

## Grade 9 – Novel Choices

As world renowned Librarian, Shivali Ranganathan, once said, **“Every reader his/her book; Every book, its reader.”** He was referring to the fact that different people enjoy different literature, and this is exactly the approach that should be used when choosing your novels. Not every book will be enjoyed or even understood by every reader, so choose wisely.

**A small summary has been included for each title; it will be your first clue as to what you may want to read. ALL of the titles are available through your local public library. If they do not have a copy of a certain title, please ask the librarian to request the book through Access PA.**

### **Great Expectations** / Dickens, Charles

**genre: Classic**

In an overgrown churchyard, a grizzled convict springs upon an orphan named Pip. The convict terrifies the young boy and threatens to kill him unless Pip helps further his escape. Later, Pip finds himself in the ruined garden where he meets the bitter and crazy Miss Havisham and her foster child Estella, with whom he immediately falls in love. After a secret benefactor gives him a fortune, Pip moves to London, where he cultivates great expectations for a life which would allow him to discard his impoverished beginnings and socialize with the idle upper class. As Pip struggles to become a gentleman and is tormented endlessly by the beautiful Estella, he slowly learns the truth about himself and his illusions.

Written in the last decade of his life, *Great Expectations* reveals Dickens’s dark attitudes toward Victorian society, its inherent class structure, and its materialism. Yet this novel persists as one of Dickens’s most popular. Richly comic and immensely readable, *Great Expectations* overflows with vividly drawn characters, moral maelstroms, and the sorrow and pity of love.

### **Runner** / Deuker, Carl

**genre: Coming of age / Mystery**

#### **From School Library Journal**

Grade 7 Up –When his alcoholic Gulf War veteran father is fired from the first steady job he has held in years, Chance Taylor is understandably glum. He has no idea where they'll get the money to pay the moorage fees for the run-down sailboat they call home. Since his parents' divorce, Chance has tried to keep a low profile in school, and his only pleasure is running by himself along the Seattle waterfront. When a marina office employee offers to pay him \$250 a week to pick up occasional packages at a tree along his running route, Chance is deeply suspicious of what they may contain but desperate enough to accept this opportunity to pay the bills. As this new job gradually becomes more dangerous and more clearly illegal, Chance's father is able to rise above his personal problems to help extricate his son. In a gripping climax complete with SWAT teams swarming throughout the marina as Coast Guard patrol boats close in on terrorists, Chance is afforded a final glimpse of the heroic man his father once was. Writing in a fast-paced, action-packed, but at the same time reflective style, Deuker uses fewer sports scenes than in his previous novels, and instead uses running as a hook to entice readers into a perceptive coming-of-age novel. A subplot involving Chance's friendship with a wealthy female classmate whose father was a close high school friend of Chance's father is nicely integrated into this timely, compelling story.–*Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA*

**Stotan** / Crutcher, Chris

**genre: Coming of age /Sport**

**From School Library Journal**

Grade 9 Up - A fine coming-of-age novel. Walker Dupree, the captain of Frost (Spokane, Wash.) High School's swim team, chronicles the senior year of the tight fraternity of young men who make up the team. Lionel, orphaned at 14, faces a sometimes hostile world alone; Nortie lives with an abusive father whom he loves but can never please; Jeff, a brash youth with everything to live for is terminally ill. Swim coach Max II Song tests these four young men unmercifully during Stotan Week, but he gives them a reservoir of strength they more than need before their season is over. The boys are typical of many teenagers; they think a lot about sex; their language isn't always clean. They face difficult, adult situations, violence, racial prejudice, Jeff's impending death. Crutcher's novel more than moves and entertains; it teaches. It teaches young people about responsibility, about courage and heroism, and ultimately about life itself. Stotan! is very, very, good. *Jerry Flack, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs*

