Common Reading Programs

Many universities and colleges have incorporated “common readings” into first year experience programs. Typically a book is selected by a campus committee and introduced during summer orientation activities. Institutions provide incoming freshman with a copy of the selected book. Students are expected to read the book over the summer and participate in discussion groups and other activities during the fall and/or spring semesters. Three longstanding programs include the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (http://www.unc.edu/srp/), Appalachian State University (http://www.summerreading.appstate.edu/) and The Ohio State University (http://fyf.osu.edu/bbc.html). The University of Texas-San Antonio (http://utsa.edu/trcss/lc/commonread/about.html) has incorporated a common reading into learning community activities. Cornell University’s program (http://www.reading.cornell.edu/) has expanded to include high school students and alumni.

Other universities, such as Indiana University – South Bend, have implemented “One Book, One Campus” programs (https://www.iusb.edu/library/about/newsevents/onebook/index.php). All faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to read a common book and participate in related activities.

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/index.html) contains extensive information related to summer reading programs.

The site includes a searchable database of institutions with summer reading programs as well as an extensive book list. Most entries include contact information.

The following list includes books that have been used by colleges and universities within the past few years. Where available, links are provided to institutions that have used the book.
A Hope in the Unseen by Ronald Suskind

About the book and discussion questions:
http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_H/hope_in_the_unseen1.asp

Appalachian State University – 2004 Common Reading (click on “Supplemental Materials” link for a list of discussion questions)
http://www.summerreading.appstate.edu/2004-selection

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America by Barbara Ehrenreich

About the book and discussion questions:

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania – 2005 Common Reading
http://academics.sru.edu/fyrst/read/

Napoleon’s Buttons: 17 Molecules That Changed History by Penny Le Couteur & Jay Burreson

About the book:
http://www.americanscientist.org/bookshelf/pub/lessons-from-the-past

The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to His White Mother by James McBride

About the book:

West of Kabul, East of New York by Tamim Ansary

About the book:

Looking for book possibilities?

Barbara Fister, a librarian at Gustavus Aldolphus College in St. Paul, Minnesota has compiled a list of common reading programs at various colleges and universities.

One Book, One College: Common Reading Programs
http://homepages.gac.edu/~fister/onebook.html
Other Variations

  http://www.buffalostate.edu/orientation/documents/CDList.pdf
- University of Alberta, Augustana Campus – Since 2006, the university has had an “academic theme”, http://www.augustana.ualberta.ca/theme/

Additional Resources

All Iowa Reads – The 2013 selection is “The Year We Left Home”, by Jean Thompson
More information - http://www.iowacenterrforthebook.org/air

Iowa: A Literary Landscape. This website, developed by the Busse Library at Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, includes an extensive list of fiction books which feature Iowa as the setting of the story.
http://www.mtmercy.edu/busselibrary/iowafic.html

Outstanding Books for the College Bound and Lifelong Learners – This list was compiled by YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association), a division by the American Library Association. Although the list was developed for students in grades 9-12, there are many titles that would be suitable for use as a common reading. Books are listed by category (e.g. Humanities, Science and Technology, etc.).
Available as an e-book via the ISU Library -

The Center for the Book at the Library of Congress maintains a list of “One Book” Reading Promotion programs in the United States.
http://www.read.gov/resources/

LabLit.com (http://www.lablit.com/the_list) – This list includes novels, films, plays, and TV shows that have a connection to science.

Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database -
(http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Main?action=new) “The Literature, Arts, & Medicine Database is an annotated multimedia listing of prose, poetry, film, video and art that was developed to be a dynamic, accessible, comprehensive resource for teaching and research in MEDICAL HUMANITIES, and for use in health/pre-health, graduate and undergraduate liberal arts and social science settings.”
Looking for Books that Fit a “Theme”?

The following books are available at Parks Library.


- This book groups book titles according to the following subjects: True Adventure, Travel, True Crime, Environmental Writing, Science and Math, History, Biography, Memoirs and Autobiography, Relationships, Investigative Writing, and Making Sense. Brief descriptions are provided of each book, and most chapters contain a short list of “fiction read-alikes.”


- This book provides detailed descriptions of books related to themes such as: Commerce, The Earth, Family, Illness, Islamic Women, Perseverance, Poverty, and World War II.


Resources from Publishers

Many of the major publishers have created catalogs that are geared toward first year experience programs. Check the following websites for catalogs, newsletters, and other resources.

First Year Experience Reading Programs – Penguin Group USA