

PLANS TO TEACH spring 2021
BOOKS THAT MAKE YOU WANT TO READ

Johnston OOOE

Spring 2020, MW @ 11:00AM-12:20PM

Bekins Basement #9

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Most Johnston courses have a history, and this one is no exception. Several years ago I asked Johnston alums James Boobar and Matt Gray, both prized teachers and counselors, to suggest a course that might be interesting and valuable, especially for newer Johnstonians. They quickly proposed a supplement to their team-taught course “Books that Make You Want to Write” that had served so many students well, and suggested “Books that Make You Want to Read.” A splendid idea! So I drew up a list of some 100 titles, despaired of choosing among them, and decided on two thematic anchors (“freedom” and “reading pleasure”) to narrow the list a little. The first version of the course ran in 2009, with Johnston seniors Myranda Hunter and Matthew Taylor as co-teachers. It went very well, as have later versions, and now I’m undertaking a fourth iteration that preserves those two original themes but organizes them under new rubrics: Beginnings (Greece, childhood), and Endings.

Here’s my proposal. Risking academic incorrectness at Johnston, I’ve chosen the books rather than negotiating possibilities with you. After all it’s *my* claim, not yours, that these books *will* make you “*want* to read.” I chose them first for the pleasure and excitement they generate, and then because in quite different, and enriching, ways they open up our ideas about reading pleasure and our understanding of human freedom. I also didn’t take the easy path of just picking contemporary books, and once again two books from before the 20th century; if you only know the easily accessible delights of your own time, your experience of pleasure is probably too narrow. *Expanding* your pleasures, making you a more versatile hedonist (and reader, and thinker, and writer) is my goal.

I’m thinking of scrapping the opening books – Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and John Fowles *The Magus* – we read last time and starting with a real oldie: Plato’s *Symposium*, the great dialogue on love. Then here are a few books, most in pairs or threesomes, that we **MIGHT** read:

Growing up Female

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland/*
Through the Looking Glass
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Alison Bechtel. *Fun Home*

African-American Lives

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
Claudia Rankine. *Citizen*.

Rewriting a Classic I

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*
Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

High-end Invisibility

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*
Sharona Muir, *Invisible Beasts*
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Fear

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*
Victor Hugo, *Last Day in the Life
of a Condemned Man*
Alan Moore. *Voice of the Fire*

Chicano/Chicana Lives

Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*
Reyna Grande, *The Distance Between Us*
(memoir)

Rewriting a Classic II

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*
Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*
Ian McEwan, *Saturday*

Native American Lives

Sherman Alexei, *Reservation Blues*
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Isolation

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
Christa Wolf, *Cassandra*

Political Fiction

Jose Saramago, *Blindness*
J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

Capstone??

David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*

OR

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*