**Alicia, My story** / Appleman-Jurman, Alicia

**genre: Historic/Non-Fiction**

**From Library Journal**

A Polish Jew, the author re-creates her efforts to survive in Nazi-dominated, war-torn Poland. Between the ages of ten and 15, she suffered terrible hardships and encountered numerous brushes with death. This is a potentially useful addition to Holocaust literature, for although she never experienced the death camps, Appleman-Jurman lived in constant peril and managed to survive only through an extraordinary combination of luck and street sense. Unfortunately, the heavy use of dialogue reconstructed more than 40 years later has an unsettling effect on the mood and plausibility of this interesting and frequently horrifying survival narrative. *Mark R. Yerburgh, Trinity Coll. Lib., Burlington, Vt.*

**Touching Spirit Bear** / Mikaelson, Ben

**genre: Coming of age**

**From School Library Journal**

Grade 7 Up-Cole Matthews is a violent teen offender convicted of viciously beating a classmate, Peter, causing neurological and psychological problems. Cole elects to participate in Circle Justice, an alternative sentencing program based on traditional Native American practices that results in his being banished to a remote Alaskan Island where he is left to survive for a year. Cynical and street smart, he expects to fake his way through the preliminaries, escape by swimming off the island, and beat the system, again. But his encounter with the Spirit Bear of the title leaves him desperately wounded and gives him six months of hospitalization to reconsider his options. Mikaelson's portrayal of this angry, manipulative, damaged teen is dead on. Cole's gradual transformation into a human kind of being happens in fits and starts. He realizes he must accept responsibility for what he has done, but his pride, pain, and conditioning continue to interfere. He learns that his anger may never be gone, but that he can learn to control it. The author concedes in a note that the culminating plot element, in which Peter joins Cole on the island so that both can learn to heal, is unlikely. But it sure works well as an adventure story with strong moral underpinnings. Gross details about Cole eating raw worms, a mouse, and worse will appeal to fans of the outdoor adventure/survival genre, while the truth of the Japanese proverb cited in the frontispiece, "Fall seven times, stand up eight" is fully and effectively realized.

**The Rag and Bone Shop** / Cormier, Robert

**genre: Horror/Psychological Thriller**

**From Publishers Weekly**

Ages 12-up. Cormier's final novel, published posthumously, is characteristically dark and thought-provoking as he delves into "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart," (from the Yeats poem). The author offers an in-depth study of two complicated characters: Trent, an ambitious and renowned interrogator who holds a perfect record wrenching confessionals out of criminals, and 12-year-old Jason Dorrant, suspected of murdering his neighbor, seven-year-old Alicia Bartlett. The killing attracts much publicity plus the attention of a senator. The local police, anxious to solve the case quickly, call on the expertise of Trent to get Jason, the last person seen with the victim, to confess to the crime. The interview between Trent and Jason evolves into a taut, sinister mind game as the interrogation expert twists the boy's thoughts and manipulates his words. Jason parries the insinuations and accusations against him to the best of his ability, but finds himself questioning his own sense of reality. The tension mounts as it becomes increasingly evident that Trent is more concerned with getting Jason to say the words he wants to hear than discovering what really happened on the day Alicia died. The chilling results of the questioning will leave an indelible mark on readers and prompt heated discussions regarding the definition of guilt and the fine line between truth and deception.

**Twilight** / Meyer, Stephenie

**genre: Fantasy**

**From School Library Journal**

*Starred Review.* Grade 9 Up—Headstrong, sun-loving, 17-year-old Bella declines her mom's invitation to move to Florida, and instead reluctantly opts to move to her dad's cabin in the dreary, rainy town of Forks, WA. She becomes intrigued with Edward Cullen, a distant, stylish, and disarmingly handsome senior, who is also a vampire. When he reveals that his specific clan hunts wildlife instead of humans, Bella deduces that she is safe from his blood-sucking instincts and therefore free to fall hopelessly in love with him. The feeling is mutual, and the resulting volatile romance smolders as they attempt to hide Edward's identity from her family and the rest of the school. Meyer adds an eerie new twist to the mismatched, star-crossed lovers theme: predator falls for prey, human falls for vampire. This tension strips away any pretense readers may have about the everyday teen romance novel, and kissing, touching, and talking take on an entirely new meaning when one small mistake could be life-threatening. Bella and Edward's struggle to make their relationship work becomes a struggle for survival, especially when vampires from an outside clan infiltrate the Cullen territory and head straight for her. As a result, the novel's danger-factor skyrockets as the excitement of secret love and hushed affection morphs into a terrifying race to stay alive. Realistic, subtle, succinct, and easy to follow, *Twilight* will have readers dying to sink their teeth into it.—*Hillias J. Martin, New York Public Library*

