

More from Our Great Summer Reads

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

Set in 1962 Jackson Mississippi, *The Help* weaves together the lives of middle class white families and their black maids. With the civil rights movement about to explode, this novel shows the complexity of a time when racial lines were being crossed. Stockett captures the sensitivity of this tense period in our history with multiple perspectives and beautiful language. Part of the enjoyment of reading this book is learning the phonetic tongue of the maids and the formality of the southern women who are desperate to maintain the norm in society. Anyone with or without personal experience in the 1960's will find this book immensely satisfying as one of those 'can't put it down' reading experiences. Funny and hopelessly sad at the same time, devour this book like the caramel cake featured throughout the novel. You might find yourself learning much more than you bargained for!

- Andrea Miner

The Writings of Leo Tolstoy

In the 19th century Russia astounded the world by producing some of the greatest literary figures of all time. Prominent among them: Leo Tolstoy. Born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, his family's 1100-acre estate south of Moscow, Tolstoy was orphaned at nine. Raised by an aunt and educated by French tutors, he attended Kazan University but forsook his studies to improve the lot of his serfs. He then wandered about for several years having little to do with royalty (as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* says: 'God bless and keep the Tsar - far away from me.') After serving in the Crimean War (where he courageously distinguished himself), he married Sofya Behrs who bore him 13 children. When their marriage grew bitterly unhappy (Sofya was probably fed up with having to handwrite his lengthy works and raise all those kids), Tolstoy rejected the Church, seeking solace in simple Christian precepts (e.g., Judge not lest ye be judged.) and his own interpretations of the Gospels. In time he achieved enormous prestige among the Russian people, revered both as a spiritual leader and friend of the poor. Finally, in 1910, exhausted by familial failures, he died peacefully at a railroad station nursed by a loyal daughter.

Any talented decadent can make fiction believable -- Tolstoy made it convincing. Like most 19th century Russian writers he was something of a subversive. His major works -- *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877) -- display consummate writing skill. Both describe the nation's broad socio-economic conditions while portraying the aspirations and anxieties of his main characters. At the time most Russian authors were caught up in cultural movements that explored such fictive images such as the Slavophile myth of the 'Russian soul.' Not Tolstoy. He sliced through all the cant and propaganda to write smooth, lithe - albeit long-winded - prose fiction.

Intended to be a family tale with an anti-war message, *War and Peace* became instead an historical novel with patriotic overtones. It depicts the passionate joy of living and the power of the human spirit as it tracks the fortunes of four families from the opulence of St. Petersburg's high-ceilinged, mirror-

walled ballrooms to the corpse-strewn carnage of Napoleonic battlefields. Tolstoy's epic vision encompassed the mood of whole cities, the movement of large armies, and an entire society's sense of foreboding as his story swings from the trivial to the grand and back -- Tolstoy's point, in fact, is that scale didn't matter. His main protagonist is a deferential peasantry led by minor nobility whose daily activities affect history more than the designs of prominent men. Like Tolstoy, Pierre Bezuhov has led a profligate life but attains moral cleansing through his nuptials to Natasha Rostov. But first he undergoes a disastrous marriage to Princess Ellen Kuragin that ends with her self-inflicted death following numerous romantic flings (before STDs were even popular). Meanwhile, her lecherous brother Anatole is bent on seducing the vulnerable Natasha. Andrey Bolkonsky marries a social butterfly who dies in childbirth. He joins the army seeking glory and achieves it but dies -- nursed by the genuinely compassionate Natasha -- from wounds sustained at the Battle of Borodino.

Anna Karenina tells of a romantic heart at war with her social environment, pitting her pathetic need for love and happiness against the *haut monde's* incessant demands. The rebellious woman renounces a respectable yet stifling marriage for an extramarital fling. While her *affaire d'amour* sizzles with erotic passion, it ensnares her in an inevitable trap of self-destruction. To describe Anna's troubled mind as she spirals downward (toward the end of the novel she becomes a bit of a whiney butt) Tolstoy fashioned the literary technique of a 'stream of consciousness,' later employed to good effect by such stalwarts as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

--Essay by Bill Lounsbury

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President's Column:

This spring, the Port Orchard branch of KRL had a significant number of children's books stolen from their collection. I guess this is one of those realities of life; there is a certain element out there willing to take advantage of whatever opportunity presents itself.

Our branch has not had a major problem with either KRL materials or FOML materials "walking out of the building", but we believe that there have been some minor thefts. We have taken precautions, including using the meeting room door only as an emergency exit during library business hours and certain other measures.

We are also really making an effort to take the "high road". One way of doing this is for all of us to extend a friendly greeting to others who are patronizing our used bookstore and reminding them that the income from the sale of used books goes directly toward operation and maintenance of the building which is owned by the community (Friends of the Library). I hope that this positive approach will discourage most from taking advantage of our self-service approach to the bookstore. Please join me in engaging all of our patrons and making them feel a part of our community library!

John Winslow-President