**English 1A Book Club Project fall 2012:**

**The Choices**

I am open to suggestions of other titles that meet the project’s criteria, but here are the ones I am recommending. Most of the ones above the line have already been used successfully in previous classes. Most of these books are available for you to check out of the library and look at before you make your choice. Nearly all of them are available in paperback versions. It will be your responsibility to get your own copy of the book.

1. **Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal**  By Conor Grennan

This is the All Campus Reads selection for this year, so you might already have a copy. It’s great as an adventure story, a coming-of-age story, and just a good read.

Summary from Amazon.com: “So as not to seem completely self-indulgent to his friends and family, Conor started his year-long trip around the world with a three-month stint volunteering in the Little Princes Orphanage in war-torn Nepal. What began as a cover story changed Conor’s life, and the lives of countless others, forever. The turning point occurred during Conor's second stint as a volunteer with Little Princes. While playing on the roof of the orphanage, Conor was approached by a woman who would turn out to be the mother of two of the wards. Over hours of conversations with her, Conor learned the truth. Many of the little princes were not orphans but children that had been taken from their homes by child traffickers. In addition to losing two of her boys, this woman, while under the control of a human trafficker, was doing her best to keep seven other terrified kids alive. Conor's life changed in those moments, as he decided to commit himself to these unfortunates. After securing spots in an orphanage for all seven and arranging for an excellent local staff to run the Little Princes Orphanage, Conor escaped Nepal, one day before revolution erupted in Kathmandu. After arriving home, Conor received a devastating email reporting that the seven kids had disappeared, snatched once again by the same trafficker. Soon he was back in Kathmandu, riding through the chaotic streets on the back of a local's motorcycle, searching for his kids, seven needles in a corrupt haystack. And that is where Conor's story begins.

Conor pledged to not only start a new orphanage for these seven but also to start an entire new programme dedicated to reuniting kids with their lost families in remote villages in the Nepalese hills. He lived under constant fear of retribution from the traffickers. He needed to return to the US by 22 December, both because that was the agreed-upon panic date on which friends would alert authorities if he didn't return, and because it was the date that the woman he'd fallen in love with over email would arrive at his door so they could, at long last, meet in person. Conor's tale is an epic thriller, and a love story, and is best told by Conor himself.”

<http://www.amazon.com/Little-Princes-Children-Thorndike-Nonfiction/dp/141043527X>

1. **Yes, Chef** by Marcus Samuelson

This is a brand-new memoir, the rags-to-riches story of a man born into from extreme poverty in rural Ethiopia who rises to become a world-class chef in NY City’s fine dining arena. Its themes include finding your professional calling in what you love, earning respect the hard way, and forging an identity out of unlikely materials. Warning: it’s still in hardback form (about $25 in the store, less online, of course.)

An excerpt from a very positive review in the *NYTimes*: “Mr. Samuelsson, as it happens, possesses one of the great culinary stories of our time. It begins in Ethiopia, where he was born into poverty and where, at 2, he contracted tuberculosis, as did his mother and sister. The three of them trudged more than 75 miles in the terrible heat to a hospital in the capital city, Addis Ababa, where his mother died. Mr. Samuelsson . . . and his sister . . . found themselves on an airplane a year later, adopted by a white, middle-class family in Goteborg, Sweden. [. . .] Eight years later the James Beard Foundation named him the best chef in New York City. In 2009 he cooked for President Obama’s first state dinner. He’s now the owner and executive chef of [Red Rooster Harlem,](http://redroosterharlem.com/) where he interprets [Southern and other comfort food standards.](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/09/dining/reviews/09rest.html?pagewanted=all)” <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/27/books/yes-chef-by-marcus-samuelsson.html>

A 5-minute CBS video interview on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ks1pfKp-5Hc>

An 8-minute radio interview: <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/24/155513111/the-fight-for-the-right-to-hear-yes-chef>

### The Film Club by David Gilmour

What would you do with your 15-year-old son if he really hated school? Say, “OK, you can drop out, but you have to watch some movies”? Most dads wouldn’t think of this option, but here’s a memoir written by a dad who did, and who made it work, pretty much. This has been a very popular book with my students, and it makes a great counterpoint to the Tiger Mother book, described below. It’s also a really quick read. For further reviews, see Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Film-Club-A-Memoir/dp/product-description/B002YX0ICG/ref=dp_proddesc_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books>

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1. **Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother** by Amy Chua

I was ‘actually afraid to offer this book when it first came out, but it has been embraced by my students ever since—not that they all love it, mind you, but they all loved reading it and arguing about it, whether their own mothers were anything like this or not. You can find excerpts from the book, the *Wall Street Journal*  article that started the furor (and death threats) and about 8,000 comments on that article on my course website for spring 2012. (Soon to be added to this semester’s site.)

"Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* did more than speak to me. It screamed, shouted and lectured me. It made me simultaneously laugh with empathy and cringe with embarrassment and exasperation... Charming... Self-effacing... Guffaw-inducing"  
-Terry Hong, San Francisco Chronicle  
  
"Readers will alternately gasp at and empathize with Chua's struggles and aspirations, all the while enjoying her writing, which, like her kid-rearing philosophy, is brisk, lively and no-holds-barred. This memoir raises intriguing, sometimes uncomfortable questions about love, pride, ambition, achievement and self-worth that will resonate among success-obsessed parents... Engagingly and provocatively chronicled. Readers of all stripes will respond to [*Battle Hymn of the] Tiger Mother*.  
-Elizabeth Chang, *The Washington Post*

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1. **The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream** By Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt

This book is especially appropriate if you are aiming for a career in medicine, but it’s a great tale of triumph over self-doubt and bad circumstances that many other students can relate with, as well. The quotes below are from Amazon. <http://www.amazon.com/Pact-Three-Young-Promise-Fulfill/dp/157322989X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1343935379&sr=1-1&keywords=the+pact>

“Chosen by *Essence* to be among the forty most influential African Americans, the three doctors grew up in the streets of Newark, facing city life’s temptations, pitfalls, even jail. But one day these three young men made a pact. They promised each other they would all become doctors, and stick it out together through the long, difficult journey to attaining that dream. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt are not only friends to this day—they are all doctors.

This is a story about the power of friendship. Of joining forces and beating the odds. A story about changing your life, and the lives of those you love most...together.

1. **Mexican Enough: My Life Between the Borderlines** by Stephanie Elizondo Griest

“Growing up in a half-white, half-brown town and family in South Texas, Stephanie Elizondo Griest struggled with her cultural identity. Upon turning thirty, she ventured to her mother's native Mexico to do some root-searching and stumbled upon a social movement that shook the nation to its core. *Mexican Enough* chronicles her adventures rumbling with luchadores (professional wrestlers), marching with rebel teachers in Oaxaca, investigating the murder of a prominent gay activist, and sneaking into a prison to meet with indigenous resistance fighters. She also visits families of the undocumented workers she befriended back home. Travel mates include a Polish thief, a Border Patrol agent, and a sultry dominatrix. Part memoir, part journalistic reportage, *Mexican Enough* illuminates how we cast off our identity in our youth, only to strive to find it again as adults -- and the lessons to be learned along the way.” From the Amazon website <http://www.amazon.com/Mexican-Enough-Life-between-Borderlines/dp/1416540172/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1343935972&sr=1-1&keywords=mexican+enough>

1. **Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, An American Town** by Warren St. John

“Outcasts United is the story of a refugee soccer team, a remarkable woman coach and a small southern town turned upside down by the process of refugee resettlement. It's a tale about resilience, the power of one person to make a difference and the daunting challenge of creating community in a place where people seem to have little in common. Over [40 colleges and universities](http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780385522045) have selected Outcasts United as their required read for incoming freshmen, and the book has been selected by numerous state and city-wide common reading programs.”

From the book’s website: <http://outcastsunited.com/home>

This is not an easy read, but students from previous semesters have felt it was worth the trouble, especially if you are interested in soccer, refugees, or stories of unlikely sports triumphs (as in *Remember the Titans* and *Invictus*).

1. **The Translator: A Tribesman’s Memoir of Darfur** By Daoud Hari

Maybe you had a lecture on a current events class about the recent genocide and refugee crisis in Darfur, or saw the film *The Lost Boys of* Sudan? This beautifully written memoir gives you the story from someone who lived through it. It is an unforgettable narrator with a powerful story.