**Ender's Game** / Card, Scott Orson

**genre: Science Fiction**

**From New York Times Book Review**

Intense is the word for Ender's Game. Aliens have attacked Earth twice and almost destroyed the human species. To make sure humans win the next encounter, the world government has taken to breeding military geniuses—and then training them in the art of war. The early training, not surprisingly, takes the form of games and Ender Wiggin is a genius among geniuses; he wins all the games. He is smart enough to know that time is running out. But is he smart enough to save the planet?

[Note: *Ender's Game* is a Hugo and Nebula Award-winning novel that is appropriate for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and up.]

**Ghost Riders / McCrumb, Sharyn**

**genre: Historical Fiction/Fantasy**

**From Publishers Weekly**

Bestselling North Carolina writer McCrumb (The Songcatcher, etc.) returns with another epic ballad of a novel, a multi-tiered Civil War story that links past and present with an otherworldly twist. Tough, resilient Malinda Blalock is dismayed when her husband, Keith, leaves their Appalachian mountain farmstead to join up with the Confederate Army in hopes of earning money. Not content to wait out the war at home, spitfire Malinda cuts her hair and enlists herself as "Sam," Keith's younger brother. Their tour of duty is cut short by a deliberate scheme to get themselves discharged, and they move on to become do-gooder outlaws, known throughout the Appalachians. This story is enmeshed with the elaborately re-imagined life of historical figure Zebulon Baird Vance: his early success in law and party politics, his time in Congress, his stint as commander of North Carolina troops, and his election (and subsequent re-election) as governor of North Carolina during the Civil War. Running parallel to these story lines is a dilemma plaguing present-day, Civil War re-enactment actors camped out in the Appalachians. As they restage a violent piece of Southern history, ghosts of Civil War soldiers begin appearing at their campsites and also to area residents. It's up to locals Rattler and Nora Bonesteel, both possessing the gift of "sight," to quell the ghosts' hostilities. McCrumb writes high-spirited historical fiction, her lush, dense narratives shored up by thorough research and convincing period detail. Her latest is another harmonious, folksy blend of history and backwoods lore.

**The Five People You Meet in Heaven / Albom, Mitch**

**genre: Inspirational**

**From Publishers Weekly**

"At the time of his death, Eddie was an old man with a barrel chest and a torso as squat as a soup can," writes Albom, author of the bestselling phenomenon Tuesdays with Morrie, in a brief first novel that is going to make a huge impact on many hearts and minds. Wearing a work shirt with a patch on the chest that reads "Eddie" over "Maintenance," limping around with a cane thanks to an old war injury, Eddie was the kind of guy everybody, including Eddie himself, tended to write off as one of life's minor characters, a gruff bit of background color. He spent most of his life maintaining the rides at Ruby Pier, a seaside amusement park, greasing tracks and tightening bolts and listening for strange sounds, "keeping them safe." The children who visited the pier were drawn to Eddie "like cold hands to a fire." Yet Eddie believed that he lived a "nothing" life-gone nowhere he "wasn't shipped to with a rifle," doing work that "required no more brains than washing a dish." On his 83rd birthday, however, Eddie dies trying to save a little girl. He wakes up in heaven, where a succession of five people are waiting to show him the true meaning and value of his life. One by one, these mostly unexpected characters remind him that we all live in a vast web of interconnection with other lives; that all our stories overlap; that acts of sacrifice seemingly small or fruitless do affect others; and that loyalty and love matter to a degree we can never fathom. Simply told, sentimental and profoundly true, this is a contemporary American fable that will be cherished by a vast readership. Bringing into the spotlight the anonymous Eddies of the world, the men and women who get lost in our cultural obsession with fame and fortune, this slim tale, like Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol, reminds us of what really matters here on earth, of what our lives are given to us for.