



Gratz Insider, Summer 2014 - Story Continuation

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Summer Reading Suggestions

Mindy Blechman is assistant director of admissions and coordinator of the Department of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Gratz College. She is also a member of the One Book, One Jewish Community project committee. As an avid reader, she recommends the following novels:

Love and Treasure (Ayelet Waldman) - This new book by New York Times bestselling author Ayelet Waldman has received widespread acclaim. It is a novel that transcends fictional generations, but is rooted in a true historical event: the American military's seizure and ultimate control of the Gold Train, a train containing valuables that had been confiscated from Hungarian Jews in 1944 by the pro-Nazi government in Hungary. The book is described on Waldman's website as a "spellbinding new novel of contraband masterpieces, tragic love, and the unexpected legacies of forgotten crimes." www.ayeletwaldman.com

Margot (Jillian Cantor) - This novel is based on an intriguing hypothetical question: what if Anne Frank's elder sister, Margot, had not perished in a concentration camp, but rather, had fled, concealed the details of her past and built a new life for herself in Philadelphia? Jillian Cantor's book answers this question by creating a new identity for Margot and exploring what might have happened when her past inevitably caught up with her.

The Dovekeepers (Alice Hoffman) - Alice Hoffman's novel takes place in Ancient Israel during the Roman siege of Masada, when over 900 Jews died in a mass suicide as the invading Roman army began closing in. At the center of the novel are the lives of its four strong female protagonists, characterized on Hoffman's website as "four extraordinary bold, resourceful, and sensuous women, each of whom comes to Masada by a different path." www.alicehoffman.com

The Museum of Extraordinary Things (Alice Hoffman) - Mindy hasn't read this book yet, but it is on her list of intended reads. Set in early 20th century New York, the

novel is a love story between two unlikely characters: Coralie Sardie, a girl, uncannily comfortable in water, who grew up playing the role of a mermaid in her father's Coney Island museum of freakish anomalies, and Eddie Cohen, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, who escaped his father's Orthodox community on the Lower East Side. The book is also a mystery revolving around the disappearance of a girl from the fatal fire at the Triangle shirtwaist factory that rocked the nation in 1911.

Despite her demanding job as president of Gratz College, **Joy Goldstein** miraculously manages to fit reading into her hectic schedule. Her suggestions for summer fiction are listed below.

***The Art Forger* (B.A. Shapiro)** - In this New York Times bestseller, B. A. Shapiro develops her own tale of intrigue around the actual and infamous 1990 theft of invaluable artwork from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Shapiro's protagonist, Claire Roth, is a young artist who enters into an agreement with a gallery owner to create a forgery of one of the Degas works that was part of the stolen collection. As explained on Shapiro's website, Roth ultimately "finds herself in a breathless race through a labyrinth of deceit where secrets hidden since the late 19th century may hold the key to the mysteries of the present." www.bashapirobooks.com

***The Goldfinch* (Donna Tartt)** - Winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, *The Goldfinch*, like *The Art Forger*, revolves around stolen art and shady deals. (In fact, if you're planning to read both books, Joy recommends reading *The Art Forger* first because it provides a useful foundation for *The Goldfinch*.) The pivotal event in the life of Donna Tartt's main character, Theo Decker, is the death of his mother in a terrorist attack at the Metropolitan Museum. Decker survives the attack, and at the urging of a dying patron, flees the devastating scene with the famous painting "The Goldfinch" in his protection. From New York to Las Vegas and back again, Tartt leads the reader through unexpected plot twists as Decker's life unfolds after the tragedy.

More fiction suggestions: Still searching for that perfect summer novel? Click [here](#) to access the Association of Jewish Libraries Bibliography Bank. Scroll down to "The Latest & Greatest in Jewish Fiction for Adults," and download this extensive list of current titles. This list was compiled for the 2014 Association of Jewish Libraries Conference by Rachel Kamin of North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, Illinois, and Ellen Tilman of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

NONFICTION BOOKS

Joy Goldstein also suggested the following nonfiction selection:

David and Goliath (Malcolm Gladwell) - Traversing a diverse range of topics from Northern Ireland and Vietnam to the impacts of dyslexia and childhood trauma, Malcolm Gladwell challenges conventional notions of weakness and strength, advantage and disadvantage.

Unsurprisingly, **Nancy Nitzberg**, the Gratz College librarian, also weighed in with her own reading suggestions. She recommends the following two books from the Gratz College library:

The Kidnapped and the Ransomed: The Narrative of Peter and Vina Still after Forty Years of Slavery (Kate E. R. Pickard) - This book offers a searing account of Peter Still's 40 years as a slave. It also describes the role played by two Jewish brothers in Still's eventual release. As she explains below, Nancy was particularly struck by an introductory essay in the book, written by the late Maxwell Whiteman, a scholar and historian from the Philadelphia area:

Max Whiteman's essay is fascinating and worth reading for its perspective on the social history of the pre-Civil War era. He conveys that because the formal abolitionist groups were church related, Jews were not much involved with them, but instead, acted individually and effectively in numerous abolitionist efforts, such as the one described in this book.

It Wasn't How It Seemed: Short Stories about People Who Jumped to Conclusions (Yehudis Samet) - Using real-life vignettes, Rebbetzin Yehudis Samet demonstrates the common divide between perception and reality. Each of her intriguing short stories ends with an unexpected twist, ultimately encouraging readers to search for the truth, rather than to draw conclusions based on how things appear.

After explaining that she reads primarily books on theology and rabbinics, **Professor Ruth Sandberg** suggested the following title:

Irreconcilable Differences? A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians (David F. Sandmel, Rosann M. Catalano, Christopher M. Leighton, eds.) - Reflecting the collective work of a number of Jewish and Christian educators, this book discusses

religious beliefs through the exploration of eight fundamental questions. Because it effectively covers similarities and differences between the two religions, the book is an excellent tool for interfaith dialogue.

Michael Schatz also had a nonfiction recommendation. Michael is an adjunct instructor at Gratz College and director of academic programs at the Gratz Jewish Community High School (JCHS). He considers the following book an important read for anyone belonging to a synagogue or other Jewish organization:

***Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community* (Ron Wolfson)** - In this book, Dr. Wolfson explains how relationship-building is the key to strengthening Jewish organizations and increasing their membership base. In a book review for the Jewish Book Council, Arnold D. Samlan says that "*Relational Judaism* has already moved to the front of the reading list for many rabbis, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, and with good reason." He continues, "Whether you're a Jewish professional, a community leader, or simply someone concerned about the future of the Jewish community and its organizations, this is a book that will get you thinking about the changes that need to be made in order to assure the future of the Jewish people."

www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/relational-judaism