"In his moving memoir, The Translator, Daoud Hari illuminates the complexities of the conflict [in Darfur]..., but his book's modest scope is perhaps its greatest strength. In its intimacy, quiet humor and compassion, The Translator is more like a conversation with a friend than a call to action. The plight of someone close to you can pierce you, and Hari keeps his readers close.”   
—Los Angeles Times

from the book’s website: <http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/features/thetranslator/>

1. **Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs (Most) Americans Won’t Do** by Gabriel Thompson

“What is it like doing the back-breaking work of immigrants? To find out, Gabriel Thompson spent the year working alongside Latino immigrants, who initially thought he was either crazy or an undercover immigration agent. He stooped over lettuce fields in Arizona and worked the graveyard shift at a chicken slaughterhouse in rural Alabama. He dodged taxis—not always successfully—as a bicycle delivery “boy” for an upscale Manhattan restaurant, and was fired from a flower shop by a boss who, he quickly realized, was nuts.

As one coworker explained, “These jobs make you old quick.” Back spasms occasionally keep Thompson in bed, where he suffers recurring nightmares involving iceberg lettuce and chicken carcasses. Combining personal narrative with investigative reporting, Thompson shines a bright light on the underside of the American economy, exposing harsh working conditions, union busting, and lax government enforcement—while telling the stories of workers, undocumented immigrants and desperate US citizens alike, forced to live with chronic pain in the pursuit of $8 an hour.” [From the book’s Website <http://workingintheshadows.wordpress.com/about/>]

1. **Lost in the Meritocracy: The Undereducation of an Overachiever** by Walter Kirn

This book gives you the inside view of what it’s like to be an outsider at an Ivy-League school. Here’s a snippet from the *NY Times* book review:

“[. . . ] Walter Kirn’s memoir, “Lost in the Meritocracy: The Undereducation of an Overachiever,” [is] the witty, self-­castigating story of the author’s single-minded quest to succeed at a series of tests and competitions that took him from one of the lowest-ranked high schools in Minnesota to Princeton. As Kirn, a noted critic and novelist, tells it, in childhood he leapt onto a hamster wheel baited with “prizes, plaques, citations, stars,” and kept rattling away at it until his junior year in the [Ivy League](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/i/ivy_league/index.html?inline=nyt-org), when he suffered a breakdown that left him nearly speechless.” But then there’s the come-back, of course. For the rest of the review: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/books/review/Miller-t.html>

This book wasn’t chosen last semester, but it has been popular in other semesters, despite its slightly snarky tone. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**More options:** Below are books that I’ve never used for this (because they’ve never been chosen), but I read them and thought they were great.

**Leaving Microsoft to Change the World: An Entrepreneur's Odyssey to Educate the World's Children** by John Wood

What happens when you get that high-powered career you’ve dreamed of and are making oodles of money but you still aren’t happy? Well, start a non-profit that can change the lives of millions of children, their families, and their communities. Anyway, that’s what John Wood did, and the story of how he did it is pretty amazing. This would be especially appropriate for students interested in careers in teaching, PR, or management.

For more information and reviews of the book: <http://www.amazon.com/Leaving-Microsoft-ChangeWorldEntrepreneurs/dp/0061121088/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1343936037&sr=1-1&keywords=leaving+microsoft+to+change+the+world>

For more about Room to Read, the organization he founded: <http://www.roomtoread.org/>

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**Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil**

by Deborah Rodriguez

This is another tale of someone—a hairstylist this time--who found an unexpected way to help people and find her true calling.

“Soon after the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez went to Afghanistan as part of a group offering humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation. Surrounded by men and women whose skills–as doctors, nurses, and therapists–seemed eminently more practical than her own, Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother of two from Michigan, despaired of being of any real use. Yet she soon found she had a gift for befriending Afghans, and once her profession became known she was eagerly sought out by Westerners desperate for a good haircut and by Afghan women, who have a long and proud tradition of running their own beauty salons. Thus an idea was born.   
  
With the help of corporate and international sponsors, the Kabul Beauty School welcomed its first class in 2003. Well meaning but sometimes brazen, Rodriguez stumbled through language barriers, overstepped cultural customs, and constantly juggled the challenges of a postwar nation even as she learned how to empower her students to become their families’ breadwinners by learning the fundamentals of coloring techniques, haircutting, and makeup.”

From the Amazon website: <http://www.amazon.com/Kabul-Beauty-School-American-Behind/dp/0812976738/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1343936411&sr=1-1&keywords=kabul+beauty+school>