

# WARING SCHOOL CHOICE BOOKS

## SUMMER 2009

Choice Books are divided into three categories:

--Books for those in Core and Group 1

--Books for anyone to choose

--Books for Groups 2-5

Please write a notecard on a particular aspect of your chosen book and submit that "card" to your group leader when you meet in September. We encourage you, of course, to do *lots* of reading this summer, for both pleasure and personal growth!

Here are synopses of all choice books, copied (in most cases) from amazon.com.

### For Core and Group 1 Exclusively

#### 1. *The Cay*/Theodore Taylor

This award-winning novel remains a powerful classic of prejudice, love, and survival. In 1942, 11-year-old Phillip Enright lives with his parents on the Dutch island of Curaçao, but when the war moves too close for comfort, his mother decides to travel with him back to the safety of Virginia. When their boat is torpedoed, however, Phillip is blinded and finds himself adrift on a life raft with an old black man and a cat. They eventually land on a deserted island. Phillip is suspicious of "the large Negro," but soon grows to trust--and ultimately love--the patient and generous Timothy.

#### 2. *Ender's Game* **AND** *Ender's Shadow*/Orson Scott Card

*Ender's Game*: This futuristic tale involves aliens, political discourse on the Internet, sophisticated computer games, and an orbiting battle station. Yet the reason it rings true for so many is that it is first and foremost a tale of humanity; a tale of a boy struggling to grow up into someone he can respect while living in an environment stripped of choices.

*Ender's Shadow*: Orson Scott Card has added a parallel novel that occupies the same time frame as *Ender's Game* and chronicles many of the same events. Children are being tested, the best and the brightest being placed into a school where they will be trained for the eminent and final fight to the death between humanity and the insect-like "Buggers." *Shadow* shifts from Ender to Bean as the protagonist and presents the events from Bean's perspective, with his own unique viewpoints. Complex three-dimensional characters, a strong story line, and vivid writing all combine to make this an exceptional work.

### 3. *The Secret Garden*/Burnett/Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frightened orphan Mary discovers the joyful wonders of life on the Yorkshire Moors with the help of two local boys and a mysterious, abandoned garden...where all things seem possible.

#### **For Students in All Groups**

1. *Three Cups of Tea*/ Greg Mortenson While critics agree that *Three Cups of Tea* should be read for its inspirational value rather than for its literary merit, the book's central theme, derived from a Baltistan proverb, rings loud and clear. "The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger," a villager tells Greg Mortenson. "The second time, you are an honored guest. The third time you become family." An inspirational story of one man's efforts to address poverty, educate girls, and overcome cultural divides, *Three Cups* reveals the enormous obstacles inherent in becoming such "family."

2. *Rowing to Latitude*/Jill Freestone Growing up in a house on the waters of Long Island, Fredston started rowing at the age of ten, when she got her first rowboat. She and her husband, Doug Fesler, are avalanche experts and co-directors of the Alaska Mountain Safety Center, but during the summer months they explore the desolate reaches of the North, traveling under their own power in oceangoing skulls and kayaks. This is the story of their 20,000-mile water journeys through Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Spitsbergen, and Norway.

3. *Nation*/Terry Pratchett Somewhere in the South Pelagic Ocean, a tidal wave wipes out the population of a small island—except for Mau, who was paddling his dugout canoe home after a month spent alone, preparing to become a man. The wave also sweeps a sailing ship carrying Daphne, an English girl, up onto the island and deposits it in the rain forest, where Mau finds her. Over the months that follow, they learn to communicate while welcoming more people to their shores and building a community of survivors. Mau searches for the meaning behind his people's gods, while Daphne applies her nineteenth-century knowledge of science and history to the many puzzles she discovers in this unfamiliar place. Broad in its scope and concrete in its details, this unusual novel strips away the trappings of two very different nations to consider what it is people value and why.

#### 4. *Diary of Anne Frank*

This startling new edition of Dutch Jewish teenager Anne Frank's classic diary written in an Amsterdam warehouse, where for two years she hid from the Nazis with her family and friends contains approximately 30% more material than the original 1947 edition. It completely revises our understanding of one of the most moving and eloquent documents of the Holocaust. The Anne we meet here is much more sarcastic, rebellious and vulnerable than the sensitive diarist beloved by millions. In the end, Anne's teen angst pales beside her profound insights, her self-discovery and her unbroken faith in good triumphing over evil.

**5. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*/Brian Selznick** A 500+ page book that's told just equally by pictures as it is by text. It is also like nothing you've ever seen before. No other children's book has even come close.

Without Hugo Cabret, none of the clocks in the magnificent Paris train station he lives in would work. Though he's only a kid, Hugo tends to the clocks every day. But there's something even more important in the boy's life than gigantic mechanics. Hugo owns a complex automaton, once his father's, that was damaged in a fire and it is his life's goal to make the little machine work again. To do so, he's been stealing small toys from an old shopkeeper in the station. One day the man catches Hugo in the act, and suddenly the two are thrown together. Coincidences, puzzles, lost keys, and a mystery from the past combine in this complex tale of old and new. The story is told with pictures that act out the action and then several pages of text that describe the plot elements. The final effect is like watching a puzzle work itself into clarity.

