

Summer reading suggestions offered

Juli Palma/Guest contributor

As an English teacher, I've always enjoyed summer as a time for me to read whatever I want, no textbooks to prepare or student writing to evaluate, just pure enjoyment. Sometimes I throw in a little educational material to keep the gray cells in shape.

My aim in preparing this summer reading list was to provide something for various types of readers: those who devour books; those who like to linger over them; the fiction-lover will find real gems here; the nonfiction lover should also be pleased.

Some of the titles might be shelved under young adult; don't be put off by that. These all have much to offer the adult reader.

FICTION



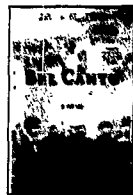
• *Peace Like a River* by Leif Enger (2001, Atlantic Monthly Press, 320 pp., \$13): If you didn't have time during the winter to join the rest of Rochester in reading this, now is the time. It's a gentle, delightful tale told by an 11-year-old

boy whose father performs miracles. The Land family dynamics are governed by the lessons Reuben absorbs from his father's determined nonviolence and faith. The character of Swede, the little sister, is irresistible.



• *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (2001, Harcourt Inc., 336 pp., \$14): This story is told by another young narrator (pronounced "pie"), but his parents are taken from him early, and he must

rely on his own faith(s) and resources to survive. It's magical realism at its best. The reader finds herself believing the impossible because it is told in such evocative detail, with scientific precision interspersed with sumptuous poetry.



• *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett (2002, Harper Collins, 336 pp., \$13.95): Here is a story attributed to Rochester's own Renee Fleming, but no one has ever been able to confirm it. Against a

backdrop of political unrest, an opera star and the party guests who have gathered to hear her perform are taken hostage. Surprisingly, the

hostages, and eventually, their captors, form a community united by the glory of the music. The author's brilliant device of the character of the translator allows the reader insight into the hearts and complex motives of the disparate group.



• *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (2003, Penguin Books, 336 pp., \$14): The setting is South Carolina, the summer of 1964. The novel opens with a disturbing image of the narrator in

the midst of a swarm of bees, yet she has prepared us to see it as a sort of Annunciation. Lily soon makes her escape, not from the bees, but from her abusive father. She rescues Rosaleen, a jailed African-American would-be voter, and the two begin a pilgrimage, each in search of her identity.

HUMOR



• *Dave Barry Slept Here: A Sort of History of the United States* by Dave Barry (1997, Ballantine Books, 256 pp., \$6.99): If you enjoy Barry's weekly columns in the newspaper,

you'll love this. As you would expect, he is irreverent, absurd and hilarious. For example, all of the historic events occur on Oct. 8. He claims that this simplifies things enormously. This book is great for the time when you'll be reading in snatches, keeping an eye on the kids at the pool, perhaps. Or, you might use it as a Fourth of July party game, reading it aloud while the burgers are on the grill. It's funniest when it's shared. Be sure to check out his "footnotes."

NONFICTION



• *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand (2001, Random House, 448 pp., \$15.95): In the depths of the Depression, three unlikely heroes united to thrill America. Their struggles against their

own limitations and the cruelties of fate can't be improved upon by moralizing. Hillenbrand simply presents the facts, and the reader is alternately exultant and stunned.

• *The Life you Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* by Paul Elie (2003, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 560 pp., \$27): Elie overlays the biographies of four American



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