

# Top 21 Books to Read Before You Graduate

The OHS English Department encourages **everyone** to read!  
Below are 21 titles to consider as selected by the OHS English Department. Happy reading!

## *Butter* by Erin Jade Lange

-- book selected by Ms. Karen Ferguson

**FICTION:** A lonely obese boy everyone calls "Butter" is about to make history. He is going to eat himself to death-live on the Internet-and everyone is invited to watch. When he first makes the announcement online to his classmates, Butter expects pity, insults, and possibly sheer indifference. What he gets are morbid cheerleaders rallying around his deadly plan. Yet as their dark encouragement grows, it begins to feel a lot like popularity. And that feels good. But what happens when Butter reaches his suicide deadline? Can he live with the fallout if he doesn't go through with his plans? Notable honors include the following: 2016 Abraham Lincoln Award, 2016 Nevada Young Readers Award Nominee, 2015 Sakura Medal Winner, 2013 Teens' Top Ten Pick



## *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak

-- book selected by Mr. Benjamin Spears

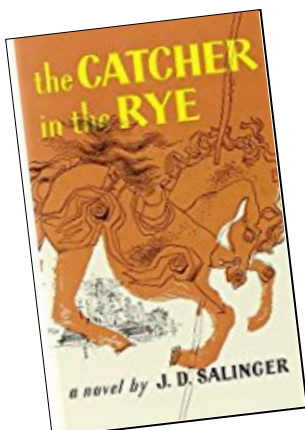
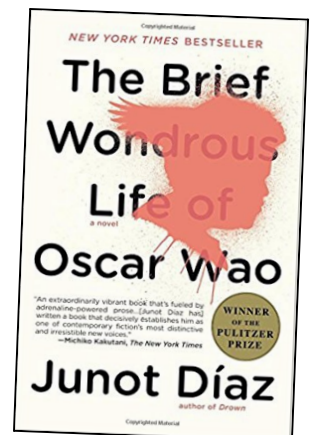
**FICTION:** Eleven-year-old Liesel Meminger is a foster child who has recently arrived in a small town outside Munich, Germany during WWII. Liesel has been sent to live with Hans and Rosa Huberman, presumably for the small stipend they'll receive. Liesel is still suffering from the loss of her little brother and the difficult and somewhat mysterious separation from her mother. She takes an immediate like to Hans, who is kind and thoughtful, but takes much longer to warm up to the abrasive Rosa.

Liesel makes friends with next-door neighbor Rudy and establishes herself as a self-proclaimed book thief. Becoming unlikely friends with the Mayor's wife Ilsa affords Liesel the opportunity to read the books in the Mayor's massive library. Along the way, Liesel is witness to the atrocities of war, heartbreaking events, love, loss and other life-changing events.

## *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz

-- book selected by Ms. Sarah Hands

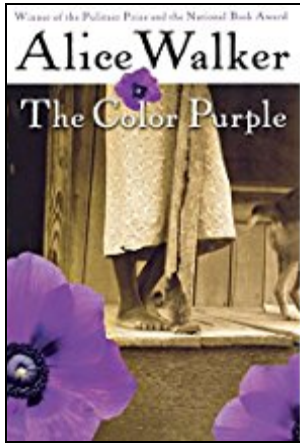
**FICTION:** Things have never been easy for Oscar, a sweet but disastrously overweight, lovesick Dominican ghetto nerd. From his home in New Jersey, where he lives with his old-world mother and rebellious sister, Oscar dreams of becoming the Dominican J. R. R. Tolkien and, most of all, of finding love. But he may never get what he wants, thanks to the Fukú—the curse that has haunted the Oscar's family for generations, dooming them to prison, torture, tragic accidents, and, above all, ill-starred love. Oscar, still waiting for his first kiss, is just its most recent victim.



## *Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger

-- book selected by Ms. Erin Holtz

The hero-narrator of *The Catcher in the Rye* is an ancient child of sixteen, a native New Yorker named Holden Caulfield. Through circumstances that tend to preclude adult, secondhand description, he leaves his prep school in Pennsylvania and goes underground in New York City for three days. The boy himself is at once too simple and too complex for us to make any final comment about him or his story. Perhaps the safest thing we can say about Holden is that he was born in the world not just strongly attracted to beauty but, almost, hopelessly impaled on it. There are many voices in this novel: children's voices, adult voices, underground voices-but Holden's voice is the most eloquent of all. Transcending his own vernacular, yet remaining marvelously faithful to it, he issues a perfectly articulated cry of mixed pain and pleasure. However, like most lovers and clowns and poets of the higher orders, he keeps most of the pain to, and for, himself. The pleasure he gives away, or sets aside, with all his heart. It is there for the reader who can handle it to keep.



