

Summer Reading 2011

The Blessing of a B Minus

Wendy Mogel, Ph.D

Many of us loved *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, and Mogel's newest book has met with equal success. Once again, she uses Jewish teachings to sort through the challenges of raising adolescents. Michael Thompson labeled the book "funny and full of common sense."

Please Look After Mom

Kyung-Sook Shin

This novel from widely acclaimed Korean author Shin focuses on motherhood and family guilt. Park So-nyo, mother of four now-adult children, has gone missing in a Seoul train station on the way to visit them. The novel is told in four parts, from the perspectives of, first, her daughter, and then, her firstborn son, her husband, and finally, So-nyo herself. Composed almost entirely in second-person narration, the writing is sharp, biting, and intensely moving. So-nyo's children continually battle with their own guilt for not taking better care of her while reminiscing about the times when they were young, growing up in incredible poverty in the countryside. The children come to terms with their mother's absence in their own ways, and their father repents for a lifetime of neglect. When So-nyo's voice enters the narrative, the portrait of a troubled but loving family is complete. Secrets are revealed, and the heart of a mother is beautifully exposed. This Korean million-plus-copy best-seller is an impressive exploration of family love, poverty, and triumphing over hardship. —Booklist

A Step From Heaven

An Na

Oh's appropriately girlish voice and measured reading bring to life Young Ju, quiet heroine of debut novelist Na's dark tale of a family of Korean immigrants, which won the ALA's Printz Award for teenage literature. At age four, Young Ju is not happy to be leaving her Korean home and loving Halmoni (grandmother) to move with her parents to Mi Gook (America), believed to be the land of great promise. Through Young Ju's experiences, listeners hear the family unravel as difficulties mount for them in the States. Young Ju's parents struggle with several low-paying jobs, handicapped by their language barrier. Young Ju's alcoholic and bitter father abuses his wife and children and forbids Young Ju to socialize with American friends. And when her father crosses a frightening line in his cruelty, Young Ju bravely takes action that sets her mother, younger brother and herself on the path to yet another new life in America. Oh's characterization, which realistically captures this powerful contemporary story and gives authentic crispness to Korean words and phrases, will keep listeners in its grip. --- Publishers Weekly

Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White

Frank H. Wu

Beginning with a recap of his childhood bewilderment over the paltry selection of appealing Asian characters in 1970s American pop culture, Frank H. Wu, associate professor at the Howard University School of Law, describes the alienation experienced

by Asian-Americans in the 20th-century. An activist and journalist (the *Washington Post*, the *Nation*, the *L.A. Times*), Wu discusses key moments and phenomena in Asian-American history: the WWII internment camps, the 1992 L.A. riots, the "model minority myth," the virulent anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. during the 1980s' recession (exemplified by the murder of a Chinese American engineer by two white auto workers, fined \$3,780 for the crime) and periodic fads involving "Asian-ness" in American media. His sobering, astute, compelling investigation locates the particulars of Asian-American experience with racism in this country's spectrum of ethnic and cultural prejudice.
—Publishers Weekly

Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other
Sherry Turkle

With the recent explosion of increasingly sophisticated cell-phone technology and social networking websites like Twitter and Facebook, a casual observer might understandably conclude that human relationships are blossoming like never before. But according to MIT science professor Turkle, that assumption would be sadly wrong. In the third and final volume of a trilogy dissecting the interface between humans and technology, Turkle suggests that we seem determined to give human qualities to objects and content to treat each other as things. In her university-sponsored studies surveying everything from text-message usage among teens to the use of robotic baby seals in nursing homes for companionship, Turkle paints a sobering and paradoxical portrait of human disconnectedness in the face of expanding virtual connections in cell-phone, intelligent machine, and Internet usage. Despite her reliance on research observations, Turkle emphasizes personal stories from computer gadgetry's front lines, which keeps her prose engaging and her message to the human species—to restrain ourselves from becoming technology's willing slaves instead of its guiding masters—loud and clear.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Rebecca Skloot

From a single, abbreviated life grew a seemingly immortal line of cells that made some of the most crucial innovations in modern science possible. And from that same life, and those cells, Rebecca Skloot has fashioned in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* a fascinating and moving story of medicine and family, of how life is sustained in laboratories and in memory. Henrietta Lacks was a mother of five in Baltimore, a poor African American migrant from the tobacco farms of Virginia, who died from a cruelly aggressive cancer at the age of 30 in 1951. A sample of her cancerous tissue, taken without her knowledge or consent, as was the custom then, turned out to provide one of the holy grails of mid-century biology: human cells that could survive--even thrive--in the lab. Known as HeLa cells, their stunning potency gave scientists a building block for countless breakthroughs, beginning with the cure for polio. Meanwhile, Henrietta's family continued to live in poverty and frequently poor health, and their discovery decades later of her unknowing contribution--and her cells' strange survival--left them full of pride, anger, and suspicion. For a decade, Skloot doggedly but compassionately gathered the threads of these stories, slowly gaining the trust of the family while helping

them learn the truth about Henrietta, and with their aid she tells a rich and haunting story that asks the questions, Who owns our bodies? And who carries our memories?
—Amazon.com review

Nurture Shock

Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman

The central premise of this book by Bronson (*What Should I Do with My Life?*) and Merryman, a *Washington Post* journalist, is that many of modern society's most popular strategies for raising children are in fact backfiring because key points in the science of child development and behavior have been overlooked. Two errant assumptions are responsible for current distorted child-rearing habits, dysfunctional school programs and wrongheaded social policies: first, things work in children the same way they work in adults and, second, positive traits necessarily oppose and ward off negative behavior. These myths, and others, are addressed in 10 provocative chapters that cover such issues as the inverse power of praise (effort counts more than results); why insufficient sleep adversely affects kids' capacity to learn; why white parents don't talk about race; why kids lie; that evaluation methods for giftedness and accompanying programs don't work; why siblings really fight (to get closer). The chatty reportage and plentiful anecdotes belie the thorough research backing up numerous cited case studies, experts' findings and examination of successful progressive programs at work in schools.