

READ FOR A LIFETIME 2008-2009 Booklist

9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation

128 pages

Sid Jacobsen

On December 5, 2005, the 9/11 Commission issued its final report card on the government's fulfillment of the recommendations issued in July 2004: one A, twelve Bs, nine Cs, twelve Ds, three Fs, and four incompletes. Here is stunning evidence that Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón, with more than sixty years of experience in the comic-book industry between them, were right: far, far too few Americans have read, grasped, and demanded action on the Commission's investigation into the events of that tragic day and the lessons America must learn. Jacobson's text frequently follows word for word the original report, faithfully captures its investigative thoroughness, and covers its entire scope, even including the Commission's final report card.

Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, The

229 pages

Sherman Alexie

In his first book for young adults, best-selling 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 reservation to attend an all-white farm town high school where the only other Indian is the school mascot.

Atonement

496 pages

Ian McEwan

In the summer of 1935, 13-year-old Briony Tallis, attempts to stage a production of her new drama "The Trials of Arabella" to welcome home her older, idolized brother Leon. But she soon discovers that her cousins, the glamorous Lola and the twin boys Jackson and Pierrot, aren't up to the task, and directorial ambitions are abandoned as more interesting prospects of preoccupation come onto the scene. The charlady's son, Robbie Turner, appears to be forcing Briony's sister Cecilia to strip in the fountain and sends her obscene letters; Leon has brought home a dim chocolate magnate keen for a war to promote his new "Army Ammo" chocolate bar; and upstairs, Briony's migraine-stricken mother Emily keeps tabs on the house from her bed. Soon, secrets emerge that change the lives of everyone present.

Book Thief, The

552 pages

Markus Zusak

It's just a small story really, about among other things: a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter, and quite a lot of thievery. Set during World War II in Germany, this is the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster girl living outside of Munich. Liesel scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing when she encounters something she can't resist—books. With the help of her accordion-playing foster father, she learns to read and shares her stolen books with her neighbors during bombing raids as well as with the Jewish man hidden in her basement before he is marched to Dachau.

Born on a Blue Day: Inside the Extraordinary Mind of an Autistic Savant

240 pages

Daniel Tammet

This unique first-person account offers a window into the mind of a high functioning, 27-year-old British autistic savant with Asperger's syndrome. Tammet's ability to think abstractly, deviate from routine, and empathize, interact and communicate with others is impaired, yet he's capable of incredible feats of memorization and mental calculation. Besides being able to effortlessly multiply and divide huge sums in his head with the speed and accuracy of a computer, Tammet, the subject of the 2005 documentary *Brainman*, learned Icelandic in a single week and recited the number pi up to the 22,514th digit, breaking the European record. He also experiences synesthesia, an unusual neurological syndrome that enables him to experience numbers and words as "shapes, colors, textures and motions." Tammet traces his life from a frustrating, withdrawn childhood and adolescence to his adult achievements, which include teaching in Lithuania, achieving financial independence with an educational Web site and sustaining a long-term romantic relationship

Cage of Stars

289 pages

Jacquelyn Mitchard

Twelve-year-old Veronica Swan's idyllic life in a close-knit Mormon community is shattered when her two younger sisters are brutally murdered. Although her parents find the strength to forgive the deranged killer, Veronica is unable to do the same. Years later, she sets out alone to avenge her sisters' deaths, dropping her identity and severing ties in the process. As she closes in on the murderer, Veronica will discover the true meaning of sin and compassion, before she makes a decision that will change her and her family's lives forever.

Copper Sun**320 pages****Sharon Draper**

Amari's life was once perfect. Engaged to the most handsome man in her tribe, adored by her family, and living in a beautiful village, she could not have imagined everything could be taken away from her in an instant. But when slave traders invade her village and brutally murder her entire family, Amari finds herself dragged away to a slave ship headed to the Carolinas, where she is bought by a plantation owner and given to his son as a birthday present. Survival seems all that Amari can hope for. But then an act of unimaginable cruelty provides her with an opportunity to escape, and with an indentured servant named Polly she flees to Fort Mose, Florida, in search of sanctuary at the Spanish colony.

Glass Castle, The**304 pages****Jeannette Walls**

Jeannette Walls grew up with parents whose ideals and stubborn nonconformity were both their curse and their salvation. Rex and Rose Mary Walls had four children. In the beginning, they lived like nomads, moving among Southwest desert towns, camping in the mountains. Rex was a charismatic, brilliant man who, when sober, captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and above all, how to embrace life fearlessly. Rose Mary painted, wrote, and couldn't stand the responsibility of providing for her family. She called herself an "excitement addict." When the money finally runs out, the Walls retreat to the dismal West Virginia mining town -- and the family -- Rex Walls had done everything he could to escape. He drank. He stole the grocery money and disappeared for days. As the dysfunction of the family escalated, Jeannette and her brother and sisters had to fend for themselves, supporting one another as they weathered their parents' betrayals and, finally, found the resources and will to leave home.

