sacrifice and of forgiveness.

A Wreath for Emmett Till by Marilyn Nelson – Written as both history and tribute, this is a collection of sonnets dedicated to the memory of Emmett Till and the brutal loss of his life. Beautifully tragic at one moment, extremely graphic the next, these 15 sonnets create a picture of a life tragically stolen by the violence of racism.

If You Come Softly by Jacqueline Woodson – A “modern day Romeo and Juliet” story about a young Jewish girl who falls in love with an African American boy. The forbidden nature of their relationship as well as the social pressures of racism and discrimination surround their love story.

From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun by Jacqueline Woodson – Fourteen-year-old Melanin Sun is shocked and dismayed when his mother reveals that she is gay and involved with a white woman. When his mother’s lover moves in with the family, Melanin must struggle with his own issues of racism and prejudice while at the same time attempting to negotiate the social pressures he faces in his Brooklyn neighborhood.

Chanda’s Secrets by Allan Stratton – Set in sub Saharan Africa, this is the story of Chanda who wants more than anything to earn an education. When her stepfather and later her mother become ill with AIDS, Chanda must leave school to care for her younger brother and sister. A stunning look at the treatment of AIDS victims in Africa.

A Step from Heaven by An Na – The story of Young Ju, who leaves Korea to live in America when she is only four-years-old. A story of acculturation and discrimination, Young first believes America will be “just like heaven.” Young must struggle with her desires to become a successful American woman and her family’s pressures for her to remain a traditional Korean girl. Beautifully told, this is a poignant tale of one girl’s coming of age while attempting to bridge two cultures.

Shizuko’s Daughter by Kyoko Mori – The story of teenage Yuki’s struggles to accept the suicide of her mother, which is closely followed by her father’s remarriage to his long-time mistress. Set in Kobe, Japan, this story contains rich details regarding the culture and geography of Japan, as well as the universal, internal struggle of a girl attempting to grieve the loss of her

mother.

Before We Were Free by Julia Alvarez - Alvarez's first young adult novel, this is a companion novel of sorts to *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. This is the story of young Anita, who watches her cousins, The Garcia Girls, flee to America to escape the political regime of the 1960s Dominican Republic. Left behind, Anita lives a life of fear and trepidation in the violent political struggle that surrounds her family.

Come back to Afghanistan: A California Teenager's Story by Said Hyder Akbar – The true story of a teenage boy who was born in Afghanistan but raised in America. After 9/11, his father returns to Afghanistan to help rebuild the country after the fall of Taliban rule. This is the story of three summers where the son visits his father and chronicles the shock, the surprise, and also the joy of visiting the country of his birth. An interesting, insider look at life in post 9/11 Afghanistan.

I Will Plant You a Lilac Tree: A Memoir of a Schindler's List Survivor by Laura Hillman – A true life story of a young girl's struggle to survive in the Nazi concentration camps, separated from her mother and brothers. Grimly dark and unsettling at times, this memoir is time and time again a testament to the shining possibility of the human spirit as Hillman is kept alive at several points through the unexpected kindness and compassion of strangers.

Hole in My Life by Jack Gantos - The author's memoir of his own teenage years and early twenties, during which he dreamed of becoming the "great American author." Caught up in a life of drugs, Gantos is twenty when he is sent to a maximum security prison to pay for his part in a drug smuggling ring. Gritty, dark, and often shocking, this is Gantos' tale of his own journey towards a new life.

Adult Non-fiction

Biko by Donald Woods - The life, imprisonment, and unsatisfactory inquest into the death of Biko, the charismatic Black South African leader. Woods, a newspaper editor, risks his life and career to expose the truth about Biko's death.

Part of my Soul Went With Him by Winnie Mandela - Battered but unyielding, Winnie Mandela reveals brutal facts about apartheid through her personal account of life in South Africa.

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes by Maya Angelou - The experience of finding a home where she has never lived before becomes the catalyst for insights about African and American blackness.

Night by Elie Weisel—A boy and his father's vivid account of being incarcerated in a concentration camp during world War II.

Why We Can't Wait by Martin Luther King, Jr. - A description of the fight of blacks for civil

rights through the eyes of their greatest leader.

The Color of Water by James McBride – A memoir whose narrative features two voices: that of a black musician growing up in Brooklyn with his 11 brothers and 11 sisters; and his mother, daughter of a failed itinerant Orthodox Jewish rabbi, who lives in a violently racist small southern town.

Black Boy by Richard Wright – This autobiography of Richard Wright’s early life, examines Richard’s tortured years in the Jim Crow South from 1912 to 1927. In each chapter, Richard relates painful and confusing memories that lead to a better understanding of the man—a black, Southern, American writer—who eventually emerges. Although Richard, as the narrator, maintains an adult voice throughout the story, each chapter is told from the perspective and knowledge that a child might possess. Yet, because the narrative is told with such force and honesty, the reliability of Richard’s memories is not questioned. By the story’s end, as Richard comes of age, the voice of the narrator and of the nineteen-year-old young man he has become merge into one.

