

Books to Go Plots

Bull Run Regional Library

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz --- The tale begins in Santo Domingo, where "a story is not a story unless it casts a supernatural shadow." It revolves around several generations of one Dominican family, of which young Oscar de León, a depressed, overweight substitute teacher, is among the youngest descendants. Oscar is a 300-pound-plus "lovesick ghetto nerd" with zero game (except for Dungeons & Dragons) who cranks out pages of fantasy fiction with the hopes of becoming a Dominican J.R.R. Tolkien.

China Star by Bartle Bull--A young White Russian count travels across three continents in his dangerous quest for vengeance and romance.

Cider House Rules by John Irving--An orphan whose adoptions never stick keeps returning to the institution that is presided over by its elderly founder, a committed and expert obstetrician and abortionist.

Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Ann Burns--Modern times come to a conservative Southern town in 1906 when the proprietor of the general store elopes with a woman half his age, and worse yet, a Yankee.

Corelli's Mandolin by Louis DeBernieres--Corelli is an Italian army captain, and the lover of Pelagia Iannis. It is through Pelagia's voice that much of the story is revealed, but the chorus includes her father, various Greek villagers, Italian and Greek soldiers, and a goatherd.

Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama --- In this lyrical, unsentimental, and compelling memoir, the son of a black African father and a white American mother searches for a workable meaning to his life as a black American. It begins in New York, where Barack Obama learns that his father—a figure he knows more as a myth than as a man—has been killed in a car accident. This sudden death inspires an emotional odyssey—first to a small town in Kansas, from which he retraces the migration of his mother's family to Hawaii, and then to Kenya, where he meets the African side of his family, confronts the bitter truth of his father's life, and at last reconciles his divided inheritance.

East of Eden by John Steinbeck --- East of Eden highlights the conflicts of two generations of brothers; the first being the kind, gentle Adam Trask and his wild brother Charles. Adam eventually marries Cathy Ames, an evil, manipulative, and beautiful prostitute; she betrays him, joining Charles on the very night of their wedding. Later, after giving birth to twin boys, she shoots Adam and leaves him to return to her former

profession. In the shadow of this heritage Adam raises their sons, the fair-haired, winning, yet intractable Aron, and the dark, clever Caleb.

Empire Falls by Richard Russo--Miles Roby runs the Empire Grill for the widow of the last Whiting male. Miles's wife has left him for a sleazy gym owner, and his angst-ridden teenage daughter has befriended a sullen, ominously silent classmate shunned by the rest of his peers.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou--Recounts a youth filled with disappointment, frustration, tragedy, and finally, hard-won independence. Sent to live with her grandmother in Arkansas, Angelou learned a great deal from her and from the tightly knit black community. The lessons carried her throughout hardships she endured later.

A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah --- An absorbing account by a young man who, as a boy of 12, gets swept up in Sierra Leone's civil war. This book goes beyond even the best journalistic efforts in revealing the life and mind of a child abducted into the horrors of warfare. Beah's harrowing journey transforms him overnight from a child enthralled by American hip-hop music and dance to an internal refugee bereft of family, wandering from village to village in a country grown deeply divided by the indiscriminate atrocities of unruly, sociopathic rebel and army forces. Beah then finds himself in the army—in a drug-filled life of casual mass slaughter that lasts until he is 15, when he's brought to a rehabilitation center sponsored by UNICEF and partnering NGOs.

March by Geraldine Brooks--As the North reels under a series of defeats during the first year of the Civil War, a man (Mr. March from Little Women) leaves his family to aid the Union cause. His experiences will change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs.

The Milagro Beanfield War by John Nichols--The residents of Milagro have been oppressed by the rich developer and owner of the Ladd Devine Sheep Company. The "war" starts when Joe Mondragon decides to irrigate his father's old beanfield against the wishes of Devine.

My Antonia by Willa Cather--A story of Antonia Shimerda, an immigrant girl from Bohemia, who represents the optimism, determination and grit that newcomers to America needed to make a successful life, and that of American-born Jim Burden, the narrator.

My Grandfather's Blessings by Rachel Naomi Remen--This series of vignettes encourages readers to recognize unexpected blessings in their own lives. Many stories are linked to the author's experiences with cancer patients, but the most memorable ones relate to her relationship with her grandfather, who died when she was seven.

One True Thing by Anna Quindlen--After caring for her mother during her final, painful battle with cancer, Ellen Gulden discovers surprising things about her mother's life and finds herself accused of murdering her mother in a mercy killing.

The Secret History by Donna Tartt--Set at a small Vermont liberal arts college housing an exclusive inner sanctum of Greek scholars, secrets and lies accumulate as Richard is drawn into the world of Professor Julian Morrow and his students, and burdened by their dysfunctional and incestuous interactions with each other.

Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafon--In post-World War II Barcelona, Daniel is taken to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, where books are guarded from oblivion. Told to choose one book to protect, he selects *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Julian Carax. He soon learns it is both valuable and in danger, because someone is determinedly burning every copy of every book written by the obscure Carax.

The Thirteenth Tale by Diane Setterfield--Margaret is summoned to the home of England's most popular novelist, and commanded to write her biography. The author has been falsifying her life story and her identity for many years. Facing death and feeling a connection to Margaret, she spins a haunting tale of an old estate, a devastating fire, twin girls, a governess, and a ghost.

Yellow Raft in Blue Water by Michael Dorris--Follows three generations of Indian women beset by hardships and torn by angry secrets, yet inextricably bound together by the indissoluble bonds of kinship.

The Zoo Keeper's Wife by Diane Ackerman --- The Zoo Keeper's Wife is the remarkable WWII story of Jan Zabinski, the director of the Warsaw Zoo, and his wife, Antonina, who, with courage and coolheaded ingenuity, sheltered 300 Jews as well as Polish resisters in their villa and in animal cages and sheds.

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