I compiled this list from books I’ve read recently that students at Weston High School will likely enjoy. I tried to hit all different types of literature, including poetry, science fiction, realistic fiction, and nonfiction. Many of these skew to the weighty, serious side, so please feel free to round out with fun bestsellers you find in bookstores and online. Enjoy and have a great summer.

**Belding Brown, Amy. The Flight of the Sparrow.** (Historical Fiction)
Well written historical fiction set in 1600s New England during King Phillip’s War between the Puritans and the Indians. The main characters are based on real characters — chiefly Mary Rowlandson who was taken captive and returned after 4 months. Mary questions Puritan values and becomes an independent woman. There’s some love and romance. Themes of race, slavery, and religion are explored. I read it in two sittings! (Mrs. Hanson)

**Chang, Leslie T. Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China** (Nonfiction)
I loved this! Chang weaves her family story between those of the young working women with whom she made relationships, so I finished the book with an understanding of migrant workers in China, how different kinds of families operate in China, Chinese lifestyles and beliefs, as well as the complex relationship Chinese Americans have with China.

But most of all I loved getting to know the women Chang highlights. Min and Chunming, like thousands of young women, left their rural villages and families as teenagers after graduating middle school and found work in the factories of Dongguan in southern China. The refrain of the books is "I am just like you" and I feel like I too am like Min and Chunming.

I was expecting to read an expose of the horrible conditions of poor Chinese factory workers. What I found out is these young women leave their villages because they are ambitious and want to make something of their lives. Life in the villages is limited. The small plots of family owned land go to the sons. There isn't much work available. Teenagers want independence (just like teenagers in other countries). Many young
women rise up the work ladder to management positions and start their own companies. (Ms. Hanson)

**Cline, Ernest. Ready Player One.** (Science Fiction)
In the year 2044, reality is an ugly place. The only time teenage Wade Watts really feels alive is when he's jacked into the virtual utopia known as the OASIS. Wade's devoted his life to studying the puzzles hidden within this world's digital confines, puzzles that are based on their creator's obsession with the pop culture of decades past and that promise massive power and fortune to whoever can unlock them. When Wade stumbles upon the first clue, he finds himself beset by players willing to kill to take this ultimate prize. The race is on, and if Wade's going to survive, he'll have to win—and confront the real world he's always been so desperate to escape. (Goodreads)

**Coates, Ta-Nehisi. Between the World and Me.** (Nonfiction)
In a profound work that pivots from the biggest questions about American history and ideals to the most intimate concerns of a father for his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates offers a powerful new framework for understanding our nation’s history and current crisis. Americans have built an empire on the idea of “race,” a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men—bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion. What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

Between the World and Me is Ta-Nehisi Coates’s attempt to answer these questions in a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children’s lives were taken as American plunder. Beautifully woven from personal narrative, reimagined history, and fresh, emotionally charged reportage, Between the World and Me clearly illuminates the past, bracingly confronts our present, and offers a transcendent vision for a way forward. (Goodreads)

**Day, Felicia. You’re Never Weird on the Internet (Almost).** (Memoir)
After growing up in the south where she was "home-schooled for hippie reasons", Felicia moved to Hollywood to pursue her dream of becoming an actress and was immediately typecast as a crazy cat-lady secretary. But Felicia’s misadventures in Hollywood led her to produce her own web series, own her own production company, and become an Internet star.
Felicia’s short-ish life and her rags-to-riches rise to Internet fame launched her career as one of the most influential creators in new media. Now, Felicia’s strange world is filled with thoughts on creativity, video games, and a dash of mild feminist activism—just like her memoir.

Hilarious and inspirational, You’re Never Weird on the Internet (Almost) is proof that everyone should embrace what makes them different and be brave enough to share it with the world, because anything is possible now—even for a digital misfit. (Goodreads)

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickeled and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America*. (Non-Fiction) Millions of Americans work for poverty-level wages, and one day Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them. She was inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform, which promised that any job equals a better life. But how can anyone survive, let alone prosper, on $6 to $7 an hour? To find out, Ehrenreich moved from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, taking the cheapest lodgings available and accepting work as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart salesperson. She soon discovered that even the "lowliest" occupations require exhausting mental and physical efforts. And one job is not enough; you need at least two if you intend to live indoors. (from Goodreads)

Henriquez, Christina. *The Book of Unknown Americans*. (Realistic Fiction) An absolutely beautiful and moving novel (I cried after I finished it) about the lives of Latino people who emigrate to the United States. The plot revolves around a beautiful, brain-damaged girl named Maribel. All the characters live in an apartment building in Delaware where immigrants from all over Latin America and the Caribbean come to live and pursue their hopes and dreams in America. It's set in the present day.