Dreaming in Color; Living in Black and White: Our own Stories of Growing up Black in America by Laurel Holliday - 17 short vignettes told by African Americans of their own youth, struggling to not only face but overcome the issues of racism and discrimination that continue to permeate this country. These true stories from every part of America tell what it was like growing up in world where the color of people's skin set them apart. How do you feel when a teacher doesn't believe that you wrote the story he thinks is great? How can you make friends and belong in a black school when your father is black and your mother is Puerto Rican? What do you do when you're working in the kitchen at summer camp in Vermont, but you're not allowed to swim in the camp lake? All the writer's pain, confusion, humiliation, and rage are vividly expressed. But many of them went on to struggle against overwhelming odds and realize their dreams. Their voices offer hope, inspiration, and a challenge to us all.

Barrio Boy by Ernesto Galarza - The story of a Mexican boy who makes the journey from his mountain village to the barrio of Sacramento.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X by Malcolm X - An important document of black history, this is Malcolm X's revealing personal account of life in the ghetto, in prison, and as a Black Muslim.

Hunger of Memory by Richard Rodriguez - The author describes his experience as a Mexican-American growing up in the Sacramento of the 1950's.

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts by Maxine Hong Kingston - The Chinese-American experience is passionately portrayed by a young woman who grew up torn between American life in modern San Francisco and the ancient legends, traditions, and folk beliefs of her Chinese heritage.

Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafsi – A memoir about teaching Western Literature in revolutionary Iran, with profound and fascinating insights into both.

In the Beginning by Irina Ratushinskaya - A poignant account of a young Russian poet's life in a society retarded by repression and confinement; her life as a young woman before and after her imprisonment in a Soviet labor camp.

Adult Fiction

Soldiers in Hiding by Richard Wiley – Teddy Maki is a Japanese-American jazz musician trapped in Tokyo and drafted into the Japanese army after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Thirty years later, Maki is a big star on Japanese TV, but wrestles with the guilt he's been carrying since the war. (Winner of the 1987 PEN/Faulkner Award)

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair—Poverty, disease, and despair depicted in this story of the barbarous working conditions in the slaughter houses of Chicago in 1900.

Go Tell it on the Mountain by James Baldwin—this book is the story of the Grimes family of Harlem in the 1930's. Growing up black is felt through the soul of the sensitive son.

Master Harold and the Boys by Fugard - First produced at the Yale Repertory Theater in 1982, Athol Fugard's "*Master Harold*"...and the Boys is based on the playwright's early life in South Africa. But the play itself is not a simple retelling of an incident from his past. Rather, Fugard has presented a personal experience that extends to universal humanity. If the play were simply a polemic against the policy of apartheid, it would already be outdated now that sweeping change has transformed South Africa. Instead, Fugard wrote a play about human relationships that are put to the test by societal and personal forces.

Of Human Bondage by Somerset Maugham - It is very difficult for a writer of my generation, if he is honest, to pretend indifference to the work of Somerset Maugham," wrote Gore Vidal. "He was always so entirely there." Originally published in 1915, *Of Human Bondage* is a potent expression of the power of sexual obsession and of modern man's yearning for freedom. This classic novel tells the story of Philip Carey, a sensitive boy born with a clubfoot who is orphaned and raised by a religious aunt and uncle. Philip yearns for adventure, and at eighteen leaves home, eventually pursuing a career as an artist in Paris. When he returns to London to study medicine, he meets the androgynous but alluring Mildred and begins a doomed love affair that will change the course of his life. There is no more powerful story of sexual infatuation, of human longing for connection and freedom.

Native Son by Richard Wright – The protagonist, Bigger Thomas, tries valiantly to make it in a white world only to be dealt (or rather choose) a life of crime and tragedy.

The Tin Drum by Guenter Grass - One of the most unforgettable novels to come out of (or rather, right after) the Second World War: Little Oskar, the drummer boy, who cannot grow as the result of the atrocities of war. He has a voice that can break glass. Grass is Germany's foremost living author; he's still writing, but I suspect *The Tin Drum* is his masterpiece.

Chronicle of a Death Untold by Gabriel Garcia Marquez - The injustice revolves around a man

who is unfortunate enough to date the wrong woman in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the patronistic society of a small Columbian village, her brothers decide to wreak vengeance by killing him. They make no bones about it, and although everyone in the village is apprised of the murder before it happens, no one has the fortitude to try and stop it---the old it's-someone-else's-problem syndrome. Very stirring and troubling.

Graceland by Chris Abani – The story takes place in Lagos, Nigeria, and concerns a teenager who does Elvis impersonations in order to survive the ghetto. The writing is exquisite. It made me ashamed of ever complaining or whining about anything ever again.

