

ELEVEN YEARS OF ASSIGNMENTS: 2007/2008 – 2017/2018

General Data

The National Association of Scholars has gathered and collated information on college common reading assignments for the last eleven years, from 2007/2008 through 2017/2018. We now have information on 732 individual colleges and universities, 4,754 assignments, and 1,655 individual texts.

This information is far too bulky to publish, but we have put it on our website. The reader is directed to **Appendix VI: Institutions that Assigned College Common Readings, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018**; **Appendix VII: Assignments, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018**; and **Appendix VIII: Texts Assigned, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018**.

Divided by year, we have collected the following data:

ELEVEN YEARS OF ASSIGNMENTS

Year	Individual Colleges and Universities	Assignments	Individual Texts	Miscellaneous Assignments
2007/2008	271	281	177	1
2008/2009	315	330	186	4
2009/2010	368	382	201	4
2010/2011	412	425	220	5
2011/2012	407	425	229	4
2012/2013	415	437	235	2
2013/2014	467	487	298	4
2014/2015	465	487	299	3
2015/2016	472	496	310	3
2016/2017	482	506	299	8
2017/2018	481	498	280	10
Total	732	4,754	1655	48

This table would suggest that the number of common reading assignments increased substantially over the last decade. This trend, however, is probably an artifact of our research techniques, which depend heavily on websearches. We suspect that a large number of common readings from a decade ago were on webpages that have since gone defunct, and many other common readings would have been identified only in orientation packets for new students rather than on webpages. We would be grateful for information that will allow us to thicken our database for those earlier years.

MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS

We have tabulated the most popular assignments for each of these 11 years. Below are the ten-most popular assignments for each year—sometimes going above 10, when multiple texts were assigned equal numbers of times in a year.

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2007 – 2008

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003	Biography Humanitarianism/Social Activism Medicine/Mortality	20
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	12
<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Dispossession/Emigration/Exile <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	9
<i>The Glass Castle</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation	8
<i>The Kite Runner</i> Hosseini, Khaled 2003	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	8
<i>Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2006	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	6
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time</i> Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin 2007	Nonfiction Education Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Islamic World theme</i>	5

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>	5
<i>A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League</i> Suskind, Ron 1998	Nonfiction Drugs/Poverty Education <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	4
<i>Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal</i> Schlosser, Eric 2001	Nonfiction Business/Economics/Economy Food	4
<i>The Namesake</i> Lahiri, Jhumpa 2003	Novel Immigration <i>South Asian theme</i>	4

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2008 – 2009

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time</i> Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin 2007	Nonfiction Education Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Islamic World theme</i>	23
<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	17
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003	Biography Humanitarianism/Social Activism Medicine/Mortality	11
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2003	Memoir Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	10
<i>Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2006	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature	8
<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i> Pollan, Michael 2006	Nonfiction Food	8
<i>The Glass Castle</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation	6

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Devil's Highway: A True Story</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2004	Nonfiction Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>	5
<i>Colors of the Mountain</i> Chen, Da 1999	Memoir Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Asian theme</i>	4
<i>Never Let Me Go</i> Ishiguro, Kazuo 2005	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Medicine/Mortality <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	4

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2009 – 2010

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time</i> Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin 2007	Nonfiction Education Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Islamic World theme</i>	28
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003	Biography Humanitarianism/Social Activism Medicine/Mortality	15
<i>The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music</i> Lopez, Steve 2008	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Disability/Disease/Mental Health <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	14
<i>Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance</i> Obama, Barack 1995	Memoir Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>	11
<i>Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America</i> Ehrenreich, Barbara 2001	Nonfiction America/Americans Drugs/Poverty	10
<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i> Pollan, Michael 2006	Nonfiction Food	9
<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Dispossession/Emigration/Exile <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	8

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	8
<i>Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project</i> Isay, Dave 2007	Nonfiction America/Americans <i>NPR theme</i>	8
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2003	Memoir Dispossession/Emigration/Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	8
<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Medicine/Mortality	8

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2010 – 2011

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	20
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time</i> Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin 2007	Nonfiction Education Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Islamic World theme</i>	18
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	15
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003	Biography Humanitarianism/Social Activism Medicine/Mortality	13
<i>Zeitoun</i> Eggers, Dave 2009	Biography Crime and Punishment/Police Disasters <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>Muslim American theme</i>	13
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	11
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	8