The Riveras have moved from Mexico to Delaware to get high quality special education for their fifteen year old daughter Maribel. The Toros moved from Panama and have a teenaged son, Mayor. He and Maribel fall in love. Neither family is supportive of the relationship: Mayor's family can't understand how he can love a girl with brain damage. Maribel's parents worry she isn't capable of protecting herself. Danger lurks in the form of a sinister teenaged boy who has caused trouble with Maribel and Mayor.

The book invites us to think about marriage, parenthood, personhood, fear, guilt, blame, joy and gratitude. The ultimate message is that love and forgiveness are supreme, and that we can find beauty anywhere if we look hard enough.
A great choice for teens. Clear and beautiful language communicate a powerful message. (Mrs. Hanson)

Jandy, Nelson. *I'll Give You The Sun*. (Realistic Fiction)
These twins love each other but almost destroy themselves in the process of competing for affection and approval from their mother, an art school, their peers, their crushes. The novel’s elements of suspense, romance, magical realism, and a series of great "reveals" at the end make it unique and appealing to almost anyone. A big plus is the HAPPY ENDING for which so many of us yearn.

Jude (girl) and Noah (boy) are quirky twins, children of academics who live in a coastal community in Northern California. Their mother is an eccentric art scholar who decides the children should apply to a prestigious and highly competitive local arts academy for high school. Not only are they competing for admission to the school, they are also competing for their mother's favor, which drives them apart in a ferocious and tragic way.

A fun, compelling, and imaginative read especially suited kids interested in art. The message of this book is: do the hard and scary work of being yourself and you will be rewarded. (Mrs. Hanson)

Johnson, Denis. *Train Dreams*. (Historical Fiction)
Denis Johnson's Train Dreams is an epic in miniature, one of his most evocative and poignant fictions. It is the story of Robert Grainier, a day laborer in the American West at the start of the twentieth century—an ordinary man in extraordinary times. Buffeted by the loss of his family, Grainer struggles to make sense of this strange new world. As his story unfolds, we witness both his shocking personal defeats and the radical changes that transform America in his lifetime. Suffused with the history and landscapes of the American West, this novella by the National Book Award–winning author of Tree of Smoke captures the disappearance of a distinctly American way of life. (Goodreads)

Kaufmann, Amy and Jay Kristof. *Illuminae #1* (Science Fiction)
The year is 2575, and two rival megacorporations are at war over a planet that’s little more than an ice-covered speck at the edge of the universe. Too bad nobody thought to warn the people living on it. With enemy fire raining down on them, Kady and Ezra—who are barely even talking to each other—are forced to fight their way onto an evacuating fleet, with an enemy warship in hot pursuit. (Goodreads)

A fantastic sci fi zombie love story thriller. Compelling story, humor, and creative use of type and different kinds of documents make this an outstanding read. Looking forward to the next book in the series. (Mrs. Hanson)

The definitive history of Asian Americans by one of the nation’s preeminent scholars on the subject.

In the past fifty years, Asian Americans have helped change the face of America and are now the fastest growing group in the United States. But as award-winning historian Erika Lee reminds us, Asian Americans also have deep roots in the country. *The Making of Asian America* tells the little-known history of Asian Americans and their role in American life, from the arrival of the first Asians in the Americas to the present-day.

An epic history of global journeys and new beginnings, this book shows how generations of Asian immigrants and their American-born descendants have made and remade Asian American life in the United States: sailors who came on the first trans-Pacific ships in the 1500s; indentured “coolies” who worked alongside African slaves in the Caribbean; and Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and South Asian immigrants who were recruited to work in the United States only to face massive racial discrimination, Asian exclusion laws, and for Japanese Americans, incarceration during World War II. Over the past fifty years, a new Asian America has emerged out of community activism and the arrival of new immigrants and refugees. No longer a “despised minority,” Asian Americans are now held up as America’s “model minorities” in ways that reveal the complicated role that race still plays in the United States. (Goodreads)

Okparanta, Chinelo. *Under the Udala Trees* (Historical Fiction)

If you enjoyed *Things Fall Apart*, you will love this beautifully written coming of age story set in Africa’s largest country, Nigeria. The story is illuminated by African folktales incorporated into the text.

Ijeoma comes of age as her nation does; born before independence, she is eleven when civil war breaks out in the young republic of Nigeria. Sent away to safety, she meets another displaced child and they fall in love. They are from different ethnic communities. They are also both girls. When their love is discovered, Ijeoma learns that she will have to hide this part of herself. We watch Ijeoma reunite with her mother, get an education, and form a life for herself as an adult.

Pitre, Michael. *Fives and Twenty-Fives*. (Historical Fiction)

Every year literary publications publish their best books of the year lists, and every year I wonder why certain books are nowhere to be found. This is one of those books. There
was no buzz about it, probably just a really good review in an unglamorous publication like Booklist (likely the reason I bought the book for the library in the first place).

