

**Saint Francis High School
Honors Great Books
Summer Reading 2020**

Honors Great Books students are required to read Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. Check the ISBN when you purchase your copy so that you bring the correct edition to class: 1451678193. In the first week of school, you will be tested on your understanding of the novel.

For the 2nd book—Choose **one** book from the list below. You will be required to give a brief presentation on it to the class, and you will complete an additional graded assignment based on your choice novel.

And Then There Were None by Agatha Christie

This is the most famous mystery novel. It is at the top of our list for a reason: everyone likes it. It's a "safe" pick for summer reading. Some of my sophomores finished it in one day since they could not put it down. Ten strangers arrive at a secluded island off England's coast after receiving a letter from someone they do not know. The millionaire who invited them is aware of their dark secrets. Will any character return to the mainland? **NOTE: This is highly recommended. Students in the past said it "didn't seem like homework."**

Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton

With this novella, published in 1911, readers learn a lot about what life was like in New England long ago. The author may be America's greatest female writer of fiction. Your grandparents probably read this since *Ethan Frome* was once read by every high school student--a classic! The book is no longer assigned in high schools since reading skills have gone down, but you can handle this challenge..

I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai

Students interested in current events will enjoy this non-fiction book by a young woman who stood up to the Taliban. She describes life in one of the most conservative parts of Pakistan, where the language is Pashto (not English, not Urdu) and where females are not encouraged to be educated. She was attacked on October 9, 2012, when she returned from school on a bus. Her courage will inspire you, but not all students enjoy non-fiction.

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See

This book transports the reader to ancient China while focusing on the best friend bond between two young girls. The narrative has many twists and turns as they age -- with relationships, children, and natural disasters which test their ability to stay connected.

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway's influence was huge in the 20th century. This novella, published in 1952, is about Santiago struggling with a giant marlin in the Gulf Stream. He is an impoverished fisherman living in Cuba. Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men..." -- look for symbolism and Biblical allusions in Hemingway's work. This was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953, but don't pick this if you expect an exciting plot. It's not that kind of book. It's a book that pleases advanced readers who can pick up on what happens in literature under the surface.

Girl With A Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier

This novel will appeal to students with a love for the visual arts. Griet is a young servant in the household of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. Readers learn the stories behind different Vermeer paintings, but one painting in particular takes center stage -- the 1665 masterwork of a girl wearing a headscarf and a pearl earring. It's an average size novel with a good plot. It helps if you want to understand Europe in the 17th century.

The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man by James Weldon Johnson

This covers race and racism in America more than a century ago. It is realistic fiction by an African American writer. The "autobiography" in the title is part of the fiction. Our narrator, who is biracial, undergoes good times and bad in America's post-Reconstruction era and in the early 20th century. After he witnesses a lynching, he decides to "pass" as a white man, thus securing safety and advancement. I admire the passages about ragtime, Frederick Douglass, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Pullman cars, pre-war Berlin, and hymns sung at revival meetings. It is not a traditional novel, so this won't please all students.

The Death of Ivan Ilyich by Leo Tolstoy

Tolstoy's reputation as a literary master is nearly as great as Shakespeare's, but few people today make time for his huge novels, so try this short work as an introduction to a Russian master. The novella seems to be about death but is really about living, asking if human perception changes as one approaches the end. Does one feel a progression toward something different? You'll be impressed by Gerasim, the servant who provides comfort during Ivan's illness. Some editions include an editor's intro, but that's optional for you to read. **NOTE: This is one of the most challenging of the "choice" selections due to a somber subject matter.**

Persuasion by Jane Austen

This has the advantage of being short for a Jane Austen novel, and some readers view it as among her best. The passage describing Louise Musgrove falling on the pavement on the Lower Cobb in Lyme Regis is immortal! Anne's vain father is among literature's greatest comic characters. **NOTE: This is one of the most challenging of the "choice" selections due to the complex language. You probably shouldn't pick this unless you've read Jane Austen novels before.**

The Ox-Bow Incident by Walter Van Tilburg Clark

In this western novel with a setting in and around Reno, a mob of 28 men are determined to bring swift justice to men accused of stealing cattle--really they form a lynch mob. But a handful of characters realize that "mob justice" is an oxymoron, so they protest. It is not easy for righteous individuals to stand up to a wrong-headed crowd. **NOTE: tTis is challenging but should interest you if you care about the law and take a dim view of "mob justice."**

All Creatures Great and Small by James Herriot

This book should appeal to animal lovers, Anglophiles, and readers who admire good writing. The setting is England's Yorkshire district, which is far from cities, during the 1930s. Wildly popular when published in 1972, the book is fiction, but the author drew from his many decades as a veterinarian, so you may view it as a mix of fiction and autobiography. **NOTE: This book is longer than other selections on this summer reading list. If you have zero interest in British culture, don't pick this.**

Candide by Voltaire

Voltaire was a philosopher of the Age of Enlightenment. This satire published in 1759 helped paved the way for the French Revolution. The young Candide struggles with disillusionment as he experiences great hardships. He ends up adopting the attitude that "we must cultivate our garden" after rejecting the idea that "all is for the best" in the "best of all possible worlds." **NOTE: This is not a traditional novel, so it might mystify some readers. At least it is short.**

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro

This is set mainly in the 1930s. The narrator is Stevens, a perfect butler in one of the stately homes of England, which means a grand house like in the *Downton Abbey* TV series. The butler has surprising reactions to events happening in the home, including the visit of Nazis and the dismissal of Jewish servants. After World War II, the house is in decline despite a rich American purchasing it. **NOTE: This is one of the most challenging of the "choice" selections. Pick this only if you are an advanced reader.**

Washington Square by Henry James

Try this if you loved *Daisy Miller* in English 9. Henry James is a master of language, but his complex sentences are a challenge for students. Catherine Harrington falls for Morris Townsend and is happy until her father discourages Catherine from marrying this fortune hunter. The father thinks no man can love Catherine for herself and cruelly says her inherited money is her sole attractive feature. Morris may fake love for Catherine, but does that matter if Catherine is happy? Should she reject Morris just because he is interested in money? She fears she is too plain to have any other chance at happiness. **NOTE: this is one of the most challenging of the "choice" selections. Pick this only if you loved *Daisy Miller*.**

The Country of the Pointed Firs by Sarah Orne Jewett

This is assigned in college as a perfect example of “local color realism.” Jewett captures the dialect, manners, and living habits of people living in the 1890s on the coast of Maine, where women are strong and men are weak. We enter the lives of ordinary people in a more innocent time--well, the times were not too innocent. We learn of Joanna, who moved to an island to live alone as punishment for committing the “unpardonable sin” (she had cursed God). **NOTE: this is one of the most challenging of the “choice” selections**