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i> Beavan, Colin 2009	Memoir Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature	7
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2003	Memoir Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	7
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	7

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2011 – 2012

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	56
<i>Zeitoun</i> Eggers, Dave 2009	Biography Crime and Punishment/Police Disasters <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>Muslim American theme</i>	17
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	14
<i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i> Beavan, Colin 2009	Memoir Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature	10
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	8
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	7
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	7

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i> Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer 2009	Memoir Humanitarianism/Social Activism Media/Science/Technology <i>African theme</i>	6
<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Medicine/Mortality	6
<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	6

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2012 – 2013

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	55
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	24
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	9
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	7
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i> Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer 2009	Memoir Humanitarianism/Social Activism Media/Science/Technology <i>African theme</i>	6
<i>Zeitoun</i> Eggers, Dave 2009	Biography Crime and Punishment/Police Disasters <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>Muslim American theme</i>	6
<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2011	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>South Asian theme</i>	5

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	5
<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2009	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>	4
<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America</i> Ehrenreich, Barbara 2001	Nonfiction America/Americans Drugs/Poverty	4
<i>The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains</i> Carr, Nicholas 2010	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology	4
<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Southeast Asian theme</i> <i>Vietnam War theme</i>	4
<i>The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration</i> Wilkerson, Isabel 2010	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>	4
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	4
<i>Where Am I Wearing? A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People that Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Business/Economics/Economy Drugs/Poverty	4
<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>African theme</i>	4

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2013 – 2014

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	24
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	13
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	10
<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2011	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>South Asian theme</i>	7
<i>One Amazing Thing</i> Divakarun, Chitra Banerjee 2010	Novel Disasters Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity <i>South Asian theme</i>	7
<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2009	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>	6
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	6

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>African theme</i>	6
<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i> Boo, Katherine 2012	Nonfiction Drugs/Poverty <i>South Asian theme</i>	5
<i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i> Iversen, Kristen 2012	Memoir Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Family Dysfunction/Separation	5
<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Career Advice/Success <i>Latin American theme</i>	5
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	5
<i>Start Something that Matters</i> Mycoskie, Blake 2011	Memoir Career Advice/Success Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Latin American theme</i>	5

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2014 – 2015

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	21
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	15
<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	8
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	7
<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>	7
<i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison</i> Kerman, Piper 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	7
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	7
<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda 2013	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>	6
<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	6

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature	5
<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2011	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>South Asian theme</i>	5
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Drugs/Poverty <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult</i>	5
<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	5

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2015 – 2016

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	19
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	16
<i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature	9
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	9
<i>March: Book One</i> Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell 2013	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	7
<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	7
<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>	7
<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>	6
<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	6

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>	5
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	5
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	5
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	5
<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Family Dysfunction/Separation	5

TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2016 – 2017

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	31
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	25
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	13
<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>	10
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	10
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>	8
<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>	7
<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	7
<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>	6

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda 2013	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>	5
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	5
<i>The Martian</i> Weir, Andy 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	5

