

# Beach Books: 2018-2019

## Appendix III Recommended Books For College Common Reading Programs



### APPENDIX III: RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR COLLEGE COMMON READING PROGRAMS

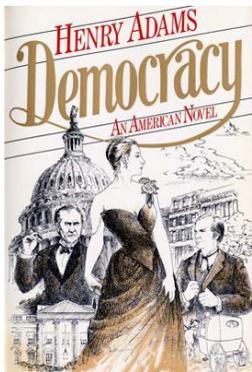
This appendix contains two sections. The first section contains 100 books appropriate in level of difficulty and length for any college freshman. The second section contains 40 more ambitious choices either because of length (i.e. *The Aeneid*) or intrinsic difficulty (i.e. *The Confidence Man*). For each book, we give several reasons why it would be a good choice for college common reading.

In compiling the books in these two sections, we had several considerations. We sought to follow our own recommendations listed above, and we also aimed to accommodate colleges that approach common reading assignments at different levels of difficulty, which is why we divided our list into two parts. Our goal is to offer constructive help.

We invite colleges and universities that have common reading programs, and those that are considering the idea, to use these two sections as a resource. We believe an educationally worthy program could be built around any one of these books. Of course, our list is not intended to be exhaustive. It is, instead, a prompt to stimulate scholars who are convinced that their institutions can and should aim higher. We recognize that every college is different, and that there is no one book that would be a suitable common reading choice for all. Our list is not a list only of classics, though it includes some.

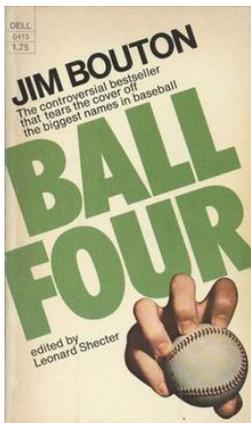
We have increased the number of our recommended books. We previously recommended 95 books appropriate for any college common reading program, we now recommend 110; we previously recommended 35 books appropriate for more ambitious college common reading programs, we now recommend 40.

## 110 Recommended Books Appropriate for any College Common Reading Program



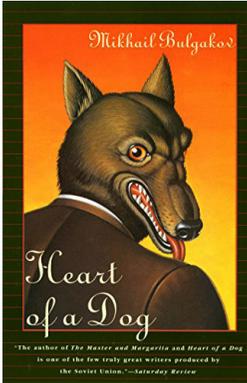
### **HENRY BROOK ADAMS – *DEMOCRACY* (1880)**

Adams' classic political novel highlights the pettiness and venality of America's elected representatives—and with a light touch explores what can be achieved by a democratic government that must work through the fallible men who wield the levers of power. Recommended for colleges who seek a sober but enjoyable appraisal of the strengths and weakness of the American government, which is no better—and no worse—than the American people.



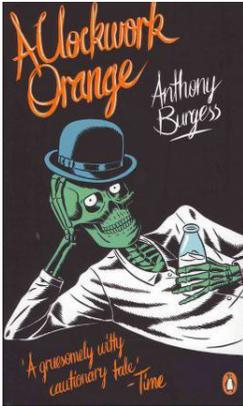
### **JIM BOUTON – *BALL FOUR* (1970)**

Fading pitcher Jim Bouton kept a diary during his 1969 season. Engaging malcontent Bouton bounced between the minor and the major leagues, pleaded with his coaches to let him pitch a knuckleball, recorded the unvarnished language, drinking, and affairs of his team-mates and managers, and glanced at the 1960s social revolutions from the vantage point of the pitcher's mound. This classic account of a professional athlete's life is especially recommended for common reading committees interested in sports memoirs.



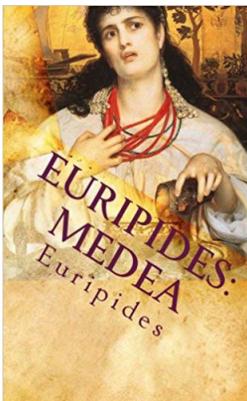
### MIKHAIL BULGAKOV – *THE HEART OF A DOG* (1925)

Dr. Preobrazhensky uses surgery to transform the dog Sharik into a human being—but he still has the heart of a dog. Sharik is violent, uncouth, an eager servant of the new Soviet state, and eventually becomes an informer for the secret police. Bulgakov's savage anti-Bolshevik satire also ridicules the hopes of any political reform or scientific advance to change man's essential nature. Especially recommended for colleges interested in books that explore the connections between science and politics.