Haunting of Hill House, The**256 pages****Shirley Jackson**

First published in 1959, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* has been hailed as a perfect work of unnerving terror. It is the story of four seekers who arrive at a notoriously unfriendly pile called Hill House: Dr. Montague, an occult scholar looking for solid evidence of a "haunting"; Theodora, his lighthearted assistant; Eleanor, a friendless, fragile young woman well acquainted with poltergeists; and Luke, the future heir of Hill House. At first, their stay seems destined to be merely a spooky encounter with inexplicable phenomena. But Hill House is gathering its powers--and soon it will choose one of them to make its own.

Heart is a Lonely Hunter, The**368 pages****Carson McCullers**

Published in 1940, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is considered McCullers' finest work. The focus of the work is on John Singer, a deaf-mute in a Georgia mill town during the 1930s, and on his effect on the people who confide in him. When Singer's mute Greek companion of 10 years goes insane, Singer is left alone and isolated. He takes a room with the Kelly family, where he is visited by the town's misfits, who turn to him for understanding but have no knowledge of his inner life.

How To Ruin A Summer Vacation**234 pages****Simone Elkeles**

Going to Israel with her estranged father is the last thing Amy wants to do this summer. A spoiled American teenager with an attitude that matches her killer Jimmy Choo slides, she's got a serious grudge against her dad, a.k.a Sperm Donor, for showing up so rarely in her life. Now he's dragging her to a war zone to meet a family she's never known, including her ill grandmother who's the only source of comfort in this strange land. Sharing a room with her unfriendly cousin, igniting a brawl at the local disco, and having her Ferragamo sandal stolen by a mutt . . . one hilarious humiliation after another tests Amy's spirit. Finding her place in a foreign culture isn't easy, but as Amy learns to shed her tough-girl persona, she discovers that making friends, falling in love, and connecting with her family and heritage isn't impossible after all.

Into the Wild**224 pages****Jon Krakauer**

After graduating from Emory University in Atlanta in 1992, top student and athlete Christopher McCandless abandoned his possessions, gave his entire \$24,000 savings account to charity and hitchhiked to Alaska, where he went to live in the wilderness. Four months later, he turned up dead. His diary, letters and two notes found at a remote campsite tell of his desperate effort to survive, apparently stranded by an injury and slowly starving. They also reflect the posturing of a confused young man, raised in affluent Annandale, Va., who self-consciously adopted a Tolstoyan renunciation of wealth and return to nature.

Just Listen**371 pages****Sarah Dessen**

When Annabel, the youngest of three beautiful sisters, has a bitter falling out with her best friend and popular, exciting Sophia, she suddenly finds herself isolated and friendless. But then she meets another loner, passionate about music and his weekly radio show, and always determined to tell the truth. When they develop a friendship, Annabel is not only introduced to new music but is encouraged to listen to her own inner voice. With help, can Annabel find the courage to speak out about what exactly happened the night her friendship with Sophie came to a screeching halt?

Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power**326 pages****Richard Carwardine**

Lincoln's election to and years in the White House. In describing his campaign for president, Oxford historian Carwardine recreates the intense party politics of the mid-19th century. The newly formed Republican Party was home to Americans with many different political agendas, and Lincoln's "blend of constitutional conservatism and high-minded...moralism" was a good basis for coalition. Carwardine pays careful attention to Lincoln's religious views, arguing that war brought him into close contact with evangelicals, who argued that the president would only succeed in reuniting the country if he obeyed God's word. Carwardine also traces the evolution of Lincoln's thinking about slavery—though he embraced emancipation first because winning the war required it, by the time he was killed Lincoln had edged toward black men's suffrage. This powerful biography leaves the reader wondering how post bellum politics might have been different were it not for that fateful gunshot on April 14, 1865.

Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, A**240 pages****Ishmael Beah**

This account by a young man who, as a boy of 12, gets swept up in Sierra Leone's civil war 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, sociopath 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. The process marks out Beah as a gifted spokesman for the center's work after his "repatriation" to civilian life in the capital, where he lives with his family and a distant uncle. When the war finally engulfs the capital, it sends 17-year-old Beah fleeing again, this time to the U.S., where he now lives.

Nineteen Minutes**464 pages****Jodi Piccouth**

In nineteen minutes, you can mow the lawn, color your hair, watch a third of a hockey game. You can get a tooth filled by a dentist or you can fold laundry for a family of five. In nineteen minutes, you can stop the world, or you can just jump off. In nineteen minutes, you can get revenge. Sterling is a small, ordinary New Hampshire town where nothing ever happens — until the day its complacency is shattered by a shocking act of violence. In the aftermath, the town's residents must not only seek justice in order to begin healing but also come to terms with the role they played in the tragedy. For them, the lines between truth and fiction, right and wrong, insider and outsider have been obscured forever. Josie Cormier, the teenage daughter of the judge sitting on the case, could be the state's best witness, but she can't remember what happened in front of her own eyes. And as the trial progresses, fault lines between the high school and the adult community begin to show, destroying the closest of friendships and families.