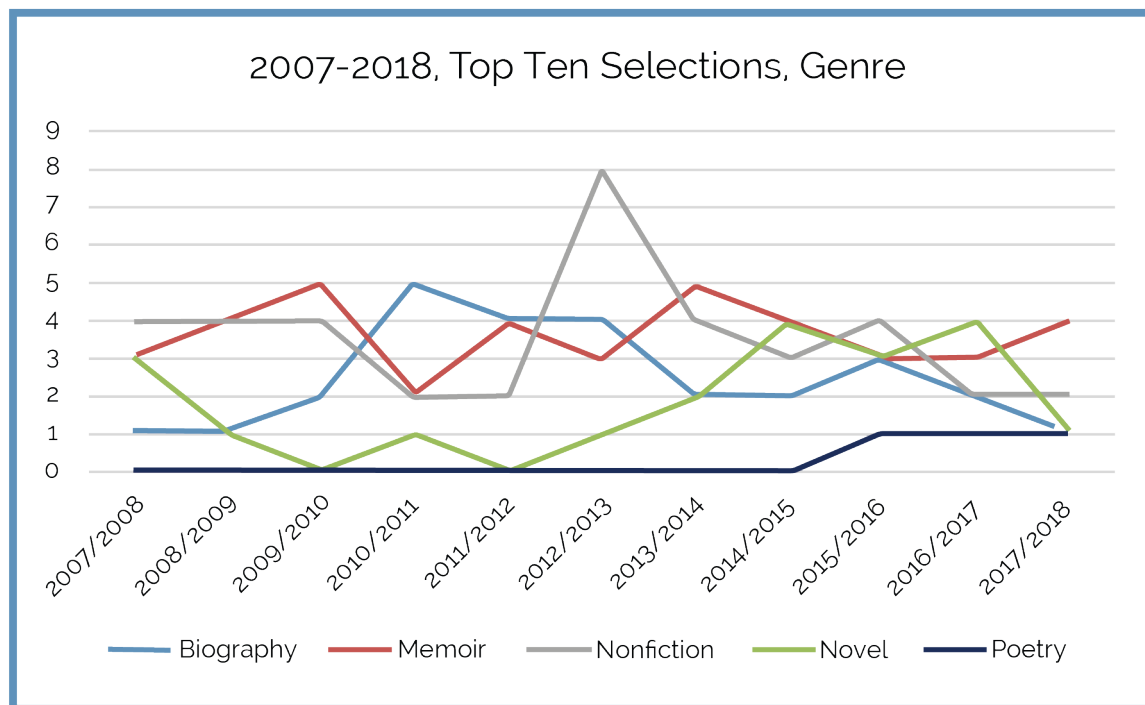
TEN MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2017-2018

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	29
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	19
<i>Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race</i> Shetterly, Margot Lee 2016	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Media/Science/Technology <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/TV version exists</i>	14
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	12
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	12
<i>Make Your Home Among Strangers</i> Cruet, Jennine Capó 2015	Novel Coming of Age Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>	10
<i>Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis</i> Vance, J. D. 2016	Memoir Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>White Appalachian theme</i>	9

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology Latin American theme Protagonist Under 18	8
<i>Callings: The Purpose & Passion of Work</i> Isay, Dave 2016	Memoir America/Americans	7
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery African American theme	7

CHANGE OVER TIME

When we tabulate the genres of these top ten selections, we may see a continuing preference for Biography, Nonfiction, and Memoir. Novels and Poetry appear to have ticked upward in frequency the last several years.



The Subject categories for these Top Ten Selections display a slight shift toward Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery, Crime and Punishment/Police, and Media/Science/Technology.

Subject Categories	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018
Adventure/Sports	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
America/Americans	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Animals/ Environmentalism/ Nature	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	0
Apocalyptic/ Dystopian/Science Fiction	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0
Business/Economics/ Economy	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Career Advice/Success	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Civil Rights/Racism/ Slavery	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	4	4	3
Coming of Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Crime and Punishment/Police	0	0	0	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	3
Disability/Disease/ Mental Health	1	0	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0
Disasters	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Dispossession/ Emigration/Exile	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Drugs/Poverty	2	1	1	0	1	3	2	2	1	1	2

Subject Categories	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018
Education	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Ethnic Cleansing/ Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnic Identity/ Sexual Identity	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Family Dysfunction/ Separation	3	1	2	2	1	2	3	2	3	1	1
Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1
Food	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Humanitarianism/ Social Activism	2	2	2	2	1	4	4	1	0	0	0
Immigration	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	3	3	2
Imprisonment/ Internment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Media/Science/ Technology	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	1	2	2	3
Medicine/Mortality	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality	0	0	0	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	0
Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
War	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Top Ten themes have shifted dramatically toward African American, and less dramatically toward Latin American.

Themes	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018
African	1	1	2	0	1	3	2	1	0	1	0
African American	2	0	2	1	2	3	2	3	6	6	6
Asian	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Asian American	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Film/TV version exists	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Graphic work	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hurricane Katrina	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Islamic World	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Latin American	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	2
Muslim American	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	0	1	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
NPR	0	0	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	0
Protagonist Under 18	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	3	2	1
South Asian	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0
Southeast Asian	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Vietnam War	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
White Appalachian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Young Adult	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Continuities

The twenty-five most assigned texts in the last eleven years were:

25 MOST POPULAR ASSIGNMENTS, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	201
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	109
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	76
<i>Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time</i> Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin 2007	Nonfiction Education Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>Islamic World theme</i>	74
<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003	Biography Humanitarianism/Social Activism Medicine/Mortality	67
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	58
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	52
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	51