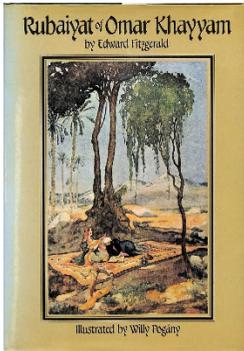
### ANTHONY BURGESS – *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* (1962)

Alex is your ordinary teenage delinquent. He likes dressing up, classical music, and whatever offers in the way of assault, rape, and murder. He is arrested, imprisoned, and then brainwashed to be good—not because he wants to, but because he has to. Can you make evil people be good? It is a worse evil to force them to be good? Especially recommended for colleges interested in science fiction. Note: reading discussion should focus on the differences between the grim 20-chapter version of the book and the more hopeful 21-chapter version.



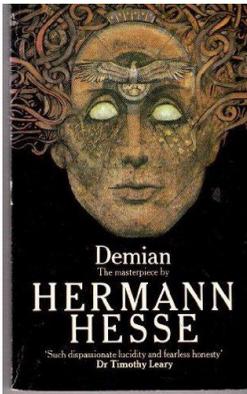
### EURIPIDES – *MEDEA* (431 BC)

Jason decides to divorce Medea—to secure an advantageous second marriage for himself and (he tells Medea) to use his new connections to give his children with Medea a better life. Medea decides that her self-respect requires her to kill not only Jason's new wife but also her own children. Is Medea a feminist heroine or a monster? No playwright has ever explored more acutely what it means for a woman to claim the dignity of a man. Especially recommended for colleges interested in discussing the status of women.



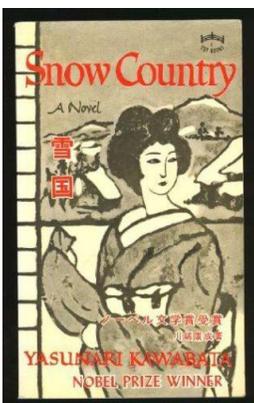
### EDWARD FITZGERALD – *RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM* (1859)

Medieval Persian poet Omar Khayyam wrote romantic and philosophical verse. Edward Fitzgerald's extremely loose translation turned Khayyam into a gloriously Victorian English mystic and skeptic. Fitzgerald's poetry beautifully evokes love and faith; they also demonstrate how much the world has gained from Westerners' affectionate, creative misreadings of non-Western texts.



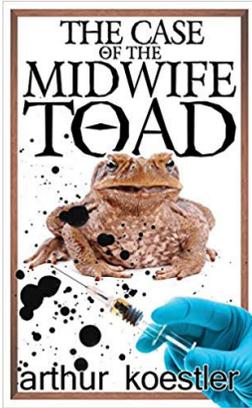
### HERMAN HESSE – *DEMIAN* (1919)

Emil Sinclair comes of age; psychologically tortured by bullies, tempted toward corruption, he eventually learns a better path from his schoolmate Max Demian. Demian instead points to a life dedicated toward self-exploration, whatever self you happen to possess. Colleges interested in character education can benefit by having students discuss the positive and negative features of *Demian*'s woozy German mysticism, which oscillates between inculcating a healthy rejection of salvation via collective endeavor and inculcating an appalling narcissism.



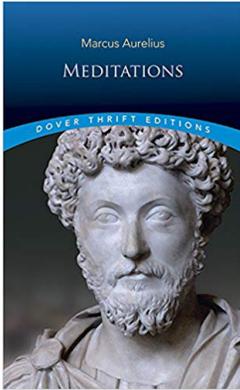
### YASUNARI KAWABATA – *SNOW COUNTRY* (1948)

Shimamura is rich, from Tokyo, an expert in Western ballet. Komako is a geisha in provincial Yuza-wa; she practices the *samisen* by listening to the radio and reading sheet music. Their love affair cannot last. Kawabata's novel incorporates the dichotomy of traditional Japan and the modern West into a classic Japanese story that likewise fuses traditional Japanese prose and imagery with Western Expressionism. Especially recommended for colleges interested in the true multiculturalism—robust traditionalism that appropriates Western culture with equal self-confidence.



