

Recommended Books for Independent Reading – Senior Grades

Author	Title	Comment	Category
Allende, Isabel	City of the Beasts	An adventure story that takes place during a treacherous trip down the Amazon river. Ghosts, snakes, an adventurer grandmother ... there's a lot going on in these 400 pages!	translated from the Spanish; YA
Almond, David	*Clay	Two young, mischievous altar boys befriend another boy who can bring clay creations to life.	YA, British 2005
Alvarez, Julia	How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents	A good read about the four Garcia girls and their trials and tribulations. Somewhat like a series of connected short stories. Some sexual content but not too explicit. Interesting chronology: goes continually backward in time; immigrant experience (Caribbean; Spanish-speaking); family dynamics; "literature of exile".	American, born in the Dominican Republic (SWC)
Anderson, Laurie Halse	Speak	Tough, tender, darkly funny story of a teenage outcast. Gripping plot, powerful characters. Melinda's sarcastic wit, honesty & courage make her a memorable protagonist. Highly recommended.	YA (SWC)
Anderson, Laurie Halse	Fever 1793	Fictional account of the yellow fever epidemic that killed thousands in Philadelphia in, you guessed it, 1793. Good historical detail, and a compelling story of the events that befall an independent-minded young girl.	YA 2000
Anderson-Dargatz, G.	A Cure for Death by Lightning	Farming life and family dynamics through the life of a teenage girl.	Western Cdn
Atwood, Margaret	The Handmaid's Tale	Set in a futuristic society where women are oppressed and society is strictly controlled. Interesting issues surrounding the relationship between men and women and reproductive rights.	Cdn (SWC)
	Alias Grace	Based on a true crime story; point of view changes as crime is described through different perspectives.	
Austen, Jane	Pride and Prejudice	The Bennet family and their romantic trials and tribulations in England in the early 1800s. And, of course, the love story of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy.	British
Aw, Tash	The Harmony Silk Factory	Story of a Malaysian Chinese family told through 3 different perspectives. Set in 1940 before the Japanese occupation. Excellent study of how perspective can change the reading experience; outsiders; complexity of relationships.	Malaysian/British 2005
Baird, Alison	The Hidden World	A girl is sent to Newfoundland for the summer and discovers a secret world of Celtic myths and legend.	YA, Cdn (SWC)
Baldwin, Shauna Singh	The Tiger Claw	Love, espionage, war, clash of religious faiths ... this has it all. Historical fiction.	Cdn 2004
	What the Body Remembers	Set in the late 1930s, deals with the romantic and political strife experienced by a Sikh family as the departing British prepare to divide the land into India and Pakistan.	
Bell, William	Crabbe	An 18 yr.-old boy learns important lessons about life in Algonquin Park.	YA, Cdn (SWC)
Bell, William	Stones	Boy in his last year of high school meets mysterious girl. Together they learn about prejudice and persecution in their community.	YA, Cdn
Boyd, Joseph	Three Day Road	Narrative alternates between the story of a young aboriginal man and his experiences on the battlefield in WWI and a parallel story involving his grandmother who lives in the bush. Loosely based on the true story of a famous aboriginal sharpshooter.	Cdn/Métis 2005
Bronte, Charlotte	Jane Eyre	Classic gothic romance.	British
Brooks, Martha	True Confessions of a Heartless Girl	Set in a little Manitoba town, a 17 yr. old girl is on the run, and she's pregnant too. Fiercely independent and stubborn, she is taken under the wing of the owner of the local café, and Del, a bachelor farmer and poet. A novel full of startlingly insights into the rich inner lives of ordinary, yet always extraordinary, people. Winner of 2002 GG award. (adapted from an Amazon.ca review)	YA (SWC)
Card, Orson Scott	Ender's Game	classic science fiction; written in the 70s but doesn't seem dated at all; very readable (war games, personal clashes)	Amer (SWC)
Cather, Willa	My Antonia	Beautiful novel about immigrants settling in the American West (prairies) in the mid-1800s.	Amer (SWC)
Choy, Wayson	The Jade Peony	"A lyrical tale of growing up in Vancouver's early Chinatown." Witty and intelligent.	Cdn
Cormier, Robert	Heroes	After World War II, an 18 yr old boy returns without a face to murder his childhood hero.	YA (SWC)
Crew, Linda	Children of the River	A Cambodian girl whose family has recently immigrated to Oregon faces cultural conflicts. Excellent!	YA (SWC)
Dallaire, Roméo	Shake Hands with the Devil (Non-fiction)	Dallaire's first-hand account of the Rwanda genocide of the early 1990s. Intense; well worth reading.	Cdn
Danticat, Edwidge	The Farming of Bones	A gritty, haunting story of a young housemaid to a wealthy Spanish family in 1930s Haiti. Wonderfully	