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	45
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	44
<i>The Glass Castle</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation	42
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	41
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2003	Memoir Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	39
<i>Zeitoun</i> Eggers, Dave 2009	Biography Crime and Punishment/Police Disasters <i>Hurricane Katrina theme</i> <i>Muslim American theme</i>	38
<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Medicine/Mortality	32
<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Dispossession/Emigration/ Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>	32
<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	31

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i> Pollan, Michael 2006	Nonfiction Food	29
<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i> Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer 2009	Memoir Humanitarianism/Social Activism Media/Science/Technology <i>African theme</i>	28
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Drugs/Poverty <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult</i>	27
<i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i> Beavan, Colin 2009	Memoir Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	25
<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2009	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women Humanitarianism/Social Activism <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>	24
<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	24
<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America</i> Ehrenreich, Barbara 2001	Nonfiction America/Americans Drugs/Poverty	23
<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Southeast Asian theme</i> <i>Vietnam War theme</i>	23

The individual texts that have lasted longest—those which have been assigned eight or more years are:

25 MOST ENDURING ASSIGNMENTS, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Years Assigned	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Glass Castle</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation	11	42
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	10	52
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	10	41
<i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> Satrapi, Marjane 2003	Memoir Dispossession/Emigration/Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Graphic work</i>	10	39
<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Medicine/Mortality	10	32
<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Dispossession/Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>	10	32
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Alexie, Sherman 2007	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Drugs/Poverty <i>Native American theme</i> <i>Young Adult</i>	10	27
<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	Novel War <i>Southeast Asian theme</i> <i>Vietnam War theme</i>	10	23

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Years Assigned	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> Díaz, Junot 2007	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity <i>Latin American theme</i>	10	20
<i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i> Fadiman, Anne 1997	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity Medicine/Mortality <i>Asian American theme</i>	10	17
<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Adventure/Sports Immigration <i>Muslim American theme</i>	9	58
<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	9	51
<i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i> Gladwell, Malcolm 2008	Nonfiction Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/ Self-Help	9	18
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	8	201
<i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i> Beah, Ishmael 2007	Memoir War Dispossession/Emigration/Exile <i>African theme</i> <i>Protagonist under 18</i>	8	45
<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>	8	31

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Years Assigned	Number of Times Assigned
<i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i> Pollan, Michael 2006	Nonfiction Food	8	29
<i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America</i> Ehrenreich, Barbara 2001	Nonfiction America/Americans Drugs/Poverty	8	23
<i>The Kite Runner</i> Hosseini, Khaled 2003	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Film/Television version exists</i>	8	21
<i>Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project</i> Isay, Dave 2007	Nonfiction America/Americans <i>NPR theme</i>	8	20
<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>	8	17
<i>How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i> Bayoumi, Moustafa 2008	Biography Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>Muslim American theme</i>	8	14
<i>Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption</i> Thompson-Cannino, Jennifer, Ronald Cotton, and Erin Torneo 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	8	14
<i>What Is the What</i> Eggers, Dave 2006	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>African theme</i>	8	12
<i>The Iliad (Books 1-6)</i> Homer 800BC?	Epic Poem War <i>European theme</i>	8	8

