
Summer is the time that teachers and administrators catch up on their reading. I wanted to share a few of my personal favorites. If you've had enough of professional reading, skip the first category below (I won't tell!) and go straight for the purely-for-pleasure reading.

Here are a couple of professional reading recommendations:

Put Reading First, The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read

If you're interested in a nice summary of some of the 2000 National Reading Panel report, you can order this publication free of charge (800-228-8813 or EdPubOrders@aspensys.com) from the US Department of Education. The publication provides clear, concise definitions of many of the buzzwords we deal with and of many of the technical terms in our discipline. There is also a parent booklet that is a companion to this one. Administrators may want to order the parent booklets for Open House in August. As far as I know, the booklets are free in any reasonable quantity you request. They are also nicely spiral bound in a handy size.

Resisting Reading Mandates, How to Triumph with the Truth (Elaine Garan)

And, speaking of the National Reading Panel, for anyone who deals with reading mandates (and who doesn't!) you'll want to read Ellen Garan's bold book (and "bold" is putting it mildly!), *Resisting Reading Mandates, How to Triumph with the Truth* (Heinemann). She gets specific about some programs that have been mandated around the country and defends her statements with solid research. She also quotes the research of Four-Blocks' Jim Cunningham numerous times throughout the book. A most interesting paperback book to add to your must-read list!

For your adult reading pleasure...

Beach Music (Pat Conroy/Doubleday)

My all-time favorite writer, who just happens to be a Southern writer and who presently lives in my state of South Carolina, wrote this book. Conroy writes the most poetic prose ever, which is why his books sometimes take me longer to read. I savor the lines and marvel at his talent! The subplots within this book are worthy of a number of separate novels, though they come together to tell a poignant story of a man dealing with his young wife's death by suicide. (This book did take a hit from critics who wrote that although it was powerful and well-told, it was depressing. You aren't, however, left depressed in the end.) If you haven't read Conroy's *The Prince of Tides*, add it to your list, too. Don't dare judge it by the movie which I thought was dreadful!

The Mists of Avalon (Marian Zimmer Bradley)

Don't dare turn this one down because of the disastrous TV movie of the same title! This is my all-time favorite book, mainly because of my love of tales of the Arthurian Legend. The book is time-consuming, but, to me, it was time well spent. The Arthurian Legend is told strictly through the eyes of the female characters, which is quite a twist from the traditional tale. Bradley weaves a fascinating tale! People who've read and enjoyed this book are kind of like a cult. Let me know if you're ready to join us!

Pillars of the Earth (Ken Follett)

This is another of my very favorite books all times. You won't want this book to end. Totally uncharacteristic of Follett's books, *Pillars* follows characters through this medieval period of history when the great cathedrals were being built. This is a love story that you'll never forget which its vivid characters, fascinating plot, and rich historical setting.

Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood (Rebecca Wells)

This was a book that I didn't read for a long time just because of the title! Well, you can't judge all books by the cover. Books are almost always better than the movie! Read this one before you head to the theater!

I know that I've slighted the non-fiction books in these recommendations. I'm the typical female that research says love mostly a steady diet of fiction. Besides the professional books I read, I find that I have to nudge myself to read non-fiction. Here's my recommendation, though, for a fantastic non-fiction book:

The Tipping Point (Malcolm Gladwell)

This may well be the most fascinating book I've ever read. Gladwell discusses what makes situations, diseases, TV programs, and fashions "tip" into epidemic proportions. What made Sesame Street and Blues Clues successful? Why was Paul Revere so successful in his mission when there were actually two men who took off to warn towns of the impending attack? Why haven't we been successful in our war against teen smoking?

Some children's books for children of all ages:

Once Upon a Fairy Tale (Starbright Foundation/Viking Press)

This is a great collection of stories built on traditional fairy tales. The Starbright Foundation asked Hollywood stars to write their versions of fairy tales from different points of view. For the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, Glenn Close, Robin Williams, Oprah Winfrey wrote from the point of view of the woodsman, the grandmother, Red Riding Hood, Red's mother, and the wolf. Hilarious! What a great way, too, to teach point of view and a neat springboard into having students write their own story innovations. A hit at primary and upper grades!