## *The Color Purple* By Alice Walker

-- book selected by Ms. Emily Popp

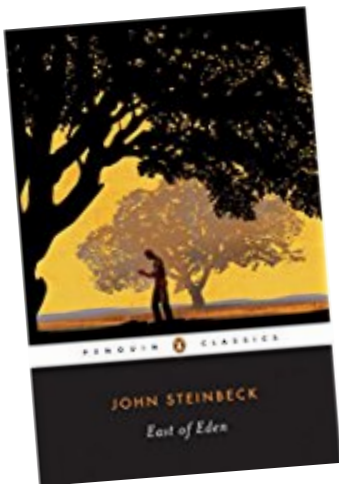
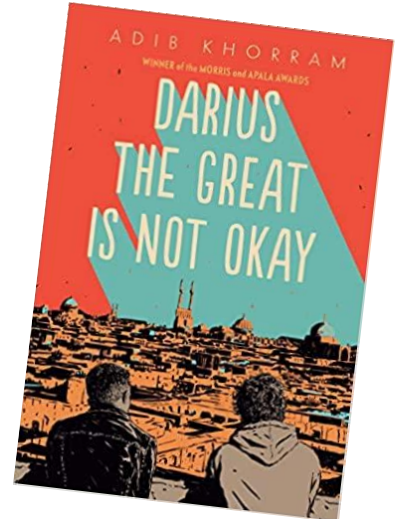
**FICTION:** *The Color Purple* is a classic. With over a million copies sold in the UK alone, it is hailed as one of the all-time 'greats' of literature, inspiring generations of readers. Set in the deep American South between the wars, it is the tale of Celie, a young black girl born into poverty and segregation. Raped repeatedly by the man she calls 'father', she has two children taken away from her, is separated from her beloved sister Nettie and is trapped into an ugly marriage. But then she meets the glamorous Shug Avery, singer and magic-maker - a woman who has taken charge of her own destiny. Gradually, Celie discovers the power and joy of her own spirit, freeing her from her past and reuniting her with those she loves.

## *Darius the Great is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram

Khorram

-- book selected by Mr. Michael Leali

**FICTION:** Darius Kellner speaks better Klingon than Farsi, and he knows more about Hobbit social cues than Persian ones. He's a Fractional Persian—half, his mom's side—and his first-ever trip to Iran is about to change his life. Darius has never really fit in at home, and he's sure things are going to be the same in Iran. His clinical depression doesn't exactly help matters, and trying to explain his medication to his grandparents only makes things harder. Then Darius meets Sohrab, the boy next door, and everything changes. Soon, they're spending their days together, playing soccer, eating faludeh, and talking for hours on a secret rooftop overlooking the city's skyline. Sohrab calls him Darioush—the original Persian version of his name—and Darius has never felt more like himself than he does now that he's Darioush to Sohrab. Adib Khorram's brilliant debut is for anyone who's ever felt not good enough—then met a friend who makes them feel so much better than okay.



## *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck

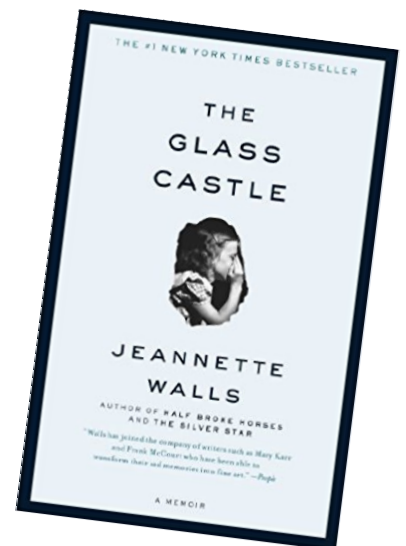
-- book selected by Ms. Jandy Sleyko

**FICTION:** *East of Eden* is a novel by Nobel Prize winner John Steinbeck, published in September 1952. Often described as Steinbeck's most ambitious novel, *East of Eden* brings to life the intricate details of two families, the Trasks and the Hamiltons, and their interwoven stories. The novel was originally addressed to Steinbeck's young sons, Thom and John. Steinbeck wanted to describe the Salinas Valley for them in detail: the sights, sounds, smells, and colors.