GENRES

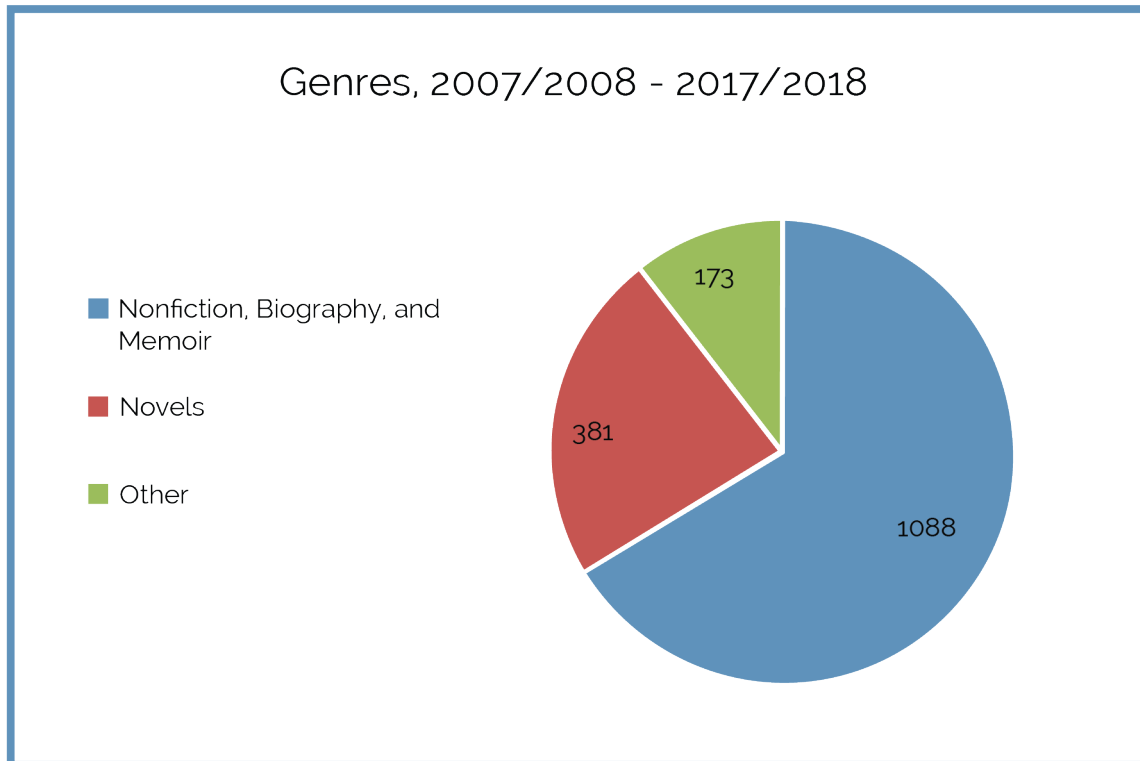
We classify common reading by genre: biography, memoir, newspaper, nonfiction, novel, play, poetry, and so on. The large majority of the 1,642 classifiable individual texts were in the three allied genres of Nonfiction (667, 41% of the total), Memoir (394, 24% of the total), and Biography (27, 2% of the total). Together there were 1,088 texts from these three genres, 66% of the total number of texts.

Novels were the most popular genre of imaginative literature: 381 texts, 23% of the total.

Non-book selections—a DNA Testing Project, a Dance, a Game Booklet—were a handful of the total. While some of these selections were thoughtfully conceived, we believe that colleges should still give priority to introducing students to the expectation that they should read a college-level book.

Genre	Number of Texts
Biography	27
Dance	1
DNA Testing Project	1
Epic Poem	2
Essay	23
Fairy Tale	1
Film	13
Game Booklet	1
Lecture	1
Memoir	394
Memoir Poems	1
Mixed Genre	2
Mural	1
Musical	1
Newspaper Articles	1
Nonfiction	667
Novel	381
Painting	2
Philosophical Dialogue	2
Play	34
Poetry	21

Genre	Number of Texts
Short Stories	57
Skills Assessment	1
Speech	5
TV Program	1
Total	1642



