

## Reading List – Battle of the Books 2026

### **1984 by George Orwell, 1949**

A masterpiece of rebellion and imprisonment where war is peace, freedom is slavery, and Big Brother is watching. *Thought Police, Big Brother, Orwellian* - these words have entered our vocabulary because of George Orwell's classic dystopian novel *1984*. The story of one man's Nightmare Odyssey as he pursues a forbidden love affair through a world ruled by warring states and a power structure that controls not only information, but also individual thought and memory, *1984* is a prophetic haunting tale. More relevant than ever before, *1984* exposes the worst crimes imaginable: the destruction of truth, freedom, and individuality.

TW: Sexually explicit scenes, torture, violence

### **The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros, 1984**

*The House on Mango Street* is one of the most cherished novels of the last fifty years. Readers from all walks of life have fallen for the voice of Esperanza, growing up in Chicago and inventing for herself who and what she will become. "In English my name means hope," she says. "In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting." Told in a series of vignettes—sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes joyous—Cisneros's masterpiece is a classic story of childhood and self-discovery, and one of the greatest neighborhood novels of all time. This gorgeous coming-of-age novel is a celebration of the power of telling one's story and of being proud of where you're from.

TW: Ableism, racism, sexual assault, suicidal ideation

### **The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky, 1999**

The critically acclaimed debut novel from Stephen Chbosky follows observant "wallflower" Charlie as he charts a course through the strange world between adolescence and adulthood. First dates, family drama, and new friends. Sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Devastating loss, young love, and life on the fringes. Caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it, Charlie must learn to navigate those wild and poignant roller-coaster days known as growing up.

TW: drug use, domestic abuse, sexual assault, homophobia, suicide

### **Crazy Rich Asians by Kevin Kwan, 2013**

*Crazy Rich Asians* is the outrageously funny debut novel about three super-rich, pedigreed Chinese families and the gossip, backbiting, and scheming that occurs when the heir to one of the most massive fortunes in Asia brings home his ABC (American-born Chinese) girlfriend to the wedding of

the season. When Rachel Chu agrees to spend the summer in Singapore with her boyfriend, Nicholas Young, she envisions a humble family home, long drives to explore the island, and quality time with the man she might one day marry. What she doesn't know is that Nick's family home happens to look like a palace, that she'll ride in more private planes than cars, and that with one of Asia's most eligible bachelors on her arm, Rachel might as well have a target on her back.

**TW: Racism & racial slurs, domestic abuse**

### **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie, 2007**

Bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior, a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Determined to take his future into his own hands, Junior leaves his troubled school on the rez to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot.

Heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which is based on the author's own experiences, coupled with poignant drawings by Ellen Forney that reflect the character's art, chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he was destined to live.

**TW: Alcoholism, animal abuse, bullying, racism, eating disorders**

### **Guantánamo Kid: The True Story of Mohammed El-Gharani by Jérôme Tubiana and Alexandre Franc, 2019**

Saudi Arabia offers few prospects for the bright young Mohammed El-Gharani. At the age of 14, having scraped together some money as a street trader, Mohammed seizes an opportunity to study in Pakistan. One Friday in Karachi, Mohammed is detained during a raid on his local mosque.

After being beaten and interrogated, he is sold to the American government by the Pakistani forces as a member of Al-Qaida with links to Osama Bin Laden, but Mohammed has heard of neither. The Americans fly him first to Kandahar and then to Guantánamo Bay. In *Guantánamo Kid*, Jérôme Tubiana and Alexandre Franc tell the eye-opening, heart-wrenching true story of one of Guantánamo's youngest detainees.

**TW: Torture, terrorism, child abuse, nudity, suicide**

### **Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults) by Bryan Stevenson, 2018**

**\*Note: This is the young adult version of the acclaimed book. If not borrowed from the DAI, please be sure to read the correct version! ISBN: 978-0-525-58006-5\***

In this very personal work--adapted from the original #1 bestseller, which the *New York Times* calls "as compelling as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and in some ways more so"--acclaimed lawyer and social justice advocate Bryan Stevenson offers a glimpse into the lives of the wrongfully imprisoned and his efforts to fight for their freedom.

Stevenson's story is one of working to protect basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society--the poor, the wrongly convicted, and those whose lives have been marked by discrimination and marginalization. Through this adaptation, young people of today will find themselves called to action and compassion in the pursuit of justice.

TW: Death, police brutality, racism, depression, homelessness

### **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon, 2003**

The *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is a murder mystery novel like no other. The detective and narrator is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a very great deal about math and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colors yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbor's dog murdered, he sets out on a terrifying journey which will turn his whole world upside down.

TW: Death, animal abuse, assault, police violence

### **The House in the Cerulean Sea by TJ Klune, 2020**

Linus Baker leads a quiet life. At forty, he has a tiny house with a devious cat and his beloved records for company. And at the Department in Charge of Magical Youth, he's spent many dull years monitoring their orphanages. Then one day, Linus is summoned by Extremely Upper Management and given a highly classified assignment. He must travel to an orphanage where six dangerous children reside - including the Antichrist. At the orphanage, Linus must somehow determine if these children could bring about the end of days. But their guardian, the charming and enigmatic Arthur Parnassus, will do anything to protect his wards. And, as Arthur and Linus grow ever closer, Linus must choose: his duty, or his dreams.

TW: Anxiety, homophobia, violence against children

### **The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1925**

*The Great Gatsby* stands as the supreme achievement of F. Scott Fitzgerald's career. First published in 1925, this quintessential novel of the Jazz Age has been acclaimed by generations of readers. The story of the mysteriously wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan, of lavish parties on Long Island at a time when The New York Times noted "gin was the national drink and sex the national obsession," it is an exquisitely crafted tale of America in the 1920s.

TW: Alcohol, death, murder, misogynistic violence

Copies of each book can be borrowed from the DAI library, except "Guantánamo Kid." eBooks and/or audiobooks versions of many of the books can be borrowed via eBooksUSA (with a valid DAI library card). All book descriptions are taken from Thalia and Good Reads.