**Contemporary Fiction Choices**

**Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut**
*Slaughterhouse-Five* explores fate, free will, the certainty of suffering and the illogical nature of human beings. Protagonist Billy Pilgrim is unstuck in time, randomly experiencing the events of his life, with no idea of what part he will next visit. Vonnegut uses the firebombing of Dresden during WWII as a central event, making the generally unrealistic novel semi-autobiographic because Vonnegut himself was a prisoner-of-war and did survive the infamous firestorm. It is ranked as the “18th greatest English language novel” by Modern Library, a major publisher.

**Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer**
The main protagonist of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a nine-year-old boy named Oskar Schell, who father has died in terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. While looking through his father's closet, Oskar finds a key in a small envelope inside a vase, on the outside of the envelope the word "Black" is written in the top left corner. Curious, Oskar sets off on a mission to contact every person in New York City with the last name Black, in alphabetical order, in order to find the lock to the key his father left behind. Major themes of the book include the quest for meaning, the effects of trauma, the importance of family and the struggle between self-destruction and self-preservation.

**Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi**
*Persepolis* is an autobiographical graphic novel depicting the author’s childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution. *Newsweek* ranked the book #5 on its list of the ten best fiction books of the decade.
Marji is a headstrong young girl who, at six years old, decided she could fix the world by becoming a prophet. As she grows older, she is obliged, due to the Islamic revolution in Iran, to wear a veil and hide her more progressive ideals. Despite the upheaval in her country, she and her parents maintain an oasis of open-mindedness. At 14, due to an injustice she witness, Marji becomes a fearless rebel and is expelled from school. Her parents, fearing for her safety in fundamentalist Iran, send her to school in Austria, where she continues her adventures.

**Night by Elie Weisel**
*Night* is a work by Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel about his experience with his father in the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in at the height of the Holocaust. In just over 100 pages of sparse and fragmented narrative, Wiesel writes about the death of God and his own increasing disgust with humanity, reflected in the inversion of the father-child relationship as his father declines to a helpless state and Wiesel becomes his resentful teenage caregiver. The novel ends with the liberation of the camps by the Soviets and US soldiers. While the prisoners welcome the liberators, it is far from a “happy ending.”
**The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini**  
*The Kite Runner* is the author’s first novel. Amir, the central character, is a well-to-do Afghani boy. He and the son of a faithful family servant, Hassan, spend their days in the pre-Taliban city of Kabul, engaged in competitive kite fighting. Amir's father, a wealthy merchant, whom Amir affectionately refers to as *Baba*, loves both boys, but is often more harshly critical of Amir, considering him weak and lacking in courage. Hassan is faithful to Amir, looking up to him, but Assef, a violent older boy and leader of a small gang of thugs, mocks Amir for socializing with Hassan, who is, according to Assef, of an inferior race. Hassan defends the weaker Amir and kicks off a series of events that are both tragic and ultimately redemptive.

**Flight by Sherman Alexie**  
*Flight* is written from the viewpoint of a Native American teenager who calls himself Zits, “a time traveling mass murderer.” Zits is a foster child and has spent the majority of his life moving from one bad family experience to another. His friend, Justice, introduces Zits to a new way of thinking, and to the idea of committing random violence in the form of a mass shooting. In the middle of a murderous rampage, Zits consciousness is somehow thrust into the body of a stranger—which would become the first of many similar incidents. The story confronts Zits’ feelings of vulnerability as a misunderstood teenager, orphan, and as a Native American person. The “unstuck in time” theme in this book echoes Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse Five.*