		lyrical prose describes heartbreak, political upheaval and the carnage that follows. The events described are historically accurate. A challenging read, but well worth it.	Haitian
Davies, Robertson	Murder and Walking Spirits	Narrated by main character, who has just been killed! Blend of farce and mystery. Retraces lives of his ancestors, including life in late 1700s to the present.	Cdn
Dickens, Charles	A Tale of Two Cities	The classic story of a family caught in the middle of the conflict during the French Revolution.	Brit (SWC)
Dinesen, Isak (also known as Karen Blixen)	Shadows in the Grass Letters from Africa	A Danish woman tries to manage a coffee farm in Africa. (The movie <i>Out of Africa</i> is based on these two books.)	Danish
Ellis, Deborah	Looking for X	Rebellious young girl, with special needs brothers, seeks to regain her mother's respect. Governor General's Award winner. 132 pages.	YA, Cdn
Flagg, Fannie	Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café	Story of racism and strong women told with humour.	American
Franklin, Miles	My Brilliant Career	Life in rural Australia at the beginning of the 20 th century, from the perspective of an independent minded young woman.	Australian
Frazier, Charles	Cold Mountain	One soldier's odyssey while struggling to return home from the American Civil War.	American
Gaines, Ernest J.	A Lesson Before Dying	the relationship between a young black man on death row and a teacher in 1940s Louisiana	Amer (SWC)
Galloway, Priscilla	Snake Dreamer	An exciting mystery combining ancient mythology with modern characters. When Dusa sees two doctors on TV claiming to be able to cure the strange condition called "snake dreaming," she heads off to their special clinic hoping to rid herself of the imaginary snakes haunting her. But there is something strange about the doctors and the island their clinic is on...	(SWC) YA
Gibb, Camilla	*Sweetness in the Belly	A small cast of characters including Lilly, a white Muslim woman who finds herself in Ethiopia and in love in the days before a revolution erupts; and Amina, an Ethiopian woman with two young children who has been forced to leave her husband behind. Now in London, the two women have to learn how to live all over again. A rich and compassionate story that both enlightens and challenges the reader. Giller Prize finalist; Trillium Book Award.	Cdn (SWC) 2005
Gibbons, Kaye	Ellen Foster	The story of a spunky girl from the American South who overcomes adversity with humour, honesty and determination. First person narrative.	American
Golden, Arthur	Memoirs of a Geisha	A young girl is sent away from her home to become a geisha. She struggles to find love and acceptance; an interesting exploration of some aspects of Japanese culture before the war.	American
Grenville, Kate	The Secret River	When he is caught stealing to feed his family in the slums of London, William Thornhill is sent, along with his wife and child, as a convict to Sydney in New South Wales (Australia). He and Sal struggle in this largely unsettled land and are put to the test as they have to deal with the aboriginal people that were there first. Historical fiction.	Australian 2005
Guterson, David	Snow Falling on Cedars	A story of three young people during the Japanese-American internment, one of whom ends up accused of murder.	American
Haddon, Mark	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time	told from the point of view of an autistic boy as he tries to unravel a number of mysteries.	British
Hardy, Thomas	Far From the Madding Crowd	A young woman inherits a sheep farm and must learn how to manage it as well as her love life.	British
Haruf, Kent	Plainsong	Story of several members of a tiny prairie community who come together in the face of great personal difficulties. Beautifully written. Deals with some tough issues but is never sentimental. Sort of a grown-up version of Martha Brooks' <i>True Confessions of a Heartless Girl</i> , where kindness and generosity ultimately triumph.	American 1999
Hawthorne, Nathaniel	The Scarlet Letter	Set in 1642 Puritan Boston where a young woman becomes a social outcast due to her illegitimate child and her unwillingness to name the father.	American
Hay, Elizabeth	*Late Nights on Air	Story of a group of people who work for a radio station in the Northwest Territories: their dreams, losses, loves. Culminates in a canoe trip to the Far North in which they imitate the voyage of a doomed adventurer.	Cdn
Heller, Joseph	Catch 22	Classic satire about war.	American
Hickam, Homer	October Sky	A blend of fiction and autobiography; about a boy, his friends, and their rockets.	American