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood**153 pages****Marjane Satrapi**

A heartbreaking memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country.

Red Kayak**209 pages****Pricilla Cummings**

Brady loves life on the Chesapeake Bay with his friends J.T. and Digger, but developers and rich families are moving into the area. While Brady befriends some of them, like the DiAngelos, his parents and friends are bitter about the changes. Tragedy strikes when the DiAngelos' kayak overturns in the bay, and Brady wonders if it was more than an accident. Soon, Brady discovers the terrible truth behind the kayak's sinking, and it will change the lives of those he loves forever.

Riding The Bus With My Sister: A True Life Journey**304 pages****Rachel Simon**

Rachel Simon's sister Beth is a spirited woman who lives intensely and often joyfully. Beth, who has mental retardation, spends her days riding the buses in her Pennsylvania City. The drivers, a lively group, are her mentors; her fellow passengers are her community. One day, Beth asked Rachel to accompany her on the buses for an entire year. This wise, funny, deeply affecting book is the chronicle of that remarkable time. Rachel, a writer and college teacher whose hyper busy life camouflaged her emotional isolation, had much to learn in her sister's extraordinary world. These are life lessons on how to live in the moment, and pay attention to what really matters, how to change, how to love—and how to slow down and enjoy the ride. Elegantly woven throughout are riveting memories of terrifying maternal abandonment, fierce sisterly loyalty, and astonishing forgiveness. Rachel Simon brings to light the almost invisible world of mental retardation, finds unlikely heroes in everyday life, and, without sentimentality, portrays Beth as the endearing, feisty, independent person she is.

Separate Peace, A**208 pages****John Knowles**

Set at a boys' boarding school in New England during the early years of World War II, *A Separate Peace* is a harrowing and luminous parable of the dark side of adolescence. Gene is a lonely, introverted intellectual. Phineas is a handsome, taunting, daredevil athlete. What happens between the two friends one summer, like the war itself, banishes the innocence of these boys and their world.

Sold**288 pages****Patricia McCormack**

Written in vignettes, this powerful novel chronicles the story of one girl's struggle to maintain her sense of self against all odds. 13-year-old Lakshmi lives an ordinary life in Nepal, going to school and thinking of the boy she is to marry. Then her gambling-addicted stepfather sells her into prostitution in India. Refusing to be with men, she is beaten and starved until she gives in. An old woman named Mumtaz rules "Happiness House" with an iron fist. She informs Lakshmi that she is trapped there until she can pay off her family's debt. And of course, crooked Mumtaz will make sure that that never happens. Lakshmi's life becomes a nightmare from which she cannot escape. But gradually, she forms friendships that enable her to survive in this terrifying new world. Until the day comes that she has to make a decision -- one that will cause her to risk everything to for a chance to reclaim her life.

The Wall: Growing Up Behind The Iron Curtain**56 pages****Peter Sis**

I was born at the beginning of it all, on the Red side—the Communist side—of the Iron Curtain." Through annotated illustrations, journals, maps, and dreamscapes, Peter Sís shows what life was like for a child who loved to draw, proudly wore the red scarf of a Young Pioneer, stood guard at the giant statue of Stalin, and believed whatever he was told to believe. But adolescence brought questions. Cracks began to appear in the Iron Curtain, and news from the West slowly filtered into the country. Sís learned about beat poetry, rock 'n' roll, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola. He let his hair grow long, secretly read banned books, and joined a rock band. Then came the Prague Spring of 1968, and for a teenager who wanted to see the world and meet the Beatles, this was a magical time. It was short-lived, however, brought to a sudden and brutal end by the Soviet-led invasion. But this brief flowering had provided a glimpse of new possibilities—creativity could be discouraged but not easily killed.

Thousand Splendid Suns, A**384 pages****Khaled Hosseini**

A breathtaking story set against the volatile events of Afghanistan's last thirty years -- from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban to post-Taliban rebuilding -- that puts the violence, fear, hope and faith of this country in intimate, human terms. It is a tale of two generations of characters brought jarringly together by the tragic sweep of war, where personal lives -- the struggle to survive, raise a family, find happiness -- are inextricable from the history playing out around them.

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace**368 pages****Greg Mortenson**

Anyone who despairs of the individual's power to change lives has to read the story of Greg Mortenson, a homeless mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built fifty-five schools - especially for girls - that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. As it chronicles Mortenson's quest, which has brought him into conflict with both enraged Islamists and uncomprehending Americans, *Three Cups of Tea* combines adventure with a celebration of the humanitarian spirit.

We Beat the Street: How a Friendship Pact Led to Success**192 pages****Davis/Hunt/Jenkins**

This rewrite of "The Pact" is the true story of three friends that grew up on the streets of Newark, facing city life's temptations, pitfalls, even jail. But one day these young men made a pact. They promised each other they would all become doctors, and stick it out together through the long, difficult journey to attain that dream. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt are not only friends to this day—they are all doctors.