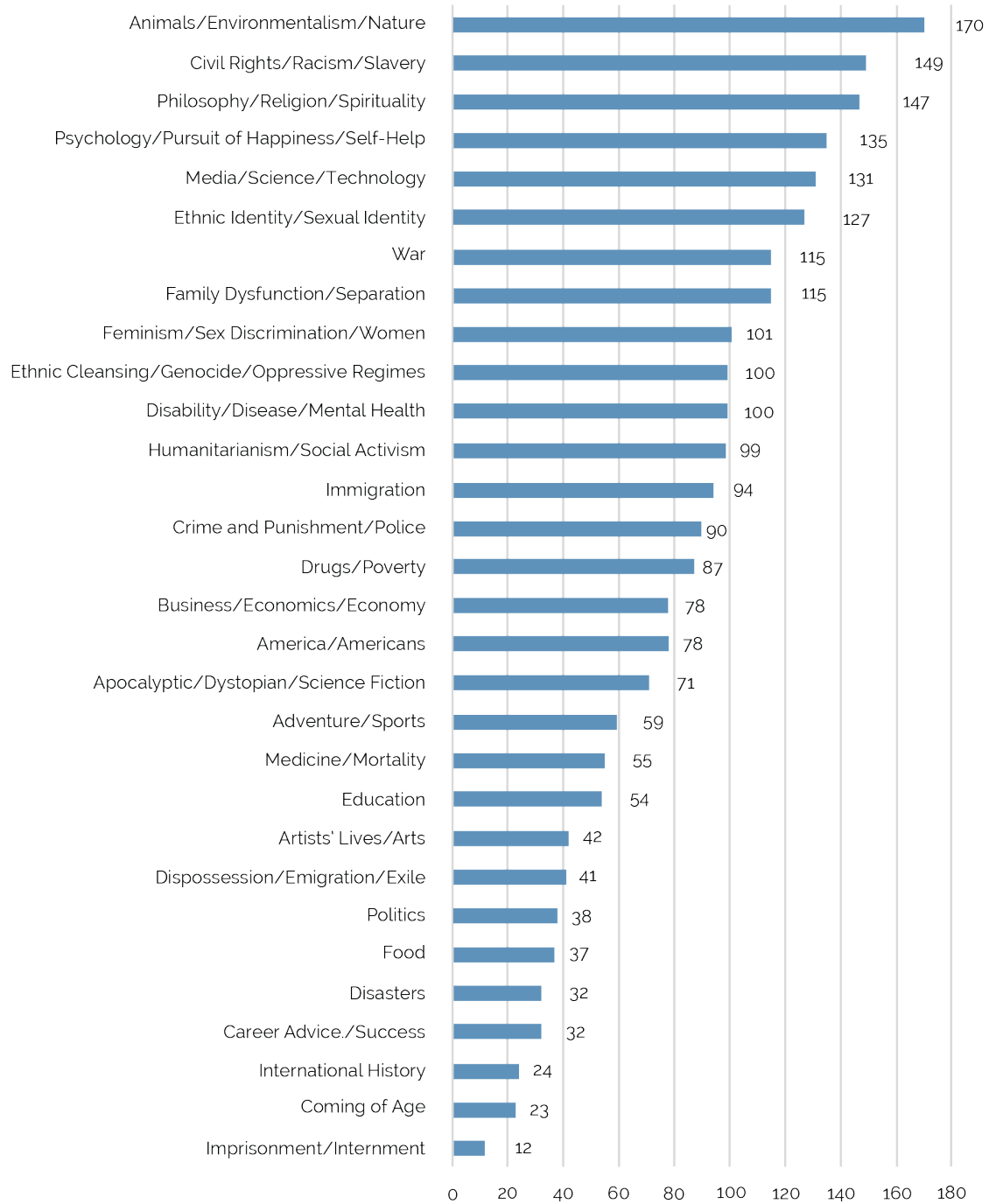
SUBJECT CATEGORIES

We divided the common readings into 30 subject categories. Since each book could be assigned up to two categories, the total number of subject categories is greater than the number of assignments. In 2007-2018, there were 2,436 assigned subject categories for 1,642 classifiable individual texts. The most popular subject categories in 2007-2018 were Animals/Environmentalism/Nature (170 individual texts), Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery (149 individual texts), Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality (147 individual texts), Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help (135 individual texts), and Media/Science/Technology (131 individual texts).

For these five categories, the most frequently assigned selections were, respectively, Colin Beavan's *No Impact Man* (25 assignments), Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* (76 assignments), Jay Allison and Dan Gediman's *This I Believe* (51 assignments), Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* (18 assignments), and Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (201 assignments).

Subject Category	Number of Selections
Adventure/Sports	59
America/Americans	78
Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	170
Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	71
Artists' Lives/Arts	42
Business/Economics/Economy	78
Career Advice/Success	32
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	149
Coming of Age	23
Crime and Punishment/Police	90
Disability/Disease/Mental Health	100
Disasters	32
Dispossession/Emigration/Exile	41
Drugs/Poverty	87
Education	54
Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	100
Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity	127
Family Dysfunction/Separation	115
Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women	101
Food	37
Humanitarianism/Social Activism	99
Immigration	94
Imprisonment/Internment	12
International History	24
Media/Science/Technology	131
Medicine/Mortality	55
Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality	147
Politics	38
Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	135
War	115
Total	2,436

Subject Categories, 2007-2018



THEMES

We have also recorded 23 further themes prominent among these assignments. Each book could be assigned up to two themes. In 2007-2018, there were 876 assigned themes for 1,642 classifiable individual texts. Most of these register the persisting interest in diversity, defined by non-white ethnicity at home and abroad, but the remainder register other aspects of common readings worth noting. Many common readings discuss books of which a film or television version exists, a significant number are graphic novels or memoirs, and many have a protagonist under 18 or are simply young-adult novels. The themes register most strongly the common reading genre's continuing obsession with race, as well as its infantilization of its students, its middlebrow taste, and its progressive politics.