Holeman, Linda	Mercy's Birds	Grade 10 girl's life is spinning out of control. Selected by NY Public Library as one of its 1998 recommended books for teens. Mother has problem with depression and creepy boyfriend. Highly recommended.	YA
Holeman, Linda	Raspberry House Blues	16 yr. old Vancouver girl doesn't get along with her adoptive mother, stays with her dad and his new family in Winnipeg. Searches for biological mother and discovers what real family love can be like. Lovely story!	YA, Cdn (SWC)
Holeman, Linda	Search of the Moon King's Daughter	Set in 1830s London and Manchester, a young girl must fend for herself when her mother is injured and her young brother, who is deaf, is sold. Vivid portrayal of the contrasts of Victorian life, with an engaging, determined protagonist. Wonderful supporting characters, drama, suspense, and a hint of romance.	YA (SWC)
Hughes, Monica	Blaine's Way	A young man's World War II experiences and how they have changed him.	YA, Cdn (SWC)
Hughes, Monica	Hunter in the Dark	An 18 yr.-old boy comes to terms with his serious illness during a hunting trip.	YA, Cdn (SWC)
Hughes, Monica	Storm Warning	Sandra Williams seems like an ordinary teenager, on holidays with her family at a northern Ontario resort town. Then she is paired up with Bryan for scuba diving. Only he can help Sandra solve a terrible mystery that links the two families in a tragic history.	YA (SWC)
Hurston, Zora Neale	Their Eyes Were Watching God	Set in the 1930s, about an African-American woman in the South. Challenging to read because of the use of dialect, but worth the effort. On many highly regarded reading lists.	
Huxley, Aldous	Brave New World	About an oppressive society and how it deals with people that don't fit.	British
Itani, Frances	Deafening	Historical fiction; story of a deaf young woman, set during WWI. Includes the effects of war on the people at home and the soldiers on the front lines, as well as an account of the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918.	
Jansen, Hanna	*Over a Thousand Hills I Walk with You	The account of a young Rwandan girl's survival during the 1994 genocide. Retold by her adopted mother; translated from the German. At times painful to read, but authentic and compelling.	YA, African 2006
Kesey, Ken	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	Life in a somewhat unusual insane asylum that was made into a very successful movie starring Jack Nicholson.	American
King, Thomas	Green Grass Running Water	Magical realism/fantasy. Includes characters from aboriginal mythology.	Cdn
Lawson, Mary	Crow Lake The Other Side of the Bridge	Story of the loss suffered by one family and how each individual copes. Set in Northern Ontario. Two very different brothers, a farm, a small-town doctor and his son, a beautiful young woman and her children are all the ingredients of a deceptively simple tale that is set against the backdrop of World War II in a northern Ontario town.	Cdn
LeGuin, Ursula	Tehanu The Dispossessed The Left Hand of Darkness	Sequel (written years later) to the Earthsea trilogy. Fantasy. Science fiction with a more philosophical bent. Fantasy about a society where gender changes by the season. Very interesting to read today as the notion of "family" evolves.	YA,(SWC)
Lohans, Alison	No Place for Kids	A story about two girls on the run after the death of their mother and their father's descent into drugs and alcohol. Honest and direct, this story follows the two sisters' journey through enclaves of urban homelessness in Winnipeg and Regina as they travel to their aunt's in Vancouver.	YA (SWC)
Lynch, Chris	Inexcusable	Keir is a high school senior about to graduate. He knows that he's a good guy but he's being accused of something that good guys just do not do. A story about truth, lies and responsibility. Not for the faint-hearted but very realistically presented. National Book Award finalist.	2005 YA
Marsden, John	So Much to Tell You	A young girl's journal entries are her "voice" as she struggles to come to terms with personal tragedy.	YA, Aus (SWC)
Marsden, John	Winter	Another great book by Marsden, this time about a girl who returns to her home 12 years after being orphaned at age 4. Very strong-willed and independent, she unravels the mystery of her mother's death. Suspenseful, and well-written. At only 150 pages in length, a quick but satisfying read.	YA, Aus 2000
Marsden, John	Tomorrow, When the War Began (series)	A group of teens are caught in the middle of a war. Set in Australia.	YA, Aus (SWC)
McClintock, Norah	Password: Murder	17-year-old Harley faces the nightmare of his father's death, in a car accident in which Harley was the driver. But he is visited by a ghost who assures him that murder was the cause of death. Harley and his best friend Rat try to solve the mystery. (Two-time Arthur Ellis Award-winning mystery writer.)	YA (SWC)
McNaughton, Janet	An Earthly Knight	Set in 1162, 16 yr. old Lady Jeanette, daughter of a minor Norman nobleman, is chosen as a potential bride for the heir of the King of Scotland. She meets a mysterious young man said to have been kidnapped by fairies. A beautifully woven story set in a magical, medieval world about a young woman with an independent	YA, Cdn (SWC)

