

# Winter Break Reading – Non fiction

*Current challenges facing society*

*Summaries are supplied by Amazon Books.com*

## ***Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson***

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinkmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever. *Just Mercy* is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

## ***Evicted by Matthew Desmond***

In *Evicted*, Princeton sociologist and MacArthur "Genius" Matthew Desmond follows eight families in Milwaukee as they each struggle to keep a roof over their heads. Hailed as "wrenching and revelatory" (*The Nation*), "vivid and unsettling" (*New York Review of Books*), *Evicted* transforms our understanding of poverty and economic exploitation while providing fresh ideas for solving one of twenty-first-century America's most devastating problems. Its unforgettable scenes of hope and loss remind us of the centrality of home, without which nothing else is possible.

## ***Dopesick by Beth Macy***

Beginning with a single dealer who lands in a small Virginia town and sets about turning high school football stars into heroin overdose statistics, Macy sets out to answer a grieving mother's question—why her only son died—and comes away with a gripping, unputdownable story of greed and need. From the introduction of OxyContin in 1996, Macy investigates the powerful forces that led America's doctors and patients to embrace a medical culture where overtreatment with painkillers became the norm. In some of the same communities featured in her bestselling book *Factory Man*, the unemployed use painkillers both to numb the pain of joblessness and pay their bills, while privileged teens trade pills in cul-de-sacs, and even high school standouts fall prey to prostitution, jail, and death. Through unsparing, compelling, and unforgettably humane portraits of families and first responders determined to ameliorate this epidemic, each facet of the crisis comes into focus. In these politically fragmented times, Beth Macy shows that one thing uniting Americans across geographic, partisan, and class lines is opioid drug abuse.

## ***Columbine by Dave Cullen***

So begins a new epilogue, illustrating how Columbine became the template for nearly two decades of "spectacle murders." It is a false script, seized upon by a generation of new killers. In the wake of Parkland, Charleston, Newtown, Aurora, and Virginia Tech, the imperative to understand the crime that sparked this plague grows more urgent every year.

What really happened April 20, 1999? The horror of Columbine left an indelible stamp on the American psyche, but most of what we "know" is wrong. It wasn't about jocks, goths, or the Trench Coat Mafia. Dave Cullen was one of the first reporters on

scene, and spent ten years on this book -- widely recognized as the definitive account. With a keen investigative eye and psychological acumen, Cullen draws on mountains of evidence, insights from the world's leading forensic psychologists, and the killers' own words and drawings -- several reproduced in a new appendix for the paperback.

### ***The 57 Bus* by Dashka Slater**

One teenager in a skirt.

One teenager with a lighter.

One moment that changes both of their lives forever.

If it weren't for the 57 bus, Sasha and Richard never would have met. Both were high school students from Oakland, California, one of the most diverse cities in the country, but they inhabited different worlds. Sasha, a white teen, lived in the middle-class foothills and attended a small private school. Richard, a black teen, lived in the crime-plagued flatlands and attended a large public one. Each day, their paths overlapped for a mere eight minutes. But one afternoon on the bus ride home from school, a single reckless act left Sasha severely burned, and Richard charged with two hate crimes and facing life imprisonment. The case garnered international attention, thrusting both teenagers into the spotlight.

### ***Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan**

What should we have for dinner? Ten years ago, Michael Pollan confronted us with this seemingly simple question and, with *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, his brilliant and eye-opening exploration of our food choices, demonstrated that how we answer it today may determine not only our health but our survival as a species. In the years since, Pollan's revolutionary examination has changed the way Americans think about food. Bringing wide attention to the little-known but vitally important dimensions of food and agriculture in America, Pollan launched a national conversation about what we eat and the profound consequences that even the simplest everyday food choices have on both ourselves and the natural world. Ten years later, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* continues to transform the way Americans think about the politics, perils, and pleasures of eating.

### ***A Deadly Wandering* by Matt Richtel**

One of the year's most original and masterfully reported books, *A Deadly Wandering* by Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* journalist Matt Richtel interweaves the cutting-edge science of attention with the tensely plotted story of a mysterious car accident and its aftermath to answer some of the defining questions of our time: *What is technology doing to us? Can our minds keep up with the pace of change? How can we find balance?*

On the last day of summer, an ordinary Utah college student named Reggie Shaw fatally struck two rocket scientists while texting and driving along a majestic stretch of highway bordering the Rocky Mountains. *A Deadly Wandering* follows Reggie from the moment of the tragedy, through the police investigation, the state's groundbreaking prosecution, and ultimately, Reggie's wrenching admission of responsibility. Richtel parallels Reggie's journey with leading-edge scientific findings on the impact technology has on our brains, showing how these devices play to our deepest social instincts. A propulsive read filled with surprising scientific detail, riveting narrative tension, and rare emotional depth, *A Deadly Wandering* is a book that can change—and save—lives.