## *The Glass Castle: A Memoir* by Jeannette Walls

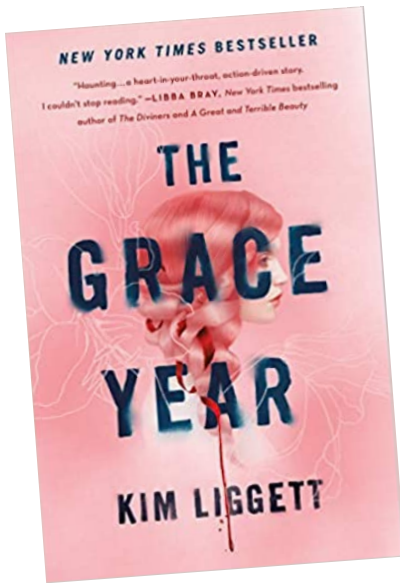
-- book selected by Ms. Kristin Lavelle

**NON-FICTION:** The perennially bestselling, extraordinary, one-of-a-kind, "nothing short of spectacular" (Entertainment Weekly) memoir from one of the world's most gifted storytellers. *The Glass Castle* is a remarkable memoir of resilience and redemption, and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly. But when he drank, he was dishonest and destructive. Her mother was a free spirit who abhorred the idea of domesticity and didn't want the responsibility of raising a family. The Walls children learned to take care of themselves. They fed, clothed, and protected one another, and eventually found their way to New York. Their parents followed them, choosing to be homeless even as their children prospered. *The Glass Castle* is truly astonishing—a memoir





permeated by the intense love of a peculiar but loyal family.



## *The Grace Year* by Kim Liggett

-- book selected by Ms. Taryn Dubiel

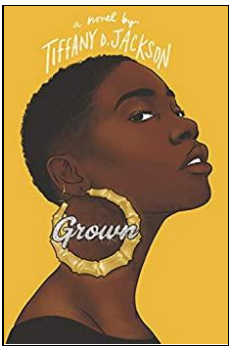
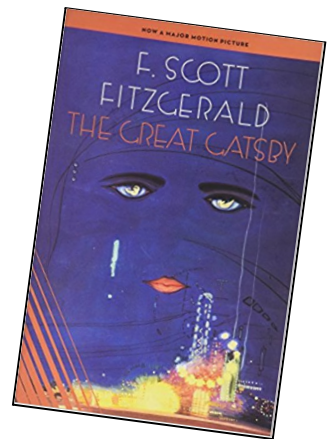
**FICTION:** In Garner County, girls are told they have the power to lure grown men from their beds, to drive women mad with jealousy. They believe their very skin emits a powerful aphrodisiac, the potent essence of youth, of a girl on the edge of womanhood. That's why they're banished for their sixteenth year, to release their magic into the wild so they can return purified and ready for marriage. But not all of them will make it home alive.

Sixteen-year-old Tierney James dreams of a better life—a society that doesn't pit friend against friend or woman against woman, but as her own grace year draws near, she quickly realizes that it's not just the brutal elements they must fear. It's not even the poachers in the woods, men who are waiting for a chance to grab one of the girls in order to make a fortune on the black market. Their greatest threat may very well be each other. With sharp prose and gritty realism, *The Grace Year* examines the complex and sometimes twisted relationships between girls, the women they eventually become, and the difficult decisions they make in-between.

## *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

-- book selected by Dr. Kelly Tobin-Martin

**FICTION:** Regarded as Fitzgerald's masterpiece and one of the greatest novels of American literature, *The Great Gatsby* is a vivid chronicle of the excesses and decadence of the "Jazz Age," as well as a timeless cautionary critique of the American dream. The story of the mysteriously wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan, of lavish parties on Long Island at a time when *The New York Times* noted "gin was the national drink and sex the national obsession," it is an exquisitely crafted tale of America in the 1920s.