Becoming Abigail by Chris Abani - Tough, spirited, and fiercely independent Abigail is brought as a teenager to London from Nigeria by relatives who attempt to force her into prostitution. She flees, struggling to find herself in the shadow of a strong but dead mother. In spare yet haunting and lyrical prose reminiscent of Marguerite Duras, Abani brings to life a young woman who lives with a strength and inner light that will enlighten and uplift the reader.

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie - The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born in 1949, at midnight, right at the time of India's declaration of freedom. His life and that of his nation follow along parallel lines in this novel, which I personally think is Rushdie's best. The shifting of time periods enhances the tumultuous period the book chronicles.

Waiting for the Barbarians by J.M. Coetzee - Another Nobel Prize laureate who writes short, economical novels that always deal with controversy in South Africa. The novel begs the question, in today's troubled world, just who ARE the barbarians? The captors or the captives? And what is our criteria for identifying them?

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alvarez - This is an enchanting, touching, humorous, and at the same time, satirical look at four sisters from the Dominican Republic who move to New York City in the early sixties and the cultural clashes they encounter. Give IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES (a bit more on the tragic side) a shot, too. Julia's great.

Beloved or ***Sula*** by Toni Morrison - The estimable first African-American female Nobel laureate in literature. THE BLUEST EYE and especially BELOVED get most of the acclaim (and deservedly so), but to my mind, Sula is Morrison's greatest achievement, mostly due to the no-nonsense, amoral protagonist, an artist known as Sula. She's unforgettable, and the book avoids the sentimentality that sometimes weighs down *Beloved*. SONG OF SOLOMON is wonderful as well.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight In Heaven by Sherman Alexie - A collection of stories by the famed Seattle Native American writer, it's mostly funny while serving the higher purpose of alerting us to the wretched conditions on reservations. When accused by critics of not being serious enough (I think they're wrong), Alexie wrote THE INDIAN KILLER, which has a harsh and murderous tempo. I think he excels best at serious humor (as did Mark Twain and Ring Lardner).

The Joy Luck Club or ***The Kitchen God's Wife*** by Amy Tan - At her best, Amy Tan excels at

portraying, not just cultural relationships, but mother-daughter relations. Anyone, male or especially female, who has a mother should plug into her books. I've not yet read all of her novels, but my impression so far is that these first two are the cream of the crop.

What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng by Dave Eggers – A collaboration between a world-famous author, Dave Eggers, and Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese refugee. After war broke out between north and south Sudan, Deng's village was destroyed and his friends and relatives killed or enslaved. This is the story of Deng's journey of hundreds of miles to a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

Of Love and Shadows by Isabel Allende – This is a novel about institutional violence, of the sort perpetrated by authoritarian states; it is about human rights and their loss, and the difficulty of documenting that loss, so as to move the collective conscience of the world. It is also a touching love story. Allende has married the world of magic and political evil most credibly

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini - A moving portrait of the last 40 years of Afghanistan history. *The Kite Runner* tells the story of Amir, a well-to-do Pashtun boy from the Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul, who is haunted by the guilt of betraying his childhood friend Hassan, the son of his father's Hazara servant. The story is set against a backdrop of tumultuous events, from the fall of the monarchy in Afghanistan through the Soviet invasion, the mass exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the Taliban regime.

The Poisonwood Bible* or *Pigs in Heaven by Barbara Kingsolver – *The Poisonwood Bible* is the tale of a missionary family that travels to Africa to convert the “heathens.” Ill prepared for the realities and challenges of life in Africa, this is the story of the family's own journey towards discovery of what matters in life. *Pigs in Heaven* deals with the Navajo culture and one woman's attempt to adopt a child who is of Navajo background, even though she herself is not. Kingsolver's language is always beautifully descriptive, while at the same time featuring wry, ironic insights into human nature.

A Yellow Raft in Blue Water by Michael Dorris - A story of secrets and struggles, this novel follows the life of three generations of women in one family. Intersecting throughout the novel are issues of racism, loss, and the dangerous nature of untold family secrets.

Dreaming in Cuba by Christina Garcia – The title is beautifully evocative of a book of dreams, dreams of three generations of a Cuban family living both in Cuba and Brooklyn. These dreamers are Celia, who, loyal to Castro, writes letters addressed to her lover Gustavo, although he has fled to Spain; Celia's troubled daughter Felicia, who also remains in Cuba; Celia's other daughter Lourdes, who opens a bakery in Brooklyn, consuming vast quantities of her own baked goods; and her daughter Pilar, a defiant bohemian painter. Deeply evocative, by turns funny, poignant and grotesque, this ambitious novel weaves together the lives of its characters in a complex, haunting web of vignettes, which convey a strong sense of place and history.