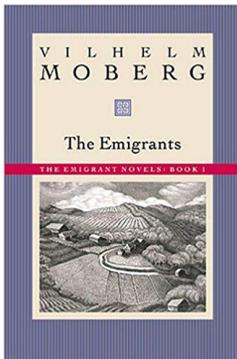
**ARTHUR KOESTLER – *THE CASE OF THE MIDWIFE TOAD* (1971)**

Biologist Paul Kammerer advocated Lamarckism—the idea that organisms pass on acquired characteristics to their children, and not just inherited ones. He was accused of fraud and committed suicide. Koestler tells his story with verve and pathos, and suggests that maybe Kammerer was framed, not fraudulent. And could there be anything to Kammerer’s ideas?—nowadays devotees of “epigenetics” are reviving quasi-Lamarckian thought. Especially recommended for colleges interested in bringing scientific debate to life—and its human costs.



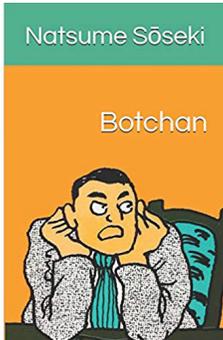
**MARCUS AURELIUS – *MEDITATIONS* (CA. 180)**

Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius articulated Stoic philosophy in these terse, compelling meditations. Aurelius teaches the reader how to ignore the distractions of pain and pleasure, to seek out dispassion and a sense of proportion, and to use your rational mind to seek to do good. Students will especially benefit from reading Aurelius in an age that glorifies unreflective passion, the embrace of victimhood, and irreconcilable resentment. Especially recommended for colleges interested in character education.



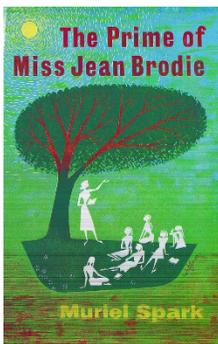
**VILHELM MOBERG – *THE EMIGRANTS* (1949)**

Karl and Kristina Nilsson emigrate from impoverished rural Sweden to the United States; after a grueling sea voyage, they arrive in their strange new home in 1850. Moberg’s novel is a fine character study of different sorts of Swedish emigrants, documentarily precise, and brings to life the great mid-nineteenth century wave of immigration that transformed America. Especially recommended for colleges interested in books that address immigration to America.



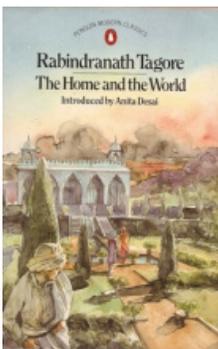
### **NATSUME SOSEKI – *BOTCHAN* (1906)**

Botchan is a Tokyo roughneck too quick with his fists, but he means well. Naturally he ends up teaching math to middle-schoolers. He quarrels with the students, quarrels with his fellow teachers, but ends up giving a good drubbing to the smooth-tongued head teacher, who really deserves it. This classic comic novel demonstrates that mistrust of arrogant, would-be intellectuals is universal. Especially recommended for colleges with large numbers of education majors.



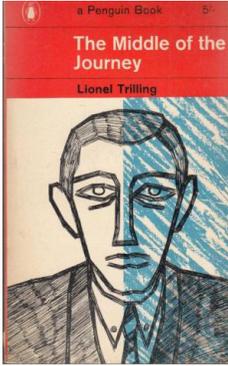
### **MURIEL SPARK – *THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE* (1961)**

Miss Jean Brodie gives her students in a 1930s Edinburgh girls school a lovingly individual education in art history, romance, classical studies, and political engagement for the Fascist cause. One student dies; another betrays her. Students will learn that they should not always trust their excitingly dedicated teachers. Especially recommended for schools interested in discussing the virtues and drawbacks of loyalty.