## *Grown* by Tiffany D. Jackson

-- book selected by Ms. Nicole Crocker

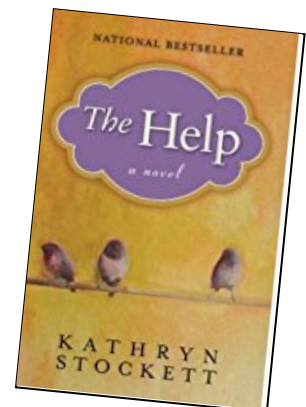
**FICTION:** When legendary R&B artist Korey Fields spots Enchanted Jones at an audition, her dreams of being a famous singer take flight. Until Enchanted wakes up with blood on her hands and zero memory of the previous night. Who killed Korey Fields?

Before there was a dead body, Enchanted's dreams had turned into a nightmare. Because behind Korey's charm and star power was a controlling dark side. Now he's dead, the police are at the door, and all signs point to Enchanted.

## *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett

-- book selected by Ms. Stephanie Stegich

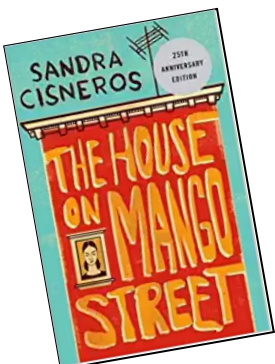
**FICTION:** Aibileen is a black maid in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi, who's always taken orders quietly, but lately she's unable to hold her bitterness back. Her friend Minny has never held her tongue but now must somehow keep secrets about her employer that leave her speechless. White socialite Skeeter just graduated college. She's full of ambition, but without a husband, she's considered a failure. Together, these seemingly different women join together to write a tell-all book about work as a black maid in the South, that could forever alter their destinies and the life of a small town.



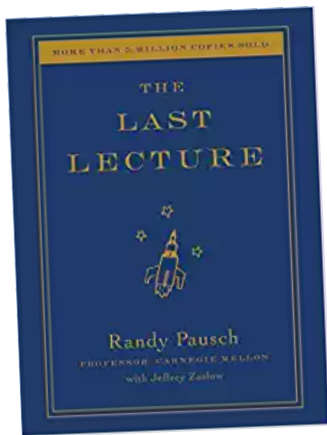
## *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

-- book selected by Dr. Amy Howerton

**FICTION:** Acclaimed by critics, beloved by readers of all ages, taught everywhere from inner-city grade schools to universities across the country, and translated all over the world, *The House on Mango Street* is the remarkable story of Esperanza Cordero. Told in a series of vignettes – sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous – it is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what



she will become. Few other books in our time have touched so many readers.



## *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch

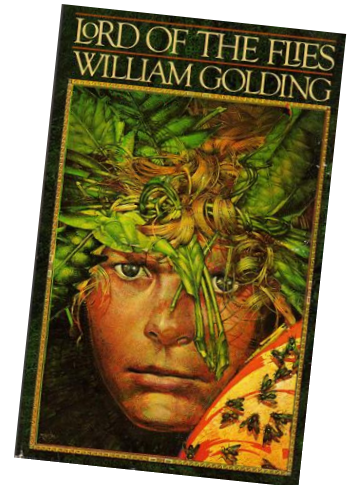
-- book selected by Ms. Rachael Henricks

**NONFICTION:** When Randy Pausch, a computer science professor at Carnegie Mellon, was asked to give such a lecture, he didn't have to imagine it as his last, since he had recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. But the lecture he gave--"Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams"--wasn't about dying. It was about the importance of overcoming obstacles, of enabling the dreams of others, of seizing every moment (because "time is all you have...and you may find one day that you have less than you think"). It was a summation of everything Randy had come to believe. It was about living.

## *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

-- book selected by Ms. Beth Prigodich

**FICTION:** At the dawn of the next world war, a plane crashes on an uncharted island, stranding a group of schoolboys. At first, with no adult supervision, their freedom is something to celebrate. This far from civilization they can do anything they want. Anything. But as order collapses, as strange howls echo in the night, as terror begins its reign, the hope of adventure seems as far removed from reality as the hope of being rescued.