In 2007-2018, the most popular themes were African American (203), Latin American (79), European (78), African (65), and Islamic World (62).

For these five themes, the most frequently assigned selections were, respectively, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (201 assignments), Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey* (52 assignments), Steven Johnson's *The Ghost Map* (12 assignments), Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (45 assignments), and *Three Cups of Tea* (74 assignments).

Theme	Number of Selections
Afghanistan War	6
African	65
African American	203
African Diaspora	12
Asian	41
Asian American	30
European	78
Film/TV version exists	38
Graphic work	27
Hurricane Katrina	16
Iraq War	22
Islamic World	62
Jewish World	6
Latin American	79
Muslim American	12
Native American	42
NPR	6

Theme	Number of Selections
Pacific Islander	4
Protagonist Under 18	61
South Asian	18
Southeast Asian	14
Vietnam War	5
White Appalachian	8
Young Adult	21
Total	876

Classic Assignments, 2007/2008 – 2017/2018

The possession of eleven years of data allows us to see new patterns and make new recommendations. In future reports we will add different analyses of our body of data. This first year, we have analyzed classic assignments.

College common reading selection committees overwhelmingly choose recently published books. In the books assigned in 2017, 318 of 487 datable assignments had been published in the previous five years—65%. In 2016, 67% had been published since 2011. On average, in every year since 2013, 65% of assignments had been published in the previous five years.

Yet the catalogue of all the common readings from 2007/2008 onward includes a fair number of classic texts—where a classic text is defined loosely as any book published before 1990. There have been 268 assignments of works published between 800 BC and 1989, including 177 individual texts. These range from the Book of Job to Margaret Atwood. (See **Appendix IV: Classic College Common Reading Texts**) The classic works are a small proportion of the total number of 4,754 common reading assignments since 2007—only 6 percent. But there are enough of them that we can say that common reading selectors *already* choose a large number of classic works.

INSTITUTIONS THAT CHOOSE CLASSIC TEXTS

Many colleges, and many different sorts of colleges, have chosen classic books. Of the 732 colleges and universities that chose common readings between 2007 and 2018, 153 colleges—21% of the total—selected a work from before 1990 (See **Appendix V: Institutions Assigning Classic Common Reading Texts**). 34 colleges—5% of the total—chose a work from before 1900. These colleges included national research universities such as Columbia University, Emory University, and the University of Pennsylvania; state institutions such as Indiana University at South Bend and Utah State University; private nondenominational colleges such as Hampshire College and Ithaca College; and private denominational colleges such as Florida College, Saint Mary’s of Maryland, and Augustana College in Illinois. (See **Appendix IV: Classic College Common Reading Texts**)

Some of these colleges focus on choosing classic texts. Columbia University always assigns the first six books of *The Iliad*. Utah Valley University’s classic book selection focuses institutionally on the classics. Florida College and The King’s College both typically choose classic works—The King’s College’s selections include *Antigone*, *King Lear*, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Hard Times*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. A significant minority of assignments come from a relatively small number of colleges. Of the 268 total assignments, five schools selected 37 assignments—14% of the total. These schools demonstrate that college students are capable of reading classic works as a matter of course.

INSTITUTIONS ASSIGNING 4+ CLASSIC TEXTS

Institution	Number of Classic Assignments
The King’s College (NY)	14
Columbia University (NY)	11
Florida College (FL)	11
Utah Valley University (UT)	9
Le Moyne College (NY)	6
Delaware Valley University (PA)	5
Saint Michael’s College (VT)	5
Augustana College (IL)	4
Cornell University (NY)	4
Indiana University, South Bend (IN)	4
Lynchburg College (VA)	4
Texas State University (TX)	4

A large number of other colleges selected older works as part of a mixture that included more standard modern works. Loyola University Maryland chose a work by Quintus Tullius Cicero; Augustana College a work by Machiavelli; Indiana University South Bend a work by Darwin. Of the 153 colleges that chose classic texts, 105—69%—chose only one. 26, 17%, chose just two. Most colleges that chose classic works chose them without a dedicated institutional focus. Colleges can incorporate classic works into their common reading rotation easily enough.

