

SENIOR BOOK TALK

Name _____

Please RANK your top 3 choices (3-2-1) and hand this packet back to your mentor.

→ Next week during third block you will be called down to the Cafeteria to get their book, assignment and to sign a contract.

BETTER by Atul Gawande

Explanation: The struggle to perform well is universal: each of us faces fatigue, limited resources, and imperfect abilities in whatever we do. But nowhere is this drive to do better more important than in medicine, where lives may be on the line with any decision. Atul Gawande examines, in riveting accounts of medical failure and triumph, how success is achieved in this complex and risk-filled profession.

FREAKONOMICS by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner

Explanation: The book is a collection of 'economic' articles written by Levitt, an expert who has already gained a reputation for applying economic theory to diverse subjects not usually covered by "traditional" economists; he does, however, accept the standard neoclassical microeconomic model of rational utility-maximization. In *Freakonomics*, Levitt and Dubner argue that economics is, at root, the study of incentives. The book's topics include:

A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khalid Hussein

Explanation: Propelled by the same superb instinct for storytelling that made *The Kite Runner* a beloved classic, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is at once an incredible chronicle of thirty years of Afghan history and a deeply moving story of family, friendship, faith, and the salvation to be found in love. Born a generation apart and with very different ideas about love and family, Mariam and Laila are two women brought jarringly together by war, by loss and by fate.

Kindred by Octavia Butler

Explanation: Dana, a modern black woman, is celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday with her new husband when she is snatched abruptly from her home in California and transported to the antebellum South. Rufus, the white son of a plantation owner, is drowning, and Dana has been summoned to save him. Dana is drawn back repeatedly through time to the slave quarters, and each time the stay grows longer, more arduous, and more dangerous until it is uncertain whether or not Dana's life will end, long before it has a chance to begin.

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

Explanation: The story is about a year in the life of a young black girl named Pecola who develops an inferiority complex due to her eye color and skin appearance. She wishes to have blue eyes. It is set in Lorain, Ohio, against the backdrop of America's Midwest during the years following the Great Depression. Because of the controversial nature of the book, which deals with racism, incest, child molestation, self-image and insanity, there have been numerous attempts to ban it from schools and libraries.

THE PACT by Jodi Picoult

Explanation: In this contemporary tale of love and friendship, Jodi Picoult brings to life a familiar world, and in a single terrifying moment awakens every parent's worst fear: We think we know our children... but do we ever really know them at all? For eighteen years the Hartes and the Golds have lived next door to each other, sharing everything from Chinese food to chicken pox to carpool duty-- they've grown so close it seems they have always been a part of each other's lives. Parents and children alike have been best friends. So, it's no surprise that in high school, Chris and Emily's friendship blossoms into something more. They've been soul mates since they were born.

SOMETHING LIKE NORMAL by Trish Doller

Explanation: Travis Stephenson is back home in Florida, on leave from Afghanistan where he has been serving on active duty as a U.S. Marine. The war has changed him, and upon his return, he is overwhelmed by his hometown, his friends, and his family. His ex-girlfriend is now dating his brother, his parents are splitting up because his dad is having an affair, and he's haunted by nightmares and hallucinations. When he reconnects with Harper Gray, a girl he spread a rumor about in middle school, he finds relief from his anxieties. During his leave, Travis must come to terms with his best friend's death during combat and realize that his flashbacks and visions are not part of the standard post-combat experience and that he needs professional help. By the end of the novel, he finds the strength to speak at Charlie's memorial.

TENDER AT THE BONE by Ruth Reichl

Explanation: At an early age, Ruth Reichl discovered that "food could be a way of making sense of the world. . . . If you watched people as they ate, you could find out who they were." Her deliciously crafted memoir, *Tender at the Bone*, is the story of a life determined, enhanced, and defined in equal measure by a passion for food, unforgettable people, and the love of tales well told. Beginning with Reichl's mother, the notorious food-poisoner known as the Queen of Mold, Reichl introduces us to the fascinating characters who shaped her world and her tastes. Spiced with Reichl's infectious humor and sprinkled with her favorite recipes, *Tender at the Bone* is a witty and compelling chronicle of a culinary sensualist's coming-of-age.

TSOTSI by Athol Fugard

Explanation: Athol Fugard is renowned for his relentless explorations of personal and political survival in apartheid South Africa. Fugard has written a single novel, *Tsotsi*, set amid the sprawling Johannesburg township of Soweto, where survival is the primary objective, *Tsotsi* traces six days in the life of a ruthless young gang leader. When we meet Tsotsi, he is a man without a name (tsotsi is Afrikaans for "hoodlum") who has repressed his past and now exists only to stage and execute vicious crimes. When he inadvertently kidnaps a baby, Tsotsi is confronted with memories of his own painful childhood, and this angry young man begins to rediscover his own humanity, dignity, and capacity to love.

WHEN I WAS PUERTO RICAN by Esmeralda Santiago

Explanation: This story begins in rural Puerto Rico, where her childhood was full of both tenderness and domestic strife, tropical sounds and sights as well as poverty. When her mother, Mami, a force of nature, takes off to New York with her seven, soon to be eleven children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually take on a new identity. In this first volume of her much-praised, bestselling trilogy, Santiago brilliantly recreates the idyllic landscape and tumultuous family life of her earliest years and her tremendous journey from the *barrio* to Brooklyn, from translating for her mother at the welfare office to high honors at Harvard.

THINGS FALL APART by Chinua Achebe

EXPLANATION: This is the first of three novels in Chinua Achebe's critically acclaimed African Trilogy. It is a classic narrative about Africa's cataclysmic encounter with Europe as it establishes a colonial presence on the continent. Told through the fictional experiences of Okonkwo, a wealthy and fearless Igbo warrior of Umuofia in the late 1800s, *Things Fall Apart* explores one man's futile resistance to the devaluing of his Igbo traditions by British political and religious forces and his despair as his community capitulates to the powerful new order. It has a tragically surprise ending.

The Pregnancy Project: A Memoir by Gaby Rodriguez

EXPLANATION: In this novel, Gaby details how she was able to fake her own pregnancy—hiding the truth from even her siblings and boyfriend's parents—and reveals all that she learned from the experience. But more than that, Gaby's story is about fighting stereotypes, and how one girl found the strength to come out from the shadow of low expectations to forge a bright future for herself.

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd

Set in South Carolina in 1964, this book tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily's fierce-hearted black "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the deepest racists in town, Lily decides to spring them both free. They escape to Tiburon, South Carolina—a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. Taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sister, Lily is introduced to their mesmerizing world of bees and honey, and the Black Madonna. This is a remarkable novel about divine female power.

Columbine by Dave Cullen

What really happened April 20, 1999? The horror left an indelible stamp on the American psyche, but most of what we "know" is wrong. It wasn't about jocks, Goths, or the Trench Coat Mafia. Dave Cullen was one of the first reporters on scene, and spent ten years on this book—widely recognized as the definitive account. With a keen investigative eye and psychological acumen, he draws on mountains of evidence, insight from the world's leading forensic psychologists, and the killers' own words and drawings—several reproduced in a new appendix. Cullen paints raw portraits of two polar opposite killers. They contrast starkly with the flashes of resilience and redemption among the survivors.