## *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline

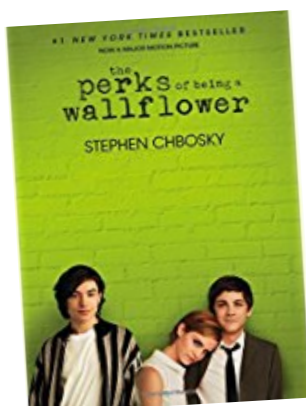
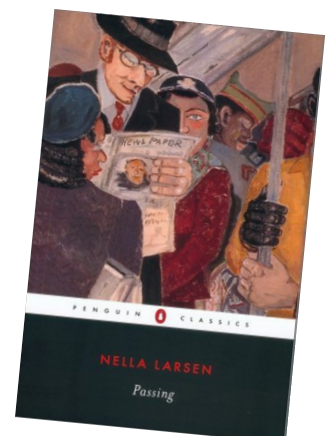
-- book selected by Ms. Saima Iqbal

**FICTION:** Humanity has nearly destroyed its world through global warming, but now an even greater evil lurks. The indigenous people of North America are being hunted and harvested for their bone marrow, which carries the key to recovering something the rest of the population has lost: the ability to dream. In this dark world, Frenchie and his companions struggle to survive as they make their way up north to the old lands. For now, survival means staying hidden—but what they don't know is that one of them holds the secret to defeating the marrow thieves.

## *Passing* by Nella Larsen

-- book selected by Ms. Alysha Wodecki

**FICTION:** If you liked *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in English 3, you'll enjoy *Passing*. It is a novel by American author Nella Larsen, first published in 1929. Set primarily in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City in the 1920s, the story centers on the reunion of two childhood friends—Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield—and their increasing fascination with each other's lives. The title refers to the practice of "racial passing", and is a key element of the novel; Clare Kendry's attempt to pass as white for her husband, John (Jack) Bellew, is its most significant depiction in the novel, and a catalyst for the tragic events.



## *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

-- book selected by Ms. Tracey Contino

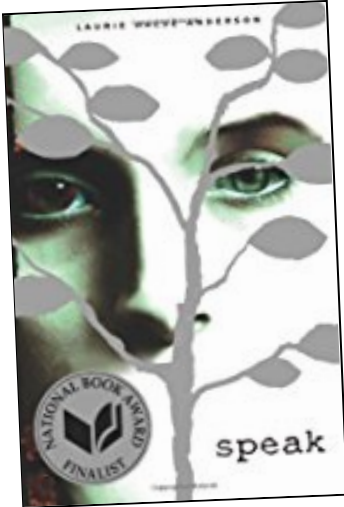
**FICTION:** The critically acclaimed debut novel from Stephen Chbosky, *Perks* follows observant "wallflower" Charlie as he charts a course through the strange world between adolescence and adulthood. First dates, family drama, and new friends. Sex, drugs, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Devastating loss, young love, and life on the fringes. Caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it, Charlie must learn to navigate those wild and poignant roller-coaster days known as growing up. This novel for teen readers (or "wallflowers" of more-advanced age) will make you laugh, cry, and

perhaps feel nostalgic for those moments when you, too, tiptoed onto the dance floor of life.

## *Something Wicked This Way Comes* by Ray Bradbury

-- book selected by Ms. Jamie Bechina

**FICTION:** A carnival rolls in sometime after the midnight hour on a chill Midwestern October eve, ushering in Halloween a week before its time. A calliope's shrill siren song beckons to all with a seductive promise of dreams and youth regained. In this season of dying, Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show has come to Green Town, Illinois, to destroy every life touched by its strange and sinister mystery. And two inquisitive boys standing precariously on the brink of adulthood will soon discover the secret of the satanic raree-show's smoke, mazes, and mirrors, as they learn all too well the heavy cost of wishes - and the stuff of nightmare.



## *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson

-- book selected by Ms. Amy Oslos

**FICTION:** The first ten lies they tell you in high school. "Speak up for yourself--we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless, outcast, because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. As time passes, she becomes increasingly isolated and practically stops talking altogether. Only her art class offers any solace, and it is through her work on an art project that she is finally able to face what really happened at that terrible party: she was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her. Her healing process has just begun when she has another violent encounter with him. But this time Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication. In Laurie Halse Anderson's powerful novel, an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself.

## *Staying Fat For Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher

-- book selected by Ms. Katie Conant

**FICTION:** Sarah Byrnes and Eric have been friends for years. When they were children, his fat and her terrible scars made them both outcasts. Later, although swimming slimmed Eric, she stayed his closest friend. Now Sarah Byrnes -- the smartest, toughest person Eric has ever known -- sits silent in a hospital. Eric must uncover the terrible secret she's hiding, before its dark currents pull them both under.

