



The Breakfast Book Club

Negotiating the Borders Between
Adolescent and Adult Literacy

**PRESENTED TO NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
November 2003**

**Presenters: Deborah Appleman, Professor at Carleton College, Northfield, MN
dapplema@carleton.edu**

**Martha Cosgrove, teacher/area leader, Edina High School, Edina, MN
marcosgrove@edina.k12.mn.us**

**Krista Hitchcock, teacher, Edina High School, Edina, MN
krlhitchcock@edina.k12.mn.us**

**Eileen Johnson, Language Arts Teaching and Learning Specialist,
Edina Public Schools, Edina, MN eiljohnson@edina.k12.mn.us**

**Sara Swenson, Librarian, Edina High School, Edina MN
sarswenson@edina.k12.mn.us**

**More information on Edina's Breakfast Book Club can be found:
<http://www.edina.k12.mn.us/edinahigh/departments/media/index.htm#bbc>**

Getting Started: Some Suggestions for Opening Book Club Conversations

"Book Club is not my classroom. Book Club is not my classroom. Book Club is not my classroom." I love discussions with students about books and ideas where ever they happen, but I have to remember that the Book Club is designed to be a different experience than students have in class. Here are some questions to get you started. Many of them *are* like the questions we ask in our classrooms. Maybe the difference is that since we have only a half hour or so, we *really* need to stay on the sidelines. One or two of these and kids will take off on their own. (In some cases I've tied the question to one of the books we've read).

Questions about characters:

How does Susie (or _____) surprise you? *Lovely Bones*

What seems to be _____'s most important characteristic?

Does this character seem familiar? How is he or she like or unlike you? *Getting In*

What does it mean to be a winner? --in this book? To you? *Lance Armstrong; In These Girls Hope is a Muscle*

What would it be like to have to fight so hard to learn? What was it like for these boys? *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

How (or why) has the author used a figure from popular culture to explore philosophy? Is he effective? *Simpsons, Tao of Pooh*

Who do you like best (or least) in this book?

Who is the most important participator in the story?

What does _____ (main character or someone else) believe?

Questions about conflict:

What is the most important problem in the book?

Why is the story resolved in this way?

Would you have done what the character did? Did you like (approve of, disapprove of) the decision of _____.

Other:

What does _____ have to say in this book (a character *or* the author)? What do *you* think about that statement?

What are the "rules" of this world? Would you like to live there?

What idea or character do you think the other is most interested in? Who or what were *you* most interested in?

Was the book interesting (entertaining, important)? Why or why not?

What made the book worth reading? Worth discussing?

What did you find important in the text? (Or surprising? Or reassuring? Or troubling?)

How did you feel about _____ a character, the end, a decision the character made.

What does _____ mean to *you*. (Heaven if you read *Lovely Bones*, for example. Or getting into college if you read *I Getting In*. Or winning if your read *Lance Armstrong* or *In These Girls Hope is a Muscle*.)

Possibilities for students to bring to book club:

Bring one important question that has to do with a character (or the problem, or the end of the work) to talk about.

Bring a line or passage you really want to talk about to Book Club.

Annotated Bibliography of Book Club Titles

Armstrong, Lance. *It's Not About the Bike*. New York: Berkley Publishing, 2001. ISBN: 0425179613.

Now five-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong overcame early career setbacks, injuries, and cancer to claim his spot at the top of the cycling world. This motivational autobiography details his training and racing, near fatal cancer, and personal struggles, all of which he conquered while becoming one of the most successful cyclists in history.

Blais, Madeleine. *In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle*. New York: Warner Books, 1995. ISBN: 0446672106.

The Lady Hurricanes, Amherst's high school women's basketball team, started their 1992-1993 season with determination and made it big. This nonfiction title traces the young women of the team through their growth and successes, while also looking at the enthusiasm of a town that, in the past, had had reserved its energies for men's athletics.

Christopher, Nicholas. *A Trip to the Stars*. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 2001. ISBN: 0743203305.

A Trip to the Stars opens in 1965 as ten year old orphan Enzo is kidnapped while at the Manhattan Planetarium with his guardian aunt Mala. They are separated for the next 15 years while Enzo is raised by his kidnapper, a great-uncle, and Mala searches for him. Allusions to astronomy, philosophy, and history enrich the story and tie the experiences of Enzo and Mala together.

De Bernieres, Louis. *Corelli's Mandolin*. New York: Vintage International, 1994. ISBN: 067976397X.

The perfect love story to feed spring fever, *Corelli's Mandolin* takes place in Greece during World War II. The novel begins with Captain Corelli, the mandolin playing likable officer in command of the Italian Army, and follows the love that develops between him and Pelagia, a young woman living in the small Greek village that his troops occupy. *Corelli's Mandolin* explores issues of love, loyalty, home, and family in its wartime setting.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2002.