(Fives and Twenty-Fives cont.)
Our main character is an officer in Iraq. He leads a unit that clears roads. This means they clear every square inch in and around the road of bombs while trying not to get shot at. Their track record is 100%—every time they suspect a bomb, there is a bomb. They operate under the fives and twenty fives rule: first secure the first five feet of perimeter around the vehicle (secure means make sure there are no concealed bombs waiting to trip and no one trying to shoot at you). After the first five feet is secured, you fan out and secure the surrounding twenty five feet. Super suspenseful and metaphoric, and relates to the narrative and structure of the book. Bravo Mr. Pitre!!

The story is told in alternating viewpoints, in medias res. We hear from the officer, a young Iraqi translator, and a medic. They have all moved on from the war and reflect on their experience. A big event is the centerpiece of the narrative but we’re not sure what it is until the end. Some chapters start in military memos, and we piece together the backstory of the memo in the following chapter.

With themes of leadership, class, and a 360 view of all the participants in the Iraqi war, this is a fantastic read for anyone. (Mrs. Hanson)

**Okparanta, Chinelo. **Under the Udala Trees **(Historical Fiction)**

Inspired by Nigeria’s folktales and its war, Under the Udala Treesis a deeply searching, powerful debut about the dangers of living and loving openly.

Ijeoma comes of age as her nation does; born before independence, she is eleven when civil war breaks out in the young republic of Nigeria. Sent away to safety, she meets another displaced child and they, star-crossed, fall in love. They are from different ethnic communities. They are also both girls. When their love is discovered, Ijeoma learns that she will have to hide this part of herself. But there is a cost to living inside a lie.

As Edwidge Danticat has made personal the legacy of Haiti’s political coming of age, Okparanta’s Under the Udala Trees uses one woman’s lifetime to examine the ways in which Nigerians continue to struggle toward selfhood. Even as their nation contends with and recovers from the effects of war and division, Nigerian lives are also wrecked and lost from taboo and prejudice. This story offers a glimmer of hope — a future where a woman might just be able to shape her life around truth and love. (Goodreads)
Prince, Liz. *Tomboy.* (Graphic Novel)
This is special because it quietly changed the way I view the world. It took me an hour to read this gentle, uplifting, to the point, graphic novel memoir about growing up and gender expression.

As long as Liz Prince could remember, she wanted to dress and act like a boy. When her mom put a dress on her when she was four, Liz cried. She liked boy toys like Power Rangers and Transformers. Kids made fun of her sometimes, but she accepted it as part of the general confusion of growing up. As she grew older, she couldn't deny the biological fact that she was a girl, yet the only way she felt comfortable was dressed as a boy. She wasn't a lesbian--she just wasn't a "girly girl." How would she ever find a boyfriend? Where did she fit in the world?

The ultimate message here is "be yourself." I recommend this book to almost anyone--keep in mind it's short and accessible to a wide range of readers. Ages 12 and up, probably. (Mrs. Hanson)

Rakine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Nonfiction; Poetry)
Claudia Rankine's bold new book recounts mounting racial aggressions in ongoing encounters in twenty-first-century daily life and in the media. Some of these encounters are slights, seeming slips of the tongue, and some are intentional offensives in the classroom, at the supermarket, at home, on the tennis court with Serena Williams and the soccer field with Zinedine Zidane, online, on TV-everywhere, all the time. The accumulative stresses come to bear on a person's ability to speak, perform, and stay alive. Our addressability is tied to the state of our belonging, Rankine argues, as are our assumptions and expectations of citizenship. In essay, image, and poetry, *Citizen* is a powerful testament to the individual and collective effects of racism in our contemporary, often named "post-race" society. (Goodreads)

Reynolds, Jason. *The Boy in the Black Suit.* (Realistic Fiction)
Just when seventeen-year-old Matt thinks he can’t handle one more piece of terrible news, he meets a girl who’s dealt with a lot more—and who just might be able to clue him in on how to rise up when life keeps knocking him down.