### ***The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert**

A major book about the future of the world, blending intellectual and natural history and field reporting into a powerful account of the mass extinction unfolding before our eyes. Over the last half-billion years, there have been Five mass extinctions, when the diversity of life on earth suddenly and dramatically contracted. Scientists around the world are currently monitoring the sixth extinction, predicted to be the most devastating extinction event since the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs. This time around, the cataclysm is us. In prose that is at once frank, entertaining, and deeply informed, *New Yorker* writer Elizabeth Kolbert tells us why and how human beings have altered life on the planet in a way no species has before. Interweaving research in half a dozen disciplines, descriptions of the fascinating species that have already been lost, and the history of extinction as a concept, Kolbert provides a moving and comprehensive account of the disappearances occurring before our very eyes. She shows that the sixth extinction is likely to be mankind's most lasting legacy, compelling us to rethink the fundamental question of what it means to be human.

### ***No One Cares About Crazy People* by Ron Powers**

*New York Times*-bestselling author Ron Powers offers a searching, richly researched narrative of the social history of mental illness in America paired with the deeply personal story of his two sons' battles with schizophrenia. From the centuries of torture of "lunatics" at Bedlam Asylum to the infamous eugenics era to the follies of the anti-psychiatry movement to the current landscape in which too many families struggle alone to manage afflicted love ones, Powers limns our fears and myths about mental illness and the fractured public policies that have resulted. Braided with that history is the moving story of Powers's beloved son Kevin--spirited, endearing, and gifted--who triumphed even while suffering from schizophrenia until finally he did not, and the story of his courageous surviving son Dean, who is also schizophrenic.

A blend of history, biography, memoir, and current affairs ending with a consideration of where we might go from here, this is a thought-provoking look at a dreaded illness that has long been misunderstood.

### ***The Overachievers* by Alexandra Robbins**

High school isn't what it used to be. With record numbers of students competing fiercely to get into college, schools are no longer primarily places of learning. They're dog-eat-dog battlegrounds in which kids must set aside interests and passions in order to strategize over how to game the system. In this increasingly stressful environment, kids aren't defined by their character or hunger for knowledge, but by often arbitrary scores and statistics.

In *The Overachievers*, journalist Alexandra Robbins delivers a poignant, funny, riveting narrative that explores how our high-stakes educational culture has spiraled out of control. During the year of her ten-year reunion, Robbins returns to her high school, where she follows students, including CJ and others:

- Julie, a track and academic star who is terrified she's making the wrong choices;
- "AP" Frank, who grapples with horrifying parental pressure to succeed;
- Taylor, a soccer and lacrosse captain whose ambition threatens her popular girl status;
- Sam, who worries his years of overachieving will be wasted if he doesn't attend a name-brand college;
- Audrey, who struggles with perfectionism; and

The stealth Overachiever, a compelling mix of fast-paced storytelling and engrossing investigative journalism, *The Overachievers* aims both to calm the admissions frenzy and to expose its escalating danger of who flies under the radar.

### ***Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario**

An astonishing story that puts a human face on the ongoing debate about immigration reform in the United States, now updated with a new Epilogue and Afterword, photos of Enrique and his family, an author interview, and more—the definitive edition of a classic of contemporary America

Based on the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper series that won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for feature writing and another for feature photography, this page-turner about the power of family is a popular text in classrooms and a touchstone for communities across the country to engage in meaningful discussions about this essential American subject.

*Enrique's Journey* recounts the unforgettable quest of a Honduran boy looking for his mother, eleven years after she is forced to leave her starving family to find work in the United States. Braving unimaginable peril, often clinging to the sides and tops of freight trains, Enrique travels through hostile worlds full of thugs, bandits, and corrupt cops. But he pushes forward, relying on his wit, courage, hope, and the kindness of strangers. As Isabel Allende writes: "This is a twenty-first-century Odyssey. If you are going to read only one nonfiction book this year, it has to be this one."

### ***Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer (this book can be supplied to you)**

In April 1992 a young man from a well-to-do family hitchhiked to Alaska and walked alone into the wilderness north of Mt. McKinley. His name was Christopher Johnson McCandless. He had given \$25,000 in savings to charity, abandoned his car and most of his possessions, burned all the cash in his wallet, and invented a new life for himself. Four months later, his decomposed body was found by a moose hunter. How McCandless came to die is the unforgettable story of *Into the Wild*. Immediately after graduating from college in 1991, McCandless had roamed through the West and Southwest on a vision quest like those made by his heroes Jack London and John Muir. In the Mojave Desert he abandoned his car, stripped it of its license plates, and burned all of his cash. He would give himself a new name, Alexander Supertramp, and unencumbered by money and belongings, he would be free to wallow in the raw, unfiltered experiences that nature presented. Craving a blank spot on the map, McCandless simply threw the maps away. Leaving behind his desperate parents and sister, he vanished into the wild. When McCandless's innocent mistakes turn out to be irreversible and fatal, he becomes the stuff of tabloid headlines and is dismissed for his naiveté, pretensions, and hubris. He is said to have had a death wish but wanting to die is a very different thing from being compelled to look over the edge. Krakauer brings McCandless's uncompromising pilgrimage out of the shadows, and the peril, adversity and renunciation sought by this enigmatic young man are illuminated with a rare understanding--and not an ounce of sentimentality. Mesmerizing, heartbreaking, *Into the Wild* is a *tour de force*. The power and luminosity of Jon Krakauer's stoytelling blaze through every page.