### **RABINDRANATH TAGORE – *THE HOME AND THE WORLD* (1916)**

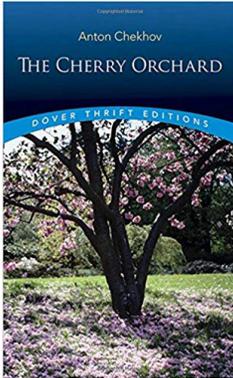
Nikhil and Bimala are a gentle loving couple who are tempted to leave their traditional mores by the alluring Indian nationalist Sandip—and learn that Sandip is an unscrupulous man who uses nationalism to serve himself. Tagore, the great figure of modern Bengal literature, wrote a subtle analysis of the attraction and power of nationalism, and how it too can be corrupted. Especially recommended for schools interested in fostering discussion about the promises and dangers of political engagement.



**LIONEL TRILLING – *THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY* (1947)**

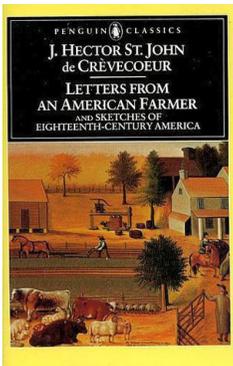
John Laskell recovers from a near-death illness and spends the summer with his friends the near-Communist Arthur and Nancy Croom—and the brooding ex-Communist Maxim Gifford. The Crooms' vicious sentimentality—their willingness to excuse any personal misbehavior by a member of the 'working class'—jolts Laskell out of his acquiescence in soft-Communist ideals. He ends the novel committed to defend liberalism against both Communism and conservatism. Trilling's fine political novel is especially recommended for colleges that seek to spark student debates about political philosophy.

## 40 Recommended Books Appropriate for More Ambitious College Common Reading Programs



### **ANTON CHEKHOV – *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* (1904)**

The noblewoman Lyubov Andreievna Ranevskaya returns to her family estate one last time, before it is sold off to pay for the mortgage. The merchant Lopakhin, son of an ex-serf, buys the estate; his triumph, the cutting down of Lyubov's beloved cherry orchard for the value of the timber, is her tragedy. Students will learn from Chekhov that comedy is inseparable from tragedy, and victory from defeat. Especially recommended for colleges interested in teaching empathy to their students.



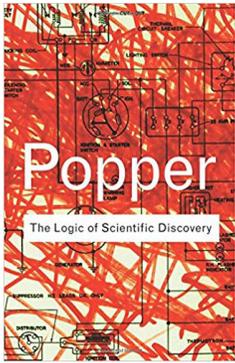
### **J. HECTOR ST. JOHN DE CRÈVECŒUR – *LETTERS FROM AN AMERICAN FARMER* (1782)**

Crèvecoeur's fictional letters explore the geography, economy, and society of the newborn America—including the nature of slavery and the frontier struggles with the Native Americans. This early study of the nature of America is as sprawling as the America it describes. Especially recommended for colleges who wish students to consider how much of America is the same as when it was born, and how much has changed.



**WALTER KEMPOWSKI – *ALL FOR NOTHING* (2006)**

It is January 1945 in East Prussia and the Russians are about to invade. Kempowski delineates every aspect of an East Prussia on the eve of annihilation—Nazis and aristocrats, artists and school-teachers, Polish slave laborers and Jews on the run. The reader knows it will be destroyed as the payment for following the Nazi will-o-the-wisp of conquest, loot, and slaughter—all gone for nothing. Kempowski lets us know how just is the Russian retribution to come—and how terrible that justice. Especially recommended for colleges who wish students to consider the consequences of being sure that history is on your side.



**KARL POPPER – *THE LOGIC OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY* (1934)**

Popper argue that the proper scientific methodology should be based on the principle of falsifiability: no experiment can prove a theory, but properly reproducible observations and experiments can falsify one. Popper's book is a modern classic of scientific epistemology. This book is especially recommended for schools focusing on science and technology, but all students will benefit from discussing whether an unfalsifiable theory has any intellectual value.



**JUNICHIRO TANIZAKI, *THE MAKIOKA SISTERS* (1948)**

The Makioka family's fortunes are declining in the late 1930s; the unmarried sisters must judge different marriage proposals, or whether to reject marriage entirely; and the shadows of the war with China are lengthening over pre-war Japan. *The Makioka Sisters* is an epic account of Westernization and women's roles, but above all it is the great realistic novel about interwar Japan. Especially recommended for colleges seeking to introduce their students to the best literature of the non-Western world.