WHAT CLASSICS GET CHOSEN?

The books range from Homer and the Bible to 1989—but committees distinctly prefer more modern works. Books from the twentieth century are 131 of the 177 classic texts, 74% of the total. 108 selections, or 61%, were published since 1945. Common reading committees should choose more pre-1900 works: works that have stood the test of time tend to be better on average, and students

should be acquainted with the long conversation of Western civilization. Nevertheless, committees may be glad to know how many classics were published between 1900 and 1989. Common readings committees have chosen a large number of accessible and relevant modern classics.

Most common readings are nonfiction, but most classic selections are fiction. 66% of common readings selected in 2017 were nonfiction, memoir, or biography, but 62% of the classic selections were fiction—poems, plays, novels, and short stories. One of the points of common readings is to build imaginative empathy, which in turn builds civic dispositions—and literary reading is particularly good at building imaginative empathy.¹⁷ Classic selections skew far more toward fiction than modern selections, and so do a better job at fostering civic dispositions.

Many of the fiction selections are science fiction. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* all got selected many times—11, 8, and 7, respectively. The classic selections reflect the larger skew of common reading selections toward science fiction, with correspondingly heavy emphasis on those works of science fiction that have achieved scholarly recognition.

Classic books are slightly less concentrated than modern selections. The most popular five assignments were *The Iliad*, assigned 14 times; *Frankenstein*, assigned 11 times; *The Handmaid's Tale*, assigned 8 times; *Fahrenheit 451*, assigned 7 times; and *The House on Mango Street*, assigned 5 times. These five together made up 16.8% of the total number of classic assignments. That number isn't much different from the top five selections for 2017—Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Margot Shetterly's *Hidden Figures*, Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore*, and Rebecca Skloot's *Henrietta Lacks*—which together made up 17.4% of the total assignments.

But the five classic selections were diverse in form and subject matter, ranging from an epic poem about the Trojan War (*The Iliad*) to a nineteenth-century meditation on the power of modern science (*Frankenstein*) to a coming-of-age novel about a Hispanic girl in Chicago (*The House on Mango Street*). By contrast, all five of the 2017 selections were nonfiction works about African-American experience in contemporary America. The great wealth of the classic tradition encouraged far greater intellectual diversity.

Selection committees often chose books that reinforce the general progressive skew of college common readings. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a beautiful if scientifically dubious book, supported modern environmental themes. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* likewise supported the progressive school of feminism. James Baldwin's various works have been selected 7 times, presumably as better written precursors to Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and*

¹⁷ National Endowment for the Arts, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007), https://www.crc.losrios.edu/files/onebook/NEA_Reading_Report.pdf, pp. 8-9, 18, 46, 90. See also Gary Saul Morson, "Why College Kids Are Avoiding the Study of Literature," *Commentary*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/why-college-kids-are-avoiding-the-study-of-literature/>.

Me. Selection committees shouldn't just choose classics that happen to dovetail with modern progressive concerns. But if committees are going to confine themselves to progressive books, they should know that a great many classics fit the bill.

CHANGING RECOMMENDATIONS

Our previous recommendations have been that common reading committees should choose different books altogether. We may now emphasize that many committees already choose classic works. We therefore may shift the framework of our recommendations to urge that selection committees adopt *best existing practices* within their professional community. Since their peers are already choosing classics, it should be relatively easy for selection committees to do the same.

We make the following specific suggestions for informal or formal shifts to the way common reading committees make their selections, to encourage the choice of classic texts.

- Common reading committees could make it part of their mission statement to choose a classic at least once every four years.
- Common reading committees could make it a rule that every common reading shortlist must include at least one classic.
- Common reading committees could ask publishers specializing in first-year readings to increase the number of classics in their catalogues.
- The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition could form a committee, drawn from professionals around the country, to come up with a list of 100 classics that would work well as common readings—a parallel to the NAS's list of recommended books, but drawn from the experience and sensibility of common reading selectors.

While we should not presume upon our analysis of the data, we suspect that further analyses of the data will allow us to continue shifting our recommendations in the direction of *best existing practices*. We hope that phrasing our recommendations in this manner will have more purchase on common reading committees.