Whatever Happened to Humpty Dumpty? (David T. Greenberg/Little, Brown and Co.)

I'm not sure exactly how to categorize this irreverent book of sequels to Mother Goose rhymes. Greenberg will have you in stitches with his clever additions to the rhymes we all grew up reciting!

Parts (Ted Arnold/Dial Books)

This book provides an hysterical look at daily biological processes that lead the main character to believe that he's falling apart. Told through the most humorous poetry, this book will be a great connection to your classroom health and science content. Enjoy Arnold's other books, too!

Oh, How I Wished I Could Read! (John Gile)

This delightful rhyming story has been around for a while, but I thought I'd add it here so that you'd have time to find it before school begins. This is a wonderful book to use at first and second grade to introduce students to the notion that reading is for a real-life purpose. The main character dreams that he is unable to read and finds himself in funny, compromising and sometimes painful situations due to his readingless state. Read this to your children in the beginning of the year, and then take a "field trip" through the school and around the school grounds to find the helpful signs in the environment that are important to us: restroom, boys', girls', library, principal's office, cafeteria, stop, yield, bus stop, etc.

Adolescent books that you'll enjoy as much as they will:

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town (Kimberly Willis Holt/Yearling Book)

Zachary Beaver is a one-act sideshow of "the fattest boy in the world." The young character from a small town in the US tells the story through a rich, vivid voice. He carries the reader through a exploration of moral dilemmas of various and sundry sorts and through

a journey of adolescence that brings back many memories for adult readers. If you're a baby-boomer, you'll find yourself walking down memory-lane!

Fever 1793 (Laurie Halse Anderson/Aladdin)

This is a powerful story that begins in Philadelphia as "the fever" begins to take the lives of old and young alike. Mattie, a lazy adolescent in the beginning, learns much about life as she watches death consume many of the people she loves and as she learns to survive. This period of history is vividly portrayed through Anderson's tale.

Because of Winn Dixie (Kate DiCamillo/Candlewick Press)

I've been sharing this book in my seminars for quite some time and have had the greatest feedback from teachers who've read it with or to their students. One veteran teacher told me that this book actually got applause from her students on the last day of her read-aloud! This is a wonderful story that will have you laughing and crying with its vivid characters! You won't forget this one!

The Million Dollar Shot (Dan Gutman/Hyperion)

This is an exciting story of a young boy who enters a contest which provides a chance for the winner to have a chance at making the million dollar shot from mid-court during an NBA game. Eddie wins the contest, of course, and the story revolves around his training and the event at the NBA game. Read to find out if he gets the \$\$ and what he learns about life, friendships, and determination in the process. You'll really enjoy the voice and humor of this character!

Love That Dog (Sharon Creech/Joanna Cotler Books - Imprint of HarperCollins)

This one is different! Written as a journal by a young boy who, as he insists that boys don't like and can't write poetry, finds his own voice as a poet. There is irony in the way that this young boy's purpose and

audience come together. *Love That Dog* is a very quick read, but a delightfully powerful book that will serve many uses in your classroom.

Smelly Old History (Mary Dobson/Oxford)

Put the whole paperback series on your list, or pick from the era that you're either more interested in or more curious about: Victorian Vapors, Roman Aromas, Tudor Odours, Greek Grime, Moldly Mummies, etc. This is a scratch and sniff series that describes these periods of history in a most unusual way—through the gross stuff! Talk about a book that gets students' attention! The text is presented in factoid styles and is most amusing. If you use these in your classroom, read the books first to be sure they don't offend you and that they'll be acceptable in your community.

Now that I've told you some of my favorites, I'll get back to my own summer reading. I'm thinking about giving Jean Auld another chance. She has a new book out in the Earth Child series. I've heard that it is back on track with the genius of her early books. I'm hoping so! Hope to hear from you about what your favorite summer reading choices are!

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