		spirit.	
Mori, Kyoko	Shizuko's Daughter	A young Japanese girl is forced to deal with the loss of a beloved mother.	YA, Japan (SWC)
Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin	*Three Cups of Tea	An utterly inspiring and captivating read about Greg Mortenson, an American mountaineer who gets lost on his way down a mountain and ends up building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Subtitled "One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time", it is an antidote to today's debates over the war in Afghanistan and far more realistic and informative than <i>The Kite Runner</i> .	Amer 2006 Non-fiction
Na, An	A Step from Heaven Wait For Me	A young girl from Korea struggles to adjust to life in California. Told from her point of view as she grows from a child to an adolescent. A "tale of both tragedy and triumph" and multiple award winner. As her senior year in high school approaches, Mina yearns to find her own path in life but working at the family business, taking care of her little sister (who is deaf), and dealing with her mother's impossible expectations are as stifling as the southern California heat, until she falls in love with a young man who offers a way out. (amazon.ca)	YA, Korean-Amer
Nattel, Lilian	The River Midnight The Singing Fire	The interwoven story of four young Jewish women and their lives and secrets in a Polish village in the 1890s. Story of two Jewish women who emigrate from Poland to 1880s London accompanied by their ghostly grandmothers. Very realistic portrayal of the gritty streets of London.	Cdn (SWC)
Nix, Garth	Sabriel (first book of trilogy followed by <i>Lirael</i> and <i>Abhorsen</i>)	Fantasy series that "reads like realism". Intelligent, inventive, and written with careful attention to detail. Adventure/fantasy; Australian award winner.	YA, Aus (SWC)
Richler, Mordecai	The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz	A young ambitious Jewish boy sets out to get himself some land and be a somebody, no matter what it takes. Set in post-war Montréal.	Cdn (SWC)
Salinger, J.D.	Catcher in the Rye	Holden Caulfield seeks to discover meaning in his life.	(SWC)
See, Lisa	*Snowflower and the Secret Fan	Set in 19 th century China, this novel explores the relationship between two young girls who are pledged to one another in an effort to improve their social status. Includes a horrifying description of the cultural practice of footbinding, as well as details about nu shu, a secret language that allowed isolated women to communicate with each other.	American
Slade, Arthur	Tribes	An intriguing story about the very unique Percy Montmount, Jr. and his last year of high school. Can't say much more without giving too much away. If you want to read something a little different, check this one out.	YA, Cdn
Smith, Alexander McCall	The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency	First in a series of 5 books. Set in Botswana (Africa). 35 yr. old Mma Ramotswa solves cases ranging from missing husbands to suspected murder. NOT your typical suspenseful mystery; "smart & sassy" with "the power to shock, amuse or touch the heart".	Afr
Suskind, Ron	A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League	Based on the Wall Street Journal series that won a Pulitzer Prize, this is an inspiring account of a young African-American teen and his rejection of the inner city world of drug dealing and violence. His academic and social struggles are chronicled very realistically, without melodrama, providing a gritty glimpse into his world. Reads like fiction but is far more intriguing than the usual Disney-like fare. NY Times Book Review 'best book'.	Non-fiction (St. Cath. Library)
Tan, Amy	The Joy Luck Club	The story of four Chinese mothers and their Chinese-American daughters, told through the perspective of each one. Interweaves the experiences of the Chinese mothers and their past lives in China with the lives of their more modern, Americanized daughters.	American
Tolkien, J.R.R.	The Lord of the Rings (trilogy)	Fantasy; hobbits and wizards battle evil.	Brit (SWC)
Tsukiyama, Gail	The Samurai's Garden Women of the Silk The Language of Threads Night of Many Dreams	All beautifully written books! For someone who wants a bit more of a challenge. Tsukiyama, an American with Chinese and Japanese parents, provides an interesting cultural perspective.	Asian-Amer
Yolen, Jane	Briar Rose	Sleeping Beauty and the Holocaust woven together in an unforgettable, powerful story.	American
Zusak, Markus	The Book Thief	It's about, among other things, a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist fighter, and quite a lot of thievery. Narrated by Death, this is an unusual but unforgettable book about people living in Nazi Germany from about 1935 to 1943. Both brutal and beautiful and well worth reading. Highly recommended.	Australian 2006 (SWC)
Zusak, Markus	*I am the Messenger	19 yr. old Ed has little to do except share a run-down apartment with his faithful yet smelly dog, drive his taxi, and play cards and drink with his amiable yet similarly washed-up friends. Then, after he stops a bank robbery, Ed begins receiving anonymous messages marked in code on playing cards and his life begins to	Australian