Wal-Mart clerk, waitress, and hotel cleaning woman...these are just a few of the jobs author Barbara Ehrenreich took to write *Nickel and Dimed*. This title is a real life look at what it is like to live on a minimum wage salary in America today.

Enger, Leif. *Peace Like a River*. New York: Grove Press, 2001. ISBN: 0802139256.

Set in a small Minnesota town during the 1960's, *Peace Like a River* chronicles the story of the Land family after Davy, the eldest son, shoots and kills two town bullies who have threatened their family and skips town on horseback. Single father Jeremiah packs up Rueben and Swede who head out across North Dakota in search of their son and brother.

Narrated by 11 year old Rueben, *Peace Like a River* is the miraculous story of the Land's faith in God and their family.

Finney Boyland, James. *Getting In*. New York: Warner Books, 1998. ISBN 0446674176

A timely choice for high school students, *Getting In* is about four high school seniors who along with their parents, embark on a Winnebago tour of Eastern colleges. In the process they make many, sometimes unnerving, discoveries about themselves and each other.

Hoff, Benjamin. *The Tao of Pooh*. New York: Penguin Publishing, 1983. ISBN: 0140067477.

The Tao of Pooh explores Taoism, an eastern philosophy, in terms of everyone's favorite bear, Winnie the Pooh. To do this, Hoff weaves in excerpts from traditional Pooh tales that exemplify Taoist beliefs. In addition, Pooh and his friends occasionally jump into the narration and comment on the principles of Taoism.

Irwin, William, Mart T. Conard, and Aeon J. Skobel, eds. *The Simpson's and Philosophy: The D'oh of Homer*. Chicago: Open Court, 2001. ISBN: 0812684333

A compilation of 18 essays, *The Simpson's and Philosophy* examines how this TV show, which many love and many love to criticize, parallels the world's most studied philosophies. The authors are mostly professional philosophers who have clearly watched and enjoyed the show since its beginnings and make their comparisons comprehensible for readers of all kinds.

Lawson, Mary. *Crow Lake*. New York: Delta, 2002. ISBN 0385337639.

Kate Morrison, her little sister, and her two brothers were orphaned when a car accident took the lives of their parents. Rather than splitting up, nineteen year old Luke takes responsibility for the family, sacrificing much of his own future to do so. Narrating the novel as young adult, Kate looks back on the sometimes terrible, sometimes touching years that shaped her family.

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 2003. ISBN: 0156027321.

Pi Patel is sixteen when his family decides to move from their native India to Canada. The family boards a ship with many of the zoo animals that they cared for as curators of the local zoo, but on the voyage the ship sinks, leaving Pi alone with a zebra, orangutan, hyena, and tiger aboard a lifeboat. This story delves into religion and philosophy, while Pi fights for his survival.

McBride, James. *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997. ISBN: 1573225789.

This memoir begins with McBride's first person account of growing up in New York City with his ten siblings. Alternating chapters tell the story of McBride's mother Ruth, a Jewish woman who grew up in the South and eventually escaped to New York where she made a home and a family with her black husband. In finding out about his mother's past,

McBride is ultimately able to make sense of his own identity. This is an inspirational story of a mother who raised eleven highly successful children, as told by her son.

McLoughlin, Tim. *Heart of the Old County*. New York: Akashic Books, 2001. ISBN: 1888451157.

Nineteen year old Mike, a native of Brooklyn, is a tough guy who doesn't quite know what he wants. He is caught between his loyalties to his father who is a small time participant in organized crime, his high school sweetheart who is demanding an engagement ring, his down and out friend who ends up dead, and a real future at college which scares him more than anything. Mike's voice provides a funny, tragic, and realistic look into his neighborhood and the decisions that any young adult makes.

Na, An. *A Step from Heaven*. New York: Speak, 2001. ISBN: 0142500275.

The daughter of Korean immigrants to the United States, Young Ju is a small child when *A Step from Heaven* begins. Na tells the story of Young Ju and her family, whose expectations of living the American Dream are not fulfilled by their life in California. This young adult novel paints a picture of an immigrant family's experiences and a girl's journey from childhood to adulthood.

Sebold, Alice. *The Lovely Bones*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2002. ISBN: 0316666343.

At the beginning of the novel, thirteen year old Susie Salmon is raped and murdered by a man living in her middle-class suburban neighborhood. In the months and years after her tragic death, Susie watches her friends and family cope with their loss and eventually learn to live without her. Susie's authentic voice is sometimes sad but often funny as she narrates her story from heaven and slowly lets go of her life on earth.

Sijie, Dai. *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001. ISBN: 0385722206.

Set during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is the story of two urban young men who are sent to the country to be reeducated. While there, they befriend a pretty seamstress and stumble upon a stash of banned Western literature. The books, which the three of them voraciously consume, take them to worlds they can only dream of and are food for survival in their intellectually dismal surroundings.