**6. *Ellen Foster*/Kaye Gibbons** In *Ellen Foster*, the title character is an 11-year-old orphan who refers to herself as "old Ellen," a description that is disturbingly apt. Ellen is an old woman in a child's body; her frail, unhappy mother dies, her abusive father alternately neglects her and makes advances on her, and she is shuttled from one uncaring relative's home to another before she finally takes matters into her own hands and finds herself a place to belong. There is something almost Dickensian about Ellen's tribulations; like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* or a host of other literary child heroes, Ellen is at the mercy of predatory adults, with only her own wit and courage--and the occasional kindness of others--to help her through. That she does, in fact, survive her childhood and even rise above it is the book's bittersweet victory.

**7. *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic—and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World*/Steven Johnson** The idiosyncratic thinker and cultural historian Steven Johnson leaps from trumpeting video games (in his previous book *Everything Bad Is Good for You*) to uncovering the history of murderous cholera infestations in London and the scientific research that revealed the microbial origins of the outbreaks.

## **For Students in Groups 2-5**

**1. *Henry IV, Part 1*/ William Shakespeare** *Henry IV, Part One*, ostensibly a history play, is concerned with the growth and maturation of Prince Henry (Hal, Harry) as he chooses between his duty to his father and his country and his desire to live the "easy life" shown to him by Jack Falstaff, a perpetually drunken knight. Will Hal be up to the challenge? Will his father ever find him to be worthy? Will he choose a life of debauchery? Will his rival Hotspur show him up? Tune in to this play and find out.

**2. *In Search of Fatima*/Ghada Karmi** Karmi, a doctor and founding member of the British political group Palestine Action, relates her quest for cultural identity after her "fragile... and misfit Arab family" leaves Jerusalem for England during the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Ironically, they resettle in a Jewish neighborhood in London; Karmi, aged nine, quickly begins to assimilate—becoming an avid reader of English literature and befriending Jewish neighbors—despite her mother's insistence on traditional Palestinian culinary customs, dating mores and family codes. Over the next two decades, events in the Middle East make their non-Arab neighbors increasingly hostile and her Jewish friends' pro-Israel fervor grows; after the Palestinian terrorist hijackings of the 1970s, some acquaintances refuse to speak to her. Karmi becomes an impassioned pro-Palestinian activist. The book's straightforward tone may appeal to politically minded readers looking for insight into the Palestinian exile experience.

**3. *House of Mirth*/Edith Wharton** *The House of Mirth* tells the story of Lily Bart, aged 29, beautiful, impoverished and in need of a rich husband to safeguard her place in the social elite, and to support her expensive habits - her clothes, her charities and her gambling. Unwilling to marry without both love and money, Lily becomes vulnerable to the kind of gossip and slander which attach to a girl who has been on the marriage market for too long. Wharton charts the course of Lily's life, providing, along the way, a wider picture of a society in transition, a rapidly changing New York where the old certainties of manners, morals and family have disappeared and the individual has become an expendable commodity.

**4. *The Baron in the Trees*/Italo Calvino** Cosimo, a young eighteenth-century Italian nobleman, rebels by climbing into the trees to remain there for the rest of his life. He adapts efficiently to an arboreal existence and even has love affairs. Calvino, as you can probably tell, was one of the most inventive fiction writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**5. *Survival in Auschwitz*/Primo Levi** *Survival in Auschwitz* is a mostly straightforward narrative, beginning with Primo Levi's deportation from Turin, Italy, to the concentration camp Auschwitz in Poland in 1943. Levi, then a 25-year-old chemist, spent 10 months in the camp. Even Levi's most graphic descriptions of the horrors he witnessed and endured there are marked by a restraint and wit that not only gives readers access to his experience, but confronts them with it in stark ethical and emotional terms: "[A]t dawn the barbed wire was full of children's washing hung out in the wind to dry. Nor did they forget the diapers, the toys, the cushions and the hundred other small things which mothers remember and which children always need. Would you not do the same? If you and your child were going to be killed tomorrow, would you not give him something to eat today?"

**6. *Bleak House*/Charles Dickens** Written in 1853, when Dickens was at his peak, *Bleak House* is often considered Dickens's best novel. Set in the 1850s, the novel tells several interconnected stories involving dozens of characters from all levels of society, giving a broad picture of life in London and in the countryside during this period. As is often the case with Dickens, his satire and humor enliven his sometimes dark subjects, without blunting his criticism of bureaucracy and the mistreatment of children. The novel is huge, not just in terms of length but in its universal themes, its characterizations, and the magnitude of its reach.