change. Zusak's style and characters are edgy and the plot has its dark moments. Young Adult fiction award-winner.

Please note that as this list is intended for senior students, some books are "adult" books with mature themes and language.

* new to list

You can also check out book lists on the Internet, such as YALSA, Booklist (American Library Association), Canadian Library Association.

(THIS SECTION STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION!)

STILL TO BE ADDED TO ABOVE LIST:

Author	Title	Comment	Category
Chopin, Kate	The Awakening	set in 1890s Louisiana	Amer
Desai, Anita	Fire on the Mountain		Indian
Du Maurier, Daphne	Rebecca	in style of Gothic romance	Brit
Fowles, John	The French Lieutenant's Woman		Amer
Kingsolver, Barbara	The Poisonwood Bible	A missionary family travels to Africa and experiences culture shock and death.	Amer
Kinsella, W.P.	Shoeless Joe	baseball fantasy	Cdn/Amer
Laurence, Margaret	The Diviners		Cdn
LeGuin, Ursula	The Dispossessed	sci fi/fantasy; philosophical	Brit
LeGuin, Ursula	The Left Hand of Darkness	sci fi/fantasy	Brit
Levy, Andrea	Small Island	Plot revolves around two Jamaicans and two Britons in post- WWII London. Their stories are told from the point of view of each character and interconnect in interesting ways.	
Mason, Daniel	The Piano Tuner	Set in late 1880s, a piano tuner is needed to repair a piano in Burma. Much of the story concerns this ordinary man's travels through the jungle, and what happens when he arrives at his destination.	Amer
McCullers, Carson	The Heart is a Lonely Hunter	Story of how a deaf man helps four outsiders come to a better understanding of themselves. Point of view shifts throughout story. Set in the 1930s in the American South.	Amer
McMurtry, Larry	Lonesome Dove	cattle drive from Texas to Montana	Amer
Mistry, Rohinton	Such a Long Journey	set in India	Cdn; born in India
Ondaatje, Michael	Anil's Ghost	The protagonist, a native Sri Lankan, left her homeland at 18 and returns to it 15 years later as part of an international human rights mission. She is a forensic anthropologist--a career that has landed her in the killing fields of Central America, digging up the victims of Guatemala's dirty war.	Cdn; born in Sri Lanka
Ondaatje, Michael	In the Skin of a Lion	set in Toronto	Cdn; born in Sri Lanka
Orwell, George	1984	life in futuristic police state * studied in gr. 12	Brit
Ostenso, Martha	Wild Geese	life on a farm; family relationships	Amer
Paton, Alan	Cry, The Beloved Country	Set in South Africa during Apartheid.	South African

Proulx, E. Annie	The Shipping News	set in Nfld	Cdn/Amer
Remarque, Erich Maria	All Quiet on the Western Front	theme of war	German
Ricci, Nino	In a Glass House	Italian immigrants struggle to survive in Southwestern Ontario.	Cdn
Ricci, Nino	Testament	A provocative version of the story of Jesus according to four witnesses.	Cdn
Richards, David Adams	Mercy Among the Children	Set in New Brunswick. Poverty-stricken family in a small rural community.	Cdn
Rizzuto, Rahna Reiko	Why She Left Us	Three generations of a Japanese-American family tragically affected by WWII and the internment.	Amer
Scott, Paul	The Jewel in the Crown (trilogy)	set in 1940s in India	Brit
Shelley, Mary	Frankenstein	The original horror story.	Brit
Shields, Carol	Larry's Party	The story of an ordinary guy, his job (he loves garden mazes), his life, his loves.	Cdn
Steinbeck, John	The Grapes of Wrath	Oklahoma farmers travel to California during 1930s after losing their farm	Amer
Steinbeck, John	Of Mice and Men	two men struggle to survive during Great Depression	Amer
Stephenson, William	A Man Called Intrepid (non-fiction)	true story of Canadian part in discovery of Enigma code breaking machine (WWII)	Cdn
Tan, Amy	The Kitchen God's Wife		Chinese-Amer
Turner Hospital, Janette	The Ivory Swing	set in India	Cdn/ Australian
Urquhart, Jane	Aw ay	Irish immigrants	Cdn
Urquhart, Jane	The Stone Carvers		Cdn
Vanderhaeghe, Guy	The Last Crossing	Set on the Canadian and American frontier borderlands at the end of the 19th century; an old-fashioned Western tale of adventure and character <i>and</i> a modern, multi-voiced story of cultural conflict.	West Cdn.
Vassanji, M.G.	The Book of Secrets	British colonialism and the Asian community in East Africa. 1994 Giller Prize winner.	Indo-Afr?-Cdn
Walker, Alice	The Color Purple	Celie	African-Amer
Wharton, Edith	The Age of Innocence	set in New York in the 1870s	Amer
Williams, Tennessee	The Glass Menagerie A Streetcar Named Desire	plays worth reading	Amer
Wynd, Oswald	The Ginger Tree	Brit. woman in Japan has love affair with Japanese man; later is forced to become independent. Interesting historical events.	British