

Laura's READ THIS List

Plot Appeal (*fast-paced, action is most important*)

[Await Your Reply by Dan Chaon](#) – You're never quite sure who is who or when is when in this completely twisted, cross-country adventure with multiple puzzles and events that leave the reader guessing until the superbly satisfying ending.

Alternative: [Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen](#) – Add all of the zombies and werewolves you want, but nothing compares to the masterfully plotted original.

Character Appeal (*the characters – who they are, how they react – is what appeals*)

[Nobody's Fool by Richard Russo](#) – I fell in love with Sully, a shrewd, sly, witty, and completely frustrating man just trying to make it through his own crazy (often self-induced crazy) life. The movie is good, but the novel is a thousand times better because you spend more time with this unforgettable character.

Alternative: [In the Drink by Kate Christensen](#)

A struggling writer in New York City, Christensen's young protagonist is lost, a little self-destructive, and completely delightful.

Theme Appeal (*the idea or meaning is what is most important*)

[The Ministry of Special Cases by Nathan Englander](#) – Englander's exploration of identity and memory (personal, familial, and national) is deep, rich, and utterly stunning. A bonus is how much you learn about Argentina's "Disappeared" crisis of the 1970s.

Alternative: [Say You're One of Them by Uwem Akpan](#) – A chilling yet lovely collection of stories about what it means to be human.

Language Appeal (*the writing itself, often lyrical, is what matters*)

[On Chesil Beach by Ian McEwan](#) – Nobody writes a better sentence than the 2010 Peggy V. Helmerich Distinguished Author Award winner. Nobody. This novella is an especially good example of McEwan's command of language.

Alternative: [The Light of Evening by Edna O'Brien](#) – Just beautiful.

Wild Card (*Just because*)

[The Help by Kathryn Stockett](#) – I'm tempted to say that if you don't love this, you have no soul. This word-of-mouth bestseller is so much more than its summary of "black maids and white woman write a book together in the Deep South 1963" – it will knock you out with its subtle beauty and engaging story.

Alternative: [Model Home by Eric Puchner](#) – Despite a shocking and completely depressing second half, I just loved this novel, and not only because it is set in the 1980s with teenage characters the same age as I was then.