Matt wears a black suit every day. No, not because his mom died—although she did, and it sucks. But he wears the suit for his gig at the local funeral home, which pays way better than the Cluck Bucket, and he needs the income since his dad can’t handle the bills (or anything, really) on his own. So while Dad’s snagging bottles of whiskey, Matt’s
snagging fifteen bucks an hour. Not bad. But everything else? Not good. Then Matt meets Lovey. She’s got a crazy name, and she’s been through more crazy than he can imagine. Yet Lovey never cries. She’s tough. Really tough. Tough in the way Matt wishes

*(Boy in the Black Suit cont.)*

he could be. Which is maybe why he’s drawn to her, and definitely why he can’t seem to shake her. Because there’s nothing more hopeful than finding a person who understands your loneliness—and who can maybe even help take it away. (Goodreads)

**Samaramci, Ozge. *Dare to Disappoint.* (Graphic Novel)**

Growing up on the Aegean Coast, Ozge loved the sea and imagined a life of adventure while her parents and society demanded predictability. Her dad expected Ozge, like her sister, to become an engineer. She tried to hear her own voice over his and the religious and militaristic tensions of Turkey and the conflicts between secularism and fundamentalism. Could she be a scuba diver like Jacques Cousteau? A stage actress? Would it be possible to please everyone including herself?

In her unpredictable and funny graphic memoir, Ozge recounts her story using inventive collages, weaving together images of the sea, politics, science, and friendship. (Goodreads)

**Septys, Ruta. *Salt to the Sea.* (Historical Fiction)**


Each one born of a different homeland; each one hunted, and haunted, by tragedy, lies…and war.

As thousands of desperate refugees flock to the coast in the midst of a Soviet advance, four paths converge, vying for passage aboard the Wilhelm Gustloff, a ship that promises safety and freedom.

Yet not all promises can be kept.

Inspired by the single greatest tragedy in maritime history, bestselling and award-winning author Ruta Sepetys (*Between Shades of Gray*) lifts the veil on a shockingly little-known casualty of World War II. An illuminating and life-affirming tale of heart and hope. (Goodreads)

**Wilson, G. Willow. *The Butterfly Mosque.* (Memoir)**
There are so many amazing memoirs being written now, and this one will join the ranks of the best. G. Willow Wilson tells the story of her conversion to Islam while at Boston University, her experience working in Egypt, falling in love, discovering what being a Muslim in a Muslim land is like, and "coming out" to her friends and family during the time period following 9/11 when anti-Islamic fervor was stronger than usual. She describes what it's like to balance Islamic and Western cultures, and sheds light on Western prejudices and assumptions through her experiences with friends and family.

I really enjoyed learning about the life of a Muslim women in Egypt, and am impressed by Wilson's powers of analysis. The book kept my interest throughout. I recommend this to readers who enjoy memoir, like to learn about different cultures, or who are interested Egypt and the Islamic world. (Ms. Hanson)

Special Mentions

I loved these books this year, but they probably will not appeal to most teen readers. However, they are so wonderful and important that I have to mention them.

Knausgaard, Karl Ove. My Struggle (Books 1-5)
(My review of Book #1)
I approached this novel with a combination of trepidation and joy. It's long, the first in a six part series, is called "My Struggle," the author photo is grim, he's Norwegian. I thought it would be super dark and difficult to read. I enjoy a literary challenge and wasn't about to let something like this, which has been buzzed about in book reviews for a couple of years, get by me without a shot. I am glad to report those preconceptions were wrong: My Struggle is compelling, smoothly written, funny, nostalgic, heart felt. Now I understand the obsession. I enjoyed it so much I read volumes 2 and 3 immediately afterwards.

The first volume is about Knausgaard's late childhood-adolescence, the second about his marriage and being a father of young kids, and the third is about his early childhood. You will be lulled into thinking it's a memoir because of the first person voice and being rooted in Knausgaard's life. However, these are novels because of the way Knausgaard structures them, how he slides back and forth along a timeline to deepen the reader's understanding and emotion around the events in his life. We walk his journey of remembrance and reflection with him. Also, Knausgaard had to reconstruct events, especially from his early childhood. He discusses ideas of death and literature, and the placement of these reflections is significant. What was happening before? What happened after?
His style is clear and simple. As one of his writer friends says, he can write 30 pages about getting a cup of coffee and it will be a page turner. If you like series, like long books, are interested in quietly powerful writing, My Struggle is for you! If you're thinking about it, just do it, you won't be sorry. (Ms. Hanson)

(Special Mentions cont.)

A modern masterpiece from one of Italy’s most acclaimed authors, My Brilliant Friend is a rich, intense, and generous-hearted story about two friends, Elena and Lila. Ferrante’s inimitable style lends itself perfectly to a meticulous portrait of these two women that is also the story of a nation and a touching meditation on the nature of friendship.

The story begins in the 1950s, in a poor but vibrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples. Growing up on these tough streets the two girls learn to rely on each other ahead of anyone or anything else. As they grow, as their paths repeatedly diverge and converge, Elena and Lila remain best friends whose respective destinies are reflected and refracted in the other. They are likewise the embodiments of a nation undergoing momentous change. Through the lives of these two women, Ferrante tells the story of a neighborhood, a city, and a country as it is transformed in ways that, in turn, also transform the relationship between her protagonists, the unforgettable Elena and Lila. (Goodreads)