

Reviewing Nonfiction Bestsellers

AP Language & Composition

Noël – October 2008

We have read two works of nonfiction that illustrate years of careful research – *Seabiscuit* and *In Cold Blood*. The next outside reading book will be a similarly-constructed book which you must compare to our past readings. With three or more classmates, you will be reading, reviewing and discussing ONE reputable, distinguished book from this list. As always, do not choose a title that you've read in the past, and, no, you may not pick a book that isn't on this list. If you have any questions about the content of the books, I suggest that you look on Amazon and research the title before making a decision. A few of these books depict disturbing events in history, and a few of these books have controversial topics. Select carefully.

Remember with nonfiction – Don't do too much research online on the topics because you'll ruin the book, and don't look at the pictures in the middle of the book either for the same reason.

Group Responsibility: Groups will gather to talk about the content of the books on select days. You will be graded on class participation, so come to class prepared to talk about the book. Bring your book with you on these days. If you are absent, you must schedule a meeting with me for before or after school for a 10 minute book talk.

Individual Responsibility: You will have to write a 600-1000 word research paper on a topic that is related to your book. The thesis must be arguable, and the topic must be approved by me. The paper must be in MLA format with two external sources. You must incorporate your book as a third source.

Out-of-Class Responsibility: On turnitin.com, there are discussion boards set up. I expect you to log on outside of class and participate in discussions on your book. I want to see these discussions start in two weeks.

Due dates – We will fill in these blanks in class.

Must select a book	
Must have a thesis approved by me	
Library Day	
Research Paper Due & "My Book is Better Than Your Book" Debate	

"My Book is Better Than Your Book" Day:

With your group members, you must share with the others what your book is about, the academic merit of the book, the reliability of the author, and the literary worth of the book. It will be up to your group to determine how you're going to organize your information and material to present your argument to win the debate. I expect a fervent, passionate, believable argument! *Everyone* must participate. I will ask pointed questions of each individual to evaluate content knowledge. (This is for points.)

Here are your choices:

Title	Author's Last Name	Brief Summaries (Purloined from Amazon.com)
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time</i>	Mortensen Relin	Some failures lead to phenomenal successes, and this American nurse's unsuccessful attempt to climb K2, the world's second tallest mountain, is one of them. Dangerously ill when he finished his climb in 1993, Mortenson was sheltered for seven weeks by the small Pakistani village of Korphe; in return, he promised to build the impoverished town's first school, a project that grew into the Central Asia Institute.
<i>Touching History: The Untold Story of the Drama That Unfolded in the Skies Over America on 9/11</i>	Spencer	While most Americans watched the 9/11 attacks on television, the guardians of the nation's air-control and air-defense systems had the unenviable task of trying to halt them. Working from interviews and tape archives, Spencer's minute-by-minute chronicle recreates their heroics in nerve-racking detail.
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World</i>	Kidder	Paul Farmer: doctor, Harvard professor, renowned infectious-disease specialist, anthropologist, the recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, and world-class Robin Hood, Farmer was brought up in a bus and on a boat, and in medical school found his life's calling: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most. (336)
<i>Blood and Thunder: The Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West</i>	Sides	Sides eloquently paints the landscape and history of the 19th-century Southwest, combining Larry McMurtry's lyricism with the historian's attachment to facts. Inevitably, Sides's main focus is the virtual decimation of the Navajo nation from the 1820s to the late 1860s. Sides depicts the complex role of whites in the subjugation of the Navajos through his portrait of Kit Carson—an illiterate trapper, soldier and scout who knew the Native Americans intimately, married two of them and, without blinking, participated in the Indians' slaughter. (624 with pics)
<i>Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War</i>	Philbrick	Have you ever wondered how America began? Philbrick will take you on an extraordinary journey to understand the truth behind our most sacred national myth: the voyage of the <i>Mayflower</i> and the settlement of Plymouth Colony. (480)
<i>Rocket Boys (aka October Sky)</i>	Hickam	Inspired by Werner von Braun and his Cape Canaveral team, 14-year-old Homer Hickam decided in 1957 to build his own rockets. They were his ticket out of Coalwood, West Virginia, a mining town that everyone knew was dying--everyone except Sonny's father, the mine superintendent.
<i>Profiles in Courage</i>	Kennedy	This is a 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning book by John F. Kennedy, describing acts of bravery and integrity by eight United States Senators from throughout the Senate's history. The profiled senators crossed party lines and/or defied the public opinion of their constituents to do what they felt was right and suffered severe criticism and losses in popularity because of their actions. The book was widely celebrated and became a best seller, but there have been allegations that most of it was the work of his speechwriter, Theodore Sorenson. There is an essay contest for based on this book. The due date is in January. (Summary is from Wikipedia)
<i>Undaunted Courage : Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West</i>	Ambrose	A biography of Meriwether Lewis that relies heavily on the journals of both Lewis and Clark, this book is also backed up by the author's personal travels along Lewis and Clark's route to the Pacific. Ambrose is not content to simply chronicle the events of the "Corps of Discovery" as the explorers called their ventures. He often pauses to assess the military leadership of Lewis and Clark, how they negotiated with various native peoples and what they reported to Jefferson.
<i>Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II's Greatest Rescue Mission</i>	Sides	On January 28, 1945, 121 hand-selected troops slipped behind enemy lines in the Philippines to attempt to find and rescue 513 forgotten POW soldiers who survived the Bataan Death March.
<i>Titanic's Last Secrets: The Further Adventures of Shadow Divers John Chatterton and Richie Kohler</i>	Matsen	<i>"Titanic's Last Secrets</i> is a fresh, moving, and irresistible portrait of the doomed ship. Combining insightful character sketches, secret archives, forensic engineering, death-defying dives and suspenseful writing, Brad Matsen travels effortlessly between past and present and offers haunting new conclusions about Titanic: It did not have to happen this way. They did not have to die. I could not put this book down." Book Review by James L. Swanson