

## Reading List: World War II & the Holocaust

### All the Light We Cannot See

Doerr, Anthony

Novel, Fiction

Doerr's absorbing, lyrical novel is set in France and Germany just before and during World War II. The two protagonists exist apart from one another except for a brief but profound meeting near the end of the book. Marie-Laure is a blind girl living in Paris with her father, a master locksmith. Werner is a bright German orphan who finds himself chosen for a coveted spot in a military academy. There's also a mysterious subplot of a valuable gem that's gone missing. This is an exquisitely constructed story about war and human resilience, a moving novel that you are sure to see on many forthcoming best-of-year lists (Chicago Public Library). [Tags: France, WWII](#)

### Atonement

McEwan, Ian

Novel, Fiction

In the summer of 1935 Briony Tallis misinterprets a moment's flirtation between her sister and the son of a servant. A crime occurs soon after, the repercussions of which are followed through the chaos and carnage of World War II and into the close of the 20th century (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Romance](#)

### The Book Thief

Zusak, Markus

Novel, Fiction

It's just a small story really, about among other things: a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter, and quite a lot of thievery. Set during World War II in Germany, Markus Zusak's groundbreaking new novel is the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster girl living outside of Munich. Liesel scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing when she encounters something she can't resist-books. With the help of her accordion-playing foster father, she learns to read and shares her stolen books with her neighbors during bombing raids as well as with the Jewish man hidden in her basement before he is marched to Dachau. This is an unforgettable story about the ability of books to feed the soul (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Books, Holocaust](#)

### The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

Boyne, John

Novel, Fiction

Berlin, 1942: When Bruno returns home from school one day, he discovers that his belongings are being packed in crates. His father has received a promotion and the family must move to a new house far, far away, where there is no one to play with and nothing to do. A tall fence stretches as far as the eye can see and cuts him off from the strange people in the distance. But Bruno longs to be an explorer and decides that there must be more to this desolate new place than meets the eye. While exploring his new environment, he meets another boy whose life and circumstances are very different from his own, and their meeting results in a friendship that has devastating consequences (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Books, Holocaust](#)

### The Diary of a Young Girl

Frank, Anne

Memoir

In 1942, with Nazis occupying Holland, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl and her family fled their home in Amsterdam and went into hiding. For the next two years, until their whereabouts were betrayed to the Gestapo, they and another family lived cloistered in the "Secret Annexe" of an old office building. Cut off from the outside world, they faced hunger, boredom, the constant cruelties of living in confined quarters, and the ever-present threat of discovery and death. In her diary Anne Frank recorded vivid impressions of her experiences during this period. By turns thoughtful, moving, and amusing, her account offers a fascinating commentary on human courage and frailty and a compelling self-

portrait of a sensitive and spirited young woman whose promise was tragically cut short (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Holocaust](#)

The Man in the High Castle

Dick, Philip K.

Novel, Sci-Fiction

It's America in 1962. Slavery is legal once again. The few Jews who still survive hide under assumed names. In San Francisco the I Ching is as common as the Yellow Pages. All because some 20 years earlier the United States lost a war, and is now occupied jointly by Nazi Germany and Japan. This harrowing, Hugo Award-winning novel is the work that established Philip K. Dick as an innovator in science fiction while breaking the barrier between science fiction and the serious novel of ideas. In it Dick offers a haunting vision of history as a nightmare from which it may just be possible to awake (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Holocaust](#)

Maus: A Survivor's Tale

Spiegelman, Art

Graphic Novel, Memoir

"The most affecting and successful narrative ever done about the Holocaust" ( Wall Street Journal ) and "the first masterpiece in comic book history" ( The New Yorker ). The Pulitzer Prize-winning Maus tells the story of Vladek Spiegelman, a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe, and his son, a cartoonist coming to terms with his father's story. Maus approaches the unspeakable through the diminutive. Its form, the cartoon (the Nazis are cats, the Jews mice), shocks us out of any lingering sense of familiarity and succeeds in "drawing us closer to the bleak heart of the Holocaust" (Chicago Public Library). [Tags: WWII, Holocaust](#)

Memoirs of a Geisha

Golden, Arthur

Novel, Fiction

A literary sensation and runaway bestseller, this brilliant debut novel presents with seamless authenticity and exquisite lyricism the true confessions of one of Japan's most celebrated geisha. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, we enter a world where appearances are paramount; where a girl's virginity is auctioned to the highest bidder; where women are trained to beguile the most powerful men; and where love is scorned as illusion. It is a unique and triumphant work of fiction - at once romantic, erotic, suspenseful - and completely unforgettable (Goodreads). [Tags: Japan, WWII, Gender](#)

Night

Wiesel, Elie

Novel, Memoir

*Night* is a work by Elie Wiesel about his experience with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944-1945, at the height of the Holocaust and toward the end of the Second World War. 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. Penetrating and powerful, as personal as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Night* awakens the shocking memory of evil at its absolute and carries with it the unforgettable message that this horror must never be allowed to happen again (Goodreads). [Tags: Religion, WWII, Holocaust](#)

The Port Chicago 50

Sheinkin, Steve

Non-fiction

An astonishing civil rights story from Newbery Honor winner and National Book Award finalist Steve Sheinkin. On July 17, 1944, a massive explosion rocked this segregated Navy base at Port Chicago, California, killing more than 300 sailors who were at the docks, critically injuring off-duty men in their bunks, and shattering windows up to a mile away. On August 9th, 244 men refused to go back to work until unsafe and unfair conditions at the docks were addressed. When the dust settled, fifty were charged with mutiny, facing decades in jail and even execution. This is a

fascinating story of the prejudice that faced black men and women in America's armed forces during World War II, and a nuanced look at those who gave their lives in service of a country where they lacked the most basic rights" (Goodreads). [Tags: WWII, Civil Rights, Black History](#)

Unbroken

Hillenbrand, Laura

Biography

On a May afternoon in 1943, an Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean and disappeared, leaving only a spray of debris and a slick of oil, gasoline, and blood. Then, on the ocean surface, a face appeared--Lt. Louis Zamperini. Captured by the Japanese and driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor (Chicago Public Library). [Tags: WWII, POW, Pacific, Japan](#)

When the Emperor Was Divine

Otsuka, Julie

Novel, Fiction

On a sunny day in Berkeley, California, in 1942, a woman sees a sign in a post office window, returns to her home, and matter-of-factly begins to pack her family's possessions. Like thousands of other Japanese Americans they have been reclassified, virtually overnight, as enemy aliens and are about to be uprooted from their home and sent to a dusty internment camp in the Utah desert. In this lean and devastatingly evocative first novel, Julie Otsuka tells their story from five flawlessly realized points of view and conveys the exact emotional texture of their experience: the thin-walled barracks and barbed-wire fences, the omnipresent fear and loneliness, the unheralded feats of heroism. *When the Emperor Was Divine* is a work of enormous power that makes a shameful episode of our history as immediate as today's headlines (Goodreads). [Tags: Japan, Internment, WWII](#)

The War Within These Walls

Sax, Aline

Graphic Novel, Non-fiction

It's World War II, and Misha's family, like the rest of the Jews living in Warsaw, has been moved by the Nazis into a single crowded ghetto. Conditions are appalling: every day more people die from disease, starvation, and deportations. Misha does his best to help his family survive, even crawling through the sewers to smuggle food. When conditions worsen, Misha joins a handful of other Jews who decide to make a final, desperate stand against the Nazis. Heavily illustrated with sober blue-and-white drawings, this powerful novel dramatically captures the brutal reality of a tragic historical event (Goodreads) [Tags: Holocaust